



# STUDES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

SIGNED IN BLOOD: NEGOTIATING WITH  
SUPERIORS GENERAL ABOUT THE  
OVERSEAS MISSIONS

ELISA FREI, PHD

51/4 WINTER 2019

## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

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## *a word from Fr. Michael Knox, SJ. . .*

The complexity of the colonial project, heavily embossed on the history of the world, has at its center the often-elusive question of, among its participants, true personal intent. To unfurl the minds of soldier or farmer, governor or missionary, woman or man, historians embark on an unenviable and painstaking journey through text, art, and oral tradition, with the hopes of uncovering the breadth of both their motivation and their purpose.

An almost unavoidable resource for this effort is the collections of published and unpublished letters, “relations,” expert treatises, catechisms, art, and other published works, of missionaries of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits); whose efforts, at one time or another, have filled the known world. Almost from inception, its Basque founder, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), sought to maintain, despite distance, a “union of hearts and minds” in the religious order by mandating letter writing among its various superiors and members.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, to date, there remain some seven thousand letters that he and his secretaries wrote to Jesuits around the world.<sup>2</sup> From India, Mozambique, Malaysia, Japan, and China, in Asia, and to Paraguay, Paraná, and Uruguay, in Latin America, Jesuits of the early modern era chronicled the global missionary labors of their men, and historians now scrutinize their content for insight into the missionaries themselves and the people they served.

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions 673–75*, hereafter *Const.*; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1996), 326, 328.

<sup>2</sup> See Ignatius’s letter 58 to Peter Faber on the nature of written correspondence between Jesuits, in *MHSI, Monumenta Ignatiana. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Societatis Jesu fundatoris epistolae et instructiones* (hereafter *Epp. et instruct.*), 12 vols. (Madrid: 1903–1911), I:236–38; in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, John W. Padberg, SJ, and John L. McCarthy, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 2006), 90–93.

Much of this early modern correspondence, set amid the greater Republic of Letters, was published and distributed to Jesuits and collaborators around the world. Given the name *litterae annuae* and, after 1580, structured according to a set *formula scribendi*, they represent a unique genre of literature that reveals the Ignatian worldview, personal dispositions, rich experience, struggle, and often-heroic efforts of their authors. They include remarkable and complex testimonies from men such as Francis Xavier (1506–1552), Luís Fróis (1532–1597), and Jean de Brébeuf (1593–1649), to name but a few. In this sense, as historian Mark Friedrich suggests, these texts both “articulate specific information about concrete situations” and represent the authors’ own expression of “self-fashioning.”<sup>3</sup>

In the present issue of *STUDIES*, Dr. Elisa Frei seeks out intention not among the Jesuit missionaries in the field, nor in their celebrated writings, but rather in aspirants who write to their superiors general seeking the opportunity to serve in foreign missions. She does not look to the *litterae annuae* but rather to the *litterae indiptae*—that is, “letters of request to go to the Indies,” understood as the areas of modern-day south and southeast Asia. These are the aspirants’ initial, formal expressions of personal intent. In particular, Frei chose to focus her study on those who were not chosen for the missions, singling out Sicilian scholastic Francesco Maria Riccio.

In this article, readers are presented, on the one hand, with insight into the solemnized rhetoric of these letters. Frei identifies some of the religious experience of their authors as they seem to formulate, on the page, articulations of prayer and personal desire, sometimes penned in their own blood. On the other hand, she looks to the replies of superiors general and, in this exchange of correspondence, brings not only greater clarity to the generals’ criteria, but also texture to the often-touching expressions of *cura personalis* that the generals offer in response to each applicant. This article, in so doing, adds to our growing understanding of intent, while at the same time challenging any historian who might hold a static ideal of the early modern Jesuit

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<sup>3</sup> Markus Friedrich, “Circulating and Compiling the *Litterae Annuae*: Towards A History of the Jesuit System of Communication,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu [AHSI]* 153 (2008): 3–41, at 6.

missionary. As a first step, inviting much greater study on the subject, Frei invites each reader to ever deepen his or her understanding of those Jesuits who, with a complexity of intention and desire, longed to step out into new landscapes of service and sacrifice.

*Fr. Michael Knox, SJ (CAN)*  
*Fr. Knox is a member of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality*



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. LITTERAE INDIPETAE .....	3
A. The Eastern Missions .....	8
B. Jesuit Intentions: To Cry, to Bleed, and to Die ...	12
C. Jesuit Zeal: To Work and to Suffer .....	15
II. FRUSTRATION AND DISILLUSION .....	19
A. The Generals' Answers .....	21
B. A Case Study: Francesco Maria Riccio .....	23
CONCLUSION .....	33

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*Dr. Elisa Frei was born in South Tyrol, Italy. She holds a BA in Archival Studies, a MA in Italian Philology, a PhD in History, and a diploma in Archive-keeping, Paleography and Diplomatics. In 2017–2018 she was a post-doctoral research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies (IAJS) at Boston College, and she is project assistant for the Digital Indipetae Database presently under development by IAJS. She is co-editor of the eight-volume series Asia by Fr. Daniello Bartoli, SJ (1608–1685). Published essays include “In Nomine Patris: The Struggle Between an Indipeta, his Father, and the Superior Generals of the Society of Jesus (1701–1724 ca.).”*

# Signed in Blood: Negotiating with Superiors General about the Overseas Missions

Elisa Frei, PhD

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*The Roman archives of the Society of Jesus hold over fifteen thousand letters written by young Jesuits to their general superiors in which they ask to be sent to the foreign missions. The letters, which predate the universal suppression of the Society in 1773, provide modern researchers an astonishing wealth of resources for learning about the spiritualities and personalities of these Jesuits. Often edifying, sometimes disconcerting, the letters also lay bare the reasons why many young men chose to enter the Society and why some of them eventually left.*

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## Introduction

From the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Jesuits wrote directly to superiors general of the Society of Jesus to request missionary assignments abroad. As a whole, these petitions have become known as the *litterae indipetae*, which comes from the Latin *Indiam petens*, meaning “asking for the Indies.” (The term “Indies” was understood to include both Asia and the Americas.) The Roman archives of the Society of Jesus holds over 15,000 *litterae indipetae* written by European Jesuits before the Society’s suppression in 1773. From the Italian assistancy alone, Jesuits wrote more than 1,500 during the generalates of Fr. Thyrsus González de Santalla (1687–1705) and Fr. Michaelangelo Tamburini (1706–1730). Some petitions followed a pre-established format, as had been periodically suggested by the generals, but others were lengthy, written quite freely, and included secrets for the generals’ eyes alone.

The first half of this article focuses on *litterae indipetae* in general, but gives some special attention to those Jesuits who asked for assignments to the Eastern Indies (China and Japan). The reason for the latter emphasis is that many *indipeti* (candidates) explicitly affirmed that they had chosen to enter the Society of Jesus because of the order's famous apostolic vocation to the East.<sup>1</sup> Many wrote that they had dreamed since childhood of having a glorious destiny in the "Indies," and they often acknowledged a desire for self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Each letter, therefore, contained one man's articulation of his deepest desires and profoundest motivations, and all this for the eyes of one person alone.

In the second half of the essay, I address the frustration of Jesuits who did not receive a missionary assignment. Many threatened to leave the order. Unfortunately, following the lives of these men after their "*indipeta*-phase" is not easy. Most of them are otherwise unknown persons from the common classes of society, whose names are known today only because of their written requests.

Thankfully, however, *indipetae* correspondence was not always one-way. Superiors general personally responded to most requests. In fact, they maintained regular communication with many petitioners, becoming well acquainted with them and their desires. Obviously, the generals could not accede to the requests of most applicants, which caused great disappointment. Hence the essay closes with a

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<sup>1</sup> On Jesuits' missionary vocations, see Adriano Prosperi, *La vocazione. Storie di gesuiti tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2016). Concerning the so-called "Indies" (Eastern and Western), see Camilla Russell, "Vocation to the East: Italian Candidates for the Jesuit China Mission at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. Machtelt Israëls and Louis Waldman, vol. 2 (Florence: Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2013), 313–27; Amélie Vantard, "Les vocations missionnaires chez les Jésuites français aux xvii<sup>e</sup>-xviii<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 116, no. 3 (2009): 9–22; Charlotte De Castelnau L'Estoile, "Élection et vocation. Le choix de la mission dans la province jésuite du Portugal à la fin du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Missions Religieuses Modernes. "Notre lieu est le monde,"* ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007), 21–43; Miriam Turrini, "La vita scelta? Appunti per una storia della vocazione in età moderna," in *Dai cantieri della storia. "Liber amicorum" per Paolo Prodi*, ed. Gian Paolo Brizzi and Giuseppe Olmi (Bologna: CLUEB, 2007), 145–59.

I would like to thank Fr. Bart Geger for kindly inviting me to write for *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*. It is an honor to have the chance to present my research to Jesuits and to a wider public.



case study of a Sicilian Jesuit named Francesco Maria Riccio. After waiting many years for his chance to serve as a missionary, and after initially receiving optimistic signals from the general, Riccio became increasingly disillusioned, and ended by leaving the Society.

## I. *Litterae indipetae*

In the last two decades, the *litterae indipetae* have become the focus of attention by an increasing number of historians.<sup>2</sup> Emanuele Colombo, borrowing a term from the French Protestant theologian Daniel Chamier (1565–1621), defined *gesuitomania* as the recent explosion of studies on the Jesuit order.<sup>3</sup> This mania inspired study of Jesuit missionary activities from many different perspectives: cultural studies, family histories, early modern understandings of emotions and masculinity, as well as art history, rhetoric, and psychology.

One blessing for those who study the *litterae indipetae* is the sheer number of letters. More than fifteen thousand are preserved in Roman archives of the Society of Jesus (ARSI).<sup>4</sup> These were written by more than five thousand Jesuits before the suppression of the Society. There are also thousands of letters written after the restoration,

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<sup>2</sup> For a bibliographical review about the subject, see Aliocha Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias. Las cartas ‘indipetae’ de los jesuitas europeos, siglos XVI – XVII, ensayo historiográfico,” in *Relaciones* 33, no. 132 (2012): 147–81. Concerning *indipeti* of the pre-suppression Society, see Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Il desiderio delle Indie. Storie, sogni e fughe di giovani gesuiti italiani* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001); Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), 549–684, and Alessandro Guerra, “Per un’archeologia della strategia missionaria dei Gesuiti: le *indipetae* e il sacrificio nella ‘vigna del Signore,’” in *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 13 (2000): 109–92. On *indipeti* of the pre- and post-suppression Society, and for additional bibliography, see Emanuele Colombo and Marina Massimi, *In viaggio. Gesuiti italiani candidati alle missioni tra Antica e Nuova Compagnia* (Milano: Il Sole 24 ORE, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Chamier wrote a pamphlet entitled *La Iesuitomanie, ou Les actes de la dispute de Lecture* (Montauban, 1618). Colombo borrowed the term for the title of his bibliography on Jesuit missions: “Gesuitomania. Studi recenti sulle missioni gesuitiche (1540–1773),” in *Evangelizzazione e globalizzazione. Le missioni gesuitiche nell’età moderna tra storia e storiografia*, ed. Michela Catto, Guido Mongini, and Silvia Mostaccio (Rome, 2010), 31–59.

<sup>4</sup> For the archival disposition in ARSI, see the table in Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias,” 171–72; for an *indipetae* index, see also the typewritten documents *indipetae* (732–759) and *indipetae extra* FG.

but they are preserved in scattered locations within the ARSI, and so it is not certain just how many there are.<sup>5</sup>

Availability, detachment, and obedience traditionally characterize the Society of Jesus, so that mobility and missions were—and are—cornerstones of the order.<sup>6</sup> Ignatius’s original ideas about missionary work had been influenced by the medieval chivalric values he treasured; but of course, missions had been a cornerstone of the church since its earliest decades. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) reshaped and institutionalized the church’s understanding of this work by underscoring that it should be a formal apostolate of religious orders as a whole, as opposed to being left in the hands of independent, charismatic individuals acting at their own discretion. In this sense, the council promoted a certain continuity and uniformity of action.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, this did not prevent many petitioners for the Indies to imagine a missionary land in which *they* were the main actors, who would chase a “crown of tribulations” in the most distant, most neglect-

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<sup>5</sup> See Emanuele Colombo and Marco Rochini, “Four Hundred Years of Desire: Ongoing Research into the Nineteenth-Century Italian *indipetae* (1829–1856),” in *Representations of the Other and Intercultural Experiences* [forthcoming], 89–116, and Marina Massimi and Mauro Brunello, “*Indipetae* e conoscenza di sé: discernimento ignaziano e psicologia moderna nel XX secolo,” *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa* 45, no. 88, nuova serie (2016): 119–52.

<sup>6</sup> See Adriano Prosperi, “La vocazione. Storie di gesuiti tra Cinquecento e Seicento” (Torino, 2016) and the section “I missionari” in *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Torino, 1996), 549–684.

<sup>7</sup> There is ample bibliography on the Council of Trent. Here I simply recommend John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). Some Jesuits had influential roles at the council; Ignatius had designated Diego Laínez and Alfonso Salmerón to be theologians there; Pierre Favre was also appointed but died on his way to Trent. However, “in an age in which political, intellectual, and religious leaders consistently and vociferously demanded reform of the church, the Jesuits spoke of it seldom,” as O’Malley explains in *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 321. On Jesuit ideas about the missions, see also Giovanni Pizzorusso, “Le choix indifférent: mentalités et attentes des jésuites aspirants missionnaires dans l’Amérique française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 109, no. 2 (1997): 892–93.

ed, “vineyards of the Lord.”<sup>8</sup> They wanted to leave as soon as possible, being well aware that every minute of delay condemned thousands of souls who were guilty only of not having heard the Gospel.

These letters often indicate that Jesuits were ready to quit their residences at a moment’s notice, carrying only the clothes on their person, and even without giving a formal notice to Jesuits and family whom they left behind. They did not fear suffering and death so much as the bureaucracy of the Jesuit curia, which they knew selected missionaries with very different criteria in view.

Naturally, Jesuit superiors did not want to send all of their best and brightest to the overseas missions. The need for good teachers to staff schools was a constant; and it was given high priority because it was an effective means to recruit new Jesuits and to reach every social class.<sup>9</sup> The general expectation was that all Jesuits except temporal coadjutors (i.e., Jesuit brothers) would be assigned to schools, at least for a little while, whether for correcting homework, teaching Latin grammar, or managing large classes with students of disparate levels of education. Petitioners understood that teaching, though not as exciting as the mysterious Indies, was a primary task of the Society, and they wrote their *indipetae* letters mindful of that context.

*Litterae indipetae* are such a unique type of written correspondence that they can be described as their own literary genre, with their own particular *tòpoi* (i.e., literary themes or structures). The letters often exhibit a predetermined format: in the opening, the Jesuit recognizes his unworthiness and humbly seeks the general’s attention. Then, he summarizes the circumstances that led him to write the letter, the sum of which was a request to go to the missions. Usually the Jesuit includes an expression of indifference regarding timing and destination. The document ends with a formal and conventional conclusion.

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<sup>8</sup> In the words of the petitioner Girolamo Lombardi: “quella corona de’ patimenti, che solo si concede per premio a chi si è già con gran valore per molto tempo essercitato nelle virtù” (ARSI, FG 751, f. 299, Piacenza, September 20, 1725).

<sup>9</sup> “Strumento fondamentale della politica di conquista delle classi dominanti.” See Adriano Prospero, “Il figlio, il padre, il gesuita. Un testo di Antonio Possevino,” in *Rinascimento* 2014: 114.

What did the *indipeti* know of the superior general and his selection policy? Probably they were aware that his secretaries were busy sorting the dozens of petitions that arrived in Rome each day. They knew that they had to convince him to send *them*, and not the others, and they tried to do this by including in their pleas certain elements.

For example, physical health was a decisive factor for the acceptance of a candidate. But by itself it was not enough, since it could not be accompanied by other defects such as mediocre academic abilities, lack of prudence, or a shaky vocation.<sup>10</sup> If petitioners did not have good physical health, they often tried to put a favorable spin on it. They sometimes claimed that their superiors and families were exaggerating their health problems, or that a miracle had recently cured them, or that the only way they could recover their health was to go to the missions.

Most Jesuits who were accepted for the missions were about thirty years old. With regard to much younger applicants, the superior general could reasonably suspect that their missionary desires were youthful, adolescent whims. Consequently, young Jesuits when applying knew enough to emphasize that their vocations already had been tested for some time and that their superiors and spiritual fathers had given them positive evaluations. Some of them also noted how old they actually felt.

Older petitioners, on the other hand, were less likely to survive the long journey, and it was more difficult for them to learn new languages and to adapt to different cultures. So, if they had a facility with languages, or if they already spoke more than one language, this is what they highlighted in their petitions. Another consideration in their favor was advanced degrees. Especially for the Japanese and Chinese missions, Jesuits were required to have advanced skills in science and mathematics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Era uno fra i più severi criteri di selezione fra i candidati, anche se non assoluto: la sola salute non bastava di per sé quando era accompagnata da altri gravi difetti." See Guerra, "Per un'archeologia," 153.

<sup>11</sup> For the Japanese, see Adriana Boscaro, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone (1549–1639)* (Venezia, 2008). But the Chinese were much more interested in European technologies, and the two different approaches fused together. On this

The act of writing such a personal letter, especially one on which their futures would depend, weighed heavily on many Jesuits. They often acknowledged their difficulties in articulating their vocations on paper. The written medium did not seem capable of reflecting accurately what was happening in their souls.<sup>12</sup> Some were convinced that, given the opportunity to speak personally with the superior general, they would be able to express themselves more effectively. Several *indipeti* offered to come to Rome so as to throw themselves at the general's feet.

Many petitioners mentioned an "inner voice" that guaranteed their vocation was really sent by God. They noted, in the process of discerning this voice, the timely mediation of a benevolent superior, a prophetic dream, a particularly intense desire, or having made the Spiritual Exercises—anything that they believed the superior general would accept as evidence that their thoughts and desires had been adequately clarified.

In order to receive a favorable response, how important was it that the letters be well-crafted? As will be shown later, the generals' secretaries selected applicants not only on the basis of the letters themselves, but also in light of information about the petitioners that had been sent to them by the local superiors, the needs expressed by regional procurators, and even pleas from the families of the petitioners. A perfect conjunction of many factors was required if one petition among hundreds were to receive a favorable response. And so, obviously, an important virtue for petitioners would be indifference.

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point, see, among others, Nicolas Standaert, "Christianity Shaped by the Chinese," in Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 558–76.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Amélie Vantard, "Les vocations missionnaires chez les Jésuites français aux xvii<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 116, no. 3 (2009): 15, and Camilla Russell, "Imagining the 'Indies': Italian Jesuit Petitions for the Overseas Missions at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century," in *L'Europa divisa e i nuovi mondi. Per Adriano Prosperi*, vol. 2 (Pisa, 2011), 183–84.

### A. The Eastern Missions

The preference for Eastern destinations that was stated in many letters was inspired by what young European men, especially those who were studying at Jesuit schools, were reading at the time. Jesuits like Francis Xavier (1506–1552) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) were writing fascinating reports about strange new lands and cultures.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, many *indipeti* had been dreaming of an oriental adventure even before they had studied in a Jesuit school or entered the Jesuit order. Even more, it was precisely because of this *désir antérieur* that many had chosen to become Jesuits in the first place, as their letters clearly explain.<sup>14</sup>

Even if petitioners entertained a preference for the East, they often seem to have left it unstated, or they expressed indifference about where to be sent. They knew that every Jesuit had to be available and avoid the appearance of trying to force a decision that should originate in God's will. They also knew, at least in theory, that they had to adjust their hopes to what the general's secretaries believed were the Society's pressing needs, although this was not easy to do in practice. Probably for these reasons, the majority of petitioners did not express a preference for a destination.

However, it should be noted that there is a vagueness in most petitions, meaning that the writers added no specific considerations pertaining to the native peoples, the cultures, and the climate of the lands where they desired to work. It suggests "a certain lack of awareness of the real state of the mission they longed for," and this despite the fact that information about the Indies would have been subject matter for their studies at Jesuit colleges.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Concerning the circulation of information, see Charlotte de Castelneau L'Estoile, Marie-Lucie Copete, Aliocha Maldavsky, and Ines G. Županov, eds., *Missions d'évangélisation et circulation des savoirs. xvie–xviii siècle* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Un désir antérieur. Les premiers jésuites des Philippines et leur indipetae (1580–1605)*, in *Missions religieuses Modernes*, 71–88.

<sup>15</sup> "Una gran inconsciencia de la realidad de la misión a la que aspiraban," in Maldavsky, *Pedir las Indias*, 155.

The first Europeans reached Kyūshū, Japan, in 1543, following a shipwreck.<sup>16</sup> As soon as the story of these Portuguese sailors became known to Francis Xavier, who was in Goa at the time, the Society of Jesus conceived an intention to convert the population of this mysterious new country. In his letters to Europe, the Apostle of the Indies wrote about Japan with such enthusiasm and optimism that there was, for centuries to follow, no lack of candidates hoping to reach the Land of the Rising Sun.<sup>17</sup>

The political situation in Japan was at first quite conducive to the Jesuit mission, since Japanese lords needed Portuguese muskets to prevail over one another in their constant civil wars. But after the stabilization of the Tokugawa shogunate that ruled Japan until 1867, and after the arrival of other religious orders—primarily Franciscans, starting in 1592—along with the arrival of other Westerners, such as Dutch and English merchants, who were less interested in conversion, Japanese rulers began to persecute Christian missionaries and their converts periodically, starting with Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) in 1597. This culminated in the expulsion of all foreigners from the empire, thus initiating the so-called *sakoku* or “closed country” from 1639 to 1866, a long period of national isolation.<sup>18</sup>

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*Several indipeti offered to come to Rome so as to throw themselves at the general's feet.*

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If Japan was inaccessible starting in the mid-seventeenth century, it did not discourage European Jesuits, who were compensated

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<sup>16</sup> For further bibliography, see Gen Shiraiishi, “Christianity in Japan: A History Defined by Great Influence and Sudden Decline,” *Concord Review* (2013): 139–63; Boscaro, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone*, and Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542–1742* (New York, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Regarding Xavier’s tragicomic misconceptions about Japan, see three essays by Urs App, “St. Francis Xavier’s Discovery of Japanese Buddhism. A Chapter in the European Discovery of Buddhism,” in *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 30, no. 1 (1997): 53–78; 30, no. 2 (1997): 214–44; 31, no. 1 (1998): 40–71.

<sup>18</sup> With the exception of several traders, mostly the Dutch and Chinese, at Dejima, Nagasaki.



by the fact that the Chinese mission was flourishing.<sup>19</sup> Approximately one century after Ricci's arrival in Beijing, Jesuits were usually viewed positively by the emperor, by his court, and by high society, although Jesuits alternated between periods of relative success and failure. They were especially appreciated and employed as scientists and astronomers in the Ming and Qing courts, and could operate and proselytize with considerable freedom.

The Society's success culminated in the Edict of Toleration issued in 1692 by the Kangxi Emperor, which recognized Roman Catholicism as a *religio licita* in his empire. Jesuits were proud of this, as it was accomplished through the trust and esteem that they had achieved by their many efforts in Beijing, and they promoted news of it throughout Europe as a key moment for the history of Christianity in Asia.

Just how preferred was the Eastern missions among *indipeti*? And how probable was it for Jesuits to be sent to China or Japan at the turn of the eighteenth century? At present, there are no complete databases about the number of *indipetae* written from all over Europe year by year.<sup>20</sup> In the Italian assitancy, during the generalates of González and Tamburini (1687–1730), at least 1,565 letters were sent to Rome.<sup>21</sup> This number is imprecise, because many letters never arrived or were discarded after reading. The total number of Jesuits who made these petitions was less than 1,500, because many letters were written by the same Jesuits.

About 9.2% (144 letters) of these Italian *indipetae* showed particular but not exclusive interest in the Eastern Indies: the most frequently

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<sup>19</sup> On the Chinese situation, see Ana Carolina Hosne, *The Jesuit Missions to China and Peru, 1570–1610. Expectations and Appraisals of Expansionism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> The Digital *Indipetae* Database is a project, not yet online, being developed by the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies at Boston College. Its purpose is to provide researchers with open access to all the transcriptions of the petitions for the Indies.

<sup>21</sup> *Litterae indipetae* written between 1687 and 1730 by members of the Italian assitancy are now mostly preserved in the ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico*, 749, 750, 751.



mentioned were the Philippines, China, Japan, and the East Indies. Some Jesuits yearned indifferently for both China and Japan. Probably the Philippines attracted so many *indipeti* for two reasons, as indicated in the letters themselves: first, its proximity to China and Japan; and second, the fact that southern Italy enjoyed political ties with Spain, thus making it easier for Jesuits from southern Italy to take Spanish ships to the Philippines, which was a Spanish territory.

As for the West Indies, a study of hundreds of letters tentatively suggests that the most popular destinations were first Mexico, then Chile, Paraguay, and the New World in general, then Maranhão/Brazil, California, and finally Quito, in Ecuador.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, about 1,440 Jesuits served in the Portuguese assintancy, which included many overseas provinces.<sup>22</sup> About half of these men were living and working in Portugal itself. Among those sent to the Indies—who were not only native Portuguese, but also Europeans travelling under the Portuguese *Padroado* system—the largest percentage operated in either Brazil (about three hundred men) or India (about two hundred men). No more than forty had established themselves in the Chinese province at the same period when Japan was closed to outsiders.

It was therefore almost impossible to be sent to China or Japan at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> But this did not mean that the hopes of many Jesuits for these missions dwindled. Why did so many Jesuits continue to desire to leave their homes in Europe for the distant Indies?

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<sup>22</sup> Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond 1540–1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 674–76. Some Italian Jesuits could hope to be sent through the Spanish empire. For example, during the early modern period, Sicily had been periodically part of the Spanish empire. Moreover, some Jesuits were sent to China by the French king. In a sense, the majority of Jesuits working in China were “Portuguese”—that is, Jesuits from different assintancies were sent according to the Portuguese *Padroado* policies. See Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800* (Rome-Paris, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> At this time, the Chinese Rites Controversy caused many difficulties for the Society of Jesus, especially for Jesuits who obeyed Rome and not the king of France. For a bibliography, see David E. Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Sankt Augustin-San Francisco, 1994).

## B. Jesuit Intentions: To Cry, to Bleed, and to Die.

An eminent lay scholar of the Society of Jesus, Paul Grendler, was surprised to notice that none of the *indipeti* expressed fear of suffering and martyrdom. He recounted the observation of a Jesuit friend who said to him, “After spending years teaching Latin grammar to boys, martyrdom might not look so bad.”<sup>24</sup>

Martyrdom certainly held a special place within the spirituality of Catholic religious orders, including the Society of Jesus. Many petitioners for the Indies showed a great enthusiasm for it: for them, the Indies were the perfect place to obtain it.<sup>25</sup> But of course, it was not beneficial to the Society of Jesus to spend so much money and resources on the education and housing of young men, only to send them to the Indies to die shortly upon arrival. At the same time, however, Jesuit superiors were disinclined to dampen such holy desires, and so they let the men continue dreaming of the Indies—even if most would never be sent there.<sup>26</sup>

Martyrdom was an exceptional grace—a baptism of blood, the highest form of *imitatio Christi*. Working in the Indies was indeed dangerous at times, certainly more than in the typical European environment, which largely explains the zeal of thousands of Jesuits to set sail for Asia or the Americas.

“Spilling blood” is a theme commonly found in the *litterae indipetae*; but at times, it became much more than a theme. During my research at ARSI, I found four Italian *indipetae* written, or at least

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<sup>24</sup> Paul F. Grendler, “The Culture of the Jesuit Teacher 1548–1773,” in *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3 (2016): 17.

<sup>25</sup> Guerra noticed how “nonostante tutti gli sforzi, migliaia di giovani continuarono a vedere nelle Indie (quelle vere), la loro vocazione, l’unica possibilità di concretizzare il loro desiderio di martirio . . . la loro adesione alla Compagnia di Gesù diventata pretestuosa al desiderio del martirio,” in “Per un’archeologia,” 133.

<sup>26</sup> “C’è la sensazione . . . che, in una sorta di gioco di specchi, per i vertici della Compagnia la ‘via indiana’ fosse a sua volta un pretesto per richiamare su di sé l’attenzione di tanta parte di giovani desiderosi di patire a cui, la promessa delle Indie era indispensabile . . . per l’avvicinamento alla Compagnia” (Guerra, “Per un’archeologia,” 134).

signed, in blood.<sup>27</sup> Other researchers have found other examples.<sup>28</sup> It is not possible yet to conduct an analysis of the ink without damaging the documents, hence one has to trust the writers who declared that they used their blood. But the color of the handwriting does appear different from that of other letters.

Holy tears were another trope in the history of Christian spirituality, starting with St. Paul and the Church Fathers and continuing through the time of the Desert Fathers and mothers into medieval monasticism all the way to Ignatius.<sup>29</sup> The founder of the Society of Jesus was depicted in his “Autobiography” as frequently crying. He “recorded weeping as a truly masculine ability in terms of his new definition of clerical manhood,” and even before his conversion, the “chivalric masculinity in which Ignatius was raised [...] included a conception of weeping as particularly manly.”<sup>30</sup>

Even if petitioners for the missions were unaware of Ignatius’s own reputation for tears, they likely had been influenced by

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<sup>27</sup> FG 750, f. 201–201v (Rome, April 6, 1705) and f. 510 (Messina, August 27, 1717); FG 751, f. 42 (Messina, April 22, 1718) and f. 338–338v (Rome, December 5, 1727).

<sup>28</sup> See ARSI, *Germ. Sup.*, f. 18, as mentioned by Luke Clossey, “The Early-Modern Jesuit Missions as a Global Movement,” in *UC World History Workshop* (2005), note 4, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0h45m0jw>.

<sup>29</sup> On the significance of religious tears, see Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Jessie Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2015), 239–54. Gutsell explains that weeping was a *tòpos* of Christianity since its first decades, and that tears as a means of “personal communication with the divine” did not lose their power in the following centuries, as Ignatius’s case well shows (253).

<sup>30</sup> “Ignatius’s capacity to weep represents another defining feature of his piety. Ignatius made frequent tears part of the range of affects that characterizes the experience of a Jesuit. For example, the “Autobiography” charts Ignatius’s spiritual progress in his developing ability to cry. From a wounded soldier suppressing his tears during two painful surgeries, he grows into a fervent believer who experiences “so much sobbing that he could not control himself. At the very end of the story, when Ignatius is working on the constitutions for his order, copious crying has become a daily habit.” See Ulrike Strasser, “‘The First Form and Grace’: Ignatius of Loyola and the Reformation of Masculinity,” in *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 56.

the traditional emphasis on that theme. One Jesuit wrote that, after learning of a call from Rome to apply for the Indian missions, he “wept so sweetly for more than two hours,” and during the night he “continuously felt such a yearning to be amongst barbarians, and let them know our common Creator.”<sup>31</sup> Another writer implored the general “with tears in my eyes, but above all else in my heart,” to remove him from his province to set sail for the Indies.<sup>32</sup> One Sicilian Jesuit complained in a follow-up letter to the general about not being chosen: he described himself as “consumed, sighing all day, bemoaning my faults,” and he concluded his renewed plea “on my knees, writing more with tears than with ink.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The generals of the Society of Jesus on certain occasions sent to most or to all of the provinces letters exhorting Jesuits to offer themselves as missionaries for the Indies, thereby influencing the number of petitions written in response to this communication. Two of the most known and efficacious of these, at least in the Italian assistancy, were (1) Michelangelo Tamburini’s “De mittendis ad Indias novis operariis,” in 1722, destined “ad omnes Provinciales exceptam Angliam,” reading it openly to promote vocations (ARSI, *Ep. NN.*, 9, f. iii); and (2) the letter written by his successor Fr. Franz Retz (1673–1750), who in 1734 sent “ad Patres provinciales omnes, praeterquam Anglia et Lithuaniae” his communication about “Capita informationis de iis, qui petunt Missiones transmarinas” (ARSI, *Ep. NN.*, 9, f. 151). For chronological reasons, the exhortation to which Staglianò referred could not be one of these, and it is unfortunately impossible to find the precise details of what was mentioned *passim* by every petitioner. The quoted passage appears in the original as “piansi così dolcemente, che per più di due ore, e poi ininterrottamente la notte mi sentiva una brama ardentissima di trovarmi fra gente barbara, e far loro conoscere il commune creatore” (ARSI, *FG* 750, f. 216, Naples, July 18, 1705). It is not known what happened to the Jesuit, since his name is not on the records of the dispatched missionaries nor in Josephus Fejér, SJ, *Defuncti secundi saeculi Societatis Jesu, 1641–1740* (Rome: General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1985–).

<sup>32</sup> “Con le lacrime agli occhi, e molto più al cuore” (ARSI, *FG* 750, f. 396–396v, Caltagirone, October 1, 1716).

<sup>33</sup> “Struggere, e sospirare tutto dì sino a piangerne i miei demeriti . . . piango per sempre la mia pessima vita . . . inginocchioni vergando più con lagrime, che con inchiostro questo foglio” (ARSI, *FG* 750, f. 488, Palermo, s.d. [May 27, 1717]). Since tears are, of course, transparent, one can assume that they were mixed with some ink or, alternatively, that this statement was more of a rhetorical *tòpos* than a description of the physical reality.

### C. Jesuit Zeal: To Work and to Suffer

In addition to dying, bleeding, and weeping for the sake of Christ, *indipeti* often expressed more broadly in their letters the desire to suffer, struggle, and experience an uncomfortable life in the name of evangelical poverty. As one *indipeta* put it succinctly: “I think you go to the Indies not to do, but to suffer.”<sup>34</sup> Another one preferred to “die during a storm, while navigating to the Indies,” but he also proclaimed himself ready to “live abandoned in one of those houses, the most poor and derelict one,” describing this fate as “the happiest one, because my life would go on in the Indies because of my obedience to God and the men.”<sup>35</sup> Another petitioner wrote to the general that he had started “to practice some discomforts” even before receiving his license for the Indies: “I started sleeping and eating less, and removing everything I have; I sold everything, I do not have anything anymore [...] I am preparing myself to donate everything I have as alms.”<sup>36</sup>

One Jesuit, renewing his request for the missions, promised the general to do the same every year: “Until I am 50 years old, I will petition for every part of the world.”<sup>37</sup> He expressed an awareness that he could be a missionary anywhere, even in his native province. But every time he thought about Francis Xavier and the Indian missionaries, he felt “moved in such a way that blood boils

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<sup>34</sup> “Non stimo nell’Indie tanto il fare quanto il patire” (ARSI, FG 751, f. 74, Como, November 27, 1719).

<sup>35</sup> “Morire in tempesta per viaggio; et ò morte à me carissima perché accadutami in sì buon punto, quanto è il viaggiare all’Indie; ò di dover io vivere abbandonato in una di quelle case la più povera, la più derelitta; e sarebbe pur questa vita per me fortunatissima, perché menata nell’Indie per obediensa prestata et à Dio et à gl’huomini” (ARSI, FG 750, ff. 195, 195v, 195vv, 195vzv, Rome [1704]).

<sup>36</sup> “Hò incominciato à sperimentare alcuni incomodi, come di dormire, mangiare, e togliere tutto quello che avea, tutto hò venduto, non hò niente più, tolto i scritti, et Christo, ed ogni cosa stò disponendo per limosine” (ARSI, FG 750, ff. 547, 547v, 547vv, Frascati, 11 dicembre 1717).

<sup>37</sup> “Fin all’età di anni 50 e per qualsivoglia parte del Mondo . . . in tal guisa commuovere, che mi bolle nelle vene il sangue, e il mio Cuore tutto che di pietra? Si intenerisce, e sfoga in ardenti brame di faticare, e patire in quelle parti” (ARSI, FG 751, f. 76, Palermo, December 4, 1719).

in my veins, and my heart of stone softens, and it bursts into ardent longing for struggling and suffering there.”

Many petitioners explicitly stated that they had chosen the Society of Jesus precisely because they wanted to be sent to the East Indies. The author of a few *indipetae* letters noticed that his present life was too weak and soft, living in his hometown in the Italian assintancy, and that certainly it was not compatible with the religious life that he had embraced.

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***“Spilling blood” is a theme commonly found in the litterae indipetae; but at times, it became much more than a theme.***

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It seemed to him that his “lower self” was enjoying too much his “daily life, in which I have so many comforts in my duty, and so few chances to suffer for my faults and help the souls of others.”<sup>38</sup> As he saw it, only the East Indies could remedy this laxity.

Indeed, Jesuits longed for overseas missions not in spite of, but rather because of, “harshness, efforts, struggle, and persecution, which inevitably are related to missions everywhere, and especially in the Indies.”<sup>39</sup> Only there could they “resemble the Crucifix in its pain, but, more than that, answer the Lord’s calling.”<sup>40</sup> They requested assignments where it would be “possible to gather more abundantly hard work and struggle, because it is specifically there that the Lord” was waiting for them.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Vedo, che la parte inferiore s’accomoda volentieri alla vita che al presente faccio, in cui ho moltissime comodità corporali, nell’officio assegnatomi, e poche occasioni di patir, molto in isconto delle mie colpe, et in aiuto dell’anime altrui” (ARSI, FG 750, f. 294–294v, Rome, July 19, 1714).

<sup>39</sup> “Durezza, le fatiche, i stenti, gli odi, le persecuzioni, le quali infallibilmente portano seco le missioni d’ogni luogo, ed in particolare quelle dell’Indie” (ARSI, FG 751, f. 37–37v, Recanati, April 8, 1718).

<sup>40</sup> “Assomigliarmi al Crocifisso nei dolori; e più ancora l’obbligo di dover soddisfare alla divina giustizia per gli oltraggi fattigli” (ARSI, FG 751, f. 37–37v, Recanati, April 8, 1718).

<sup>41</sup> “Paesi dove si raccolgono in maggior abbondanza e stenti e fatiche, perché là aponto parmi che il Signore mi aspetti” (ARSI, FG 750, f. 520, Genua, October 23, 1717).

An Italian Jesuit, Giulio Gori, who aspired for the Chinese mission, explains well why he chose that destination. Gori, who was born in 1686 into a rich and important family in Siena, decided in 1704, after philosophical studies “in the world,” to become a Jesuit.<sup>42</sup> His petitions for the missions were never accepted, so he became a professor of philosophy and canon law. In some of his courses he taught forbidden scientific and philosophical theories, so that some of his work was condemned by both the church and the Society of Jesus. Nevertheless, he died a Jesuit in 1764.

Gori pleaded passionately in three detailed letters, written between 1700 and 1709, to be sent to the Chinese Empire. From the start, he anticipated that the general might be skeptical about his intentions and respond that it was really “the World” — that is, worldly desires for fame and adventure rather than a real divine calling — that prompted Gori to request a mission to China.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, Gori explained that “the World has the habit to deceive with only three things: riches, honor, and pleasures,” but

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<sup>42</sup> See Anna Rita Capoccia, “Gori, Giulio,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 58 (2002), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-gori\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-gori_(Dizionario-Biografico)). Capoccia researched the Italian Jesuit for her doctoral dissertation and analyzed his teachings in “Modernità e ortodossia: strategie di conciliazione e dissidenza nell’insegnamento della filosofia nei collegi gesuitici del primo Settecento,” *Les Dossiers du Grihl*. 2 (2009), 1–37, <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/3678>.

<sup>43</sup> ARSI, FG 750, f. 89, 89a, 89b, 89bv, 89c, 89d, 89e, 89ev, Rome, December 2, 1704. All of the following quotations are from this letter: “Il mondo suole ingannare, et adescare con tre sole cose, Ricchezze, Onori e Piaceri . . . certo è, che bisogna aspettarsi una navigatione assai humiliante, sempre con ciurmaglia, che continuamente caricano di ingiurie, strapazzi e villanie, e bisogna per questo istesso servirli, e far lo schiavo a tutti . . . starsene molto tempo in casa, e per non starvi otioso, scopare, fare il quoco, et altre cose simili, che l’uomo mondano non reputa per onore . . . avendo io grandissima inclinatione alla speculatione, stimerei più tosto (come alle volte ne ho sentito alcun moto dentro di me) stimerei, dico, più tosto allettativo d’onore il restarmene qua in Europa . . . privarsi delle molte recreazioni lecite, ed honeste, che qui si godono in Domino nella Compagnia, perdere qualche agio, e commodità . . . Quanto poi alla carne, certo è che ella non gusta gran cosa né degli incomodi, patimenti sommi della navigatione, né di quelli molto maggiori, che portan seco un clima diverso, diversi cibi, et il doversi assuefare a diversi costumi.”



none of them could be found in the Chinese Empire.<sup>44</sup> For example, Gori continued, no missionary could expect to obtain money or honor there. On the contrary, a Jesuit should expect discomfort from the very beginning of the missionary experience, starting with “a very humiliating navigation, always with a terrible crew, that continuously vituperate, mistreat, and insult you, and you can nonetheless do anything but serve them, and be anyone’s slave.” Even after he landed at his destination, a Jesuit would pass many days and months in learning the language and practicing *accomodatio*—that is, adapting himself to food, clothing, cultural expectations, and ceremonies, as well as spending “much time at home, sweeping and cooking so as not to be idle: tasks which no worldly man would consider honorable.”

As for “honors,” Gori argued that he had to be sent to the Indies because leaving him in the Italian assitancy would be dangerous to his spiritual integrity. He described himself as “inclined to [intellectual] speculation,” so that staying in Europe was “tempting for my honor.”

As for the third temptation of riches, China meant “getting rid of the many legitimate and honest recreations that we can enjoy here in the Society of Jesus, losing some luxury and comfort” to which human beings are naturally attracted. Gori asserted as an “indisputable fact that people do not like inconvenience, the sufferings of navigation, or even worse, every change of climate, and food, and costumes.” In short, Gori was arguing shrewdly that sending him to China was the only way that the superior general could save Gori’s soul.

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<sup>44</sup> This is an allusion to the Meditation on the Two Standards (*Spiritual Exercises* 136–48). Note that the *Exercises* is not “a book intended for private reading with a view to edification . . . the text existed only in so far as it was practiced,” and its main aim is to help the practitioner, assisted by a spiritual director, to well discern about his vocation to the Society of Jesus and his mission. “Riches, honor, and pleasures,” as the petitioner Giulio Gori noted, were weapons that Lucifer used to mislead Jesuits who did not have a true vocation. See Adriano Prosperi, “The Two Standards. The Origins and Development of a Celebrated Ignatian Meditation,” in *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015): 361–86.



## II. Frustration and Disillusion

Only a fraction of the thousands of requests received through *litterae indipetae* were approved for the overseas mission—not because of any machinations on the part of superiors or blood relatives to keep the petitioners in the Italian colleges, but simply because there was no suitable fit for them in the Indies in general and especially in Eastern Asia. On the contrary, it was far more likely for a Jesuit to be employed as a teacher in a Jesuit school or as a field missionary in his own assistancy. So how did Jesuits react to being refused?

Many Jesuits continued sending letters to Rome without bothering to conceal their disappointment.<sup>45</sup> One admitted that the general's reply left him "embittered [...] because of the delay of my longed-for departure for the Indies."<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, some Jesuits confessed to being envious of those chosen to be sent to the Indies, especially if they knew them personally, having studied or lived with them in the same colleges. But by the same token, the fact that they knew the selected Jesuits only encouraged them to continue pursuing their own requests.

One petitioner, for example, expressed his joy about missionaries being sent to Paraguay. Since these included not only priests but also students such as himself, he felt an even stronger urge to "turn to Your

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<sup>45</sup> The fascinating subject of *dimissiones*, especially with regard to Jesuits who were disappointed in their petitions, has not been studied adequately. See Sabina Pavone, "I dimessi dalla Compagnia negli anni del generalato di Francesco Borgia: una nuova questione storiografica," in *Francisco de Borja y su tiempo: Política, religión y cultura en la Edad Moderna* (Valencia: Abatros Ediciones, 2011), 465–79; "Dentro e fuori la Compagnia di Gesù: Claude Visdelou tra riti cinesi e riti malabarici," in *Los jesuitas: religión, política y educación (siglos XVI–XVIII)* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2012), 943–60; and "Dissentire per sopravvivere. Note sull'ultima attività di Paolo Segneri (1692–1694)," in *Avventure dell'obbedienza nella Compagnia di Gesù. Teoria e prassi fra XVI e XIX secolo*, ed. Fernanda Alfieri and Claudio Ferlan (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 139–64. Pavone notices that many *dimissi* came from the Sicilian province. See also Mario Scaduto, "Il Libretto consolatorio di Bobadilla a Domenèch sulle vocazioni mancate (1570)," in *AHSI* 43, no. 85 (1974): 85–101.

<sup>46</sup> "Riscontro di Vostra Paternità come m'ha molto consolato nello spirito . . . m'ha dall'altra parte ammaregiato alquanto il mio spirito per il differimento della partenza tanto desiderata per le Indie" (ARSI, FG 750, f. 398, Modica, October 13, 1716).

Paternity to be fulfilled."<sup>47</sup> The fact that he was "touched by holy envy for what my brothers accomplished" meant, at least to him, that his own vocation was authentic. Another petitioner complained to the general that he deserved "not less [...] indeed more, to suffer in the name of the Lord than my companion [...] who was selected by Your Paternity to the enterprise I so much desire."<sup>48</sup>

One petitioner named Franciscis was confused because another Jesuit, staying briefly in Genoa while waiting to leave for the Philippines, had congratulated him for having being selected for a South Indian mission. Franciscis had not received any official communication from the general or from the provincial, and he was suffering "like a beggar who dreamed to be enriched."<sup>49</sup> And just in case the provincial had already described him to the general as physically weak, Franciscis declared himself "sound and strong [...] I have an excellent bodily constitution, I am in a good health, therefore I am suitable." He was looking forward to working at "the most laborious task, also as a scullery boy"; and to increase his labors, he aimed at the Eastern Indies because they were, according to him, "the most painful" destination.

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<sup>47</sup> "Le liete novelle capitate della consolazione, che si è degnata Vostra Paternità conferire non solo a qualche nostro Sacerdote, ma anco a più d'uno studente, destinati già felicemente a faticar nelle Missioni del Paraguai, sicome m'hanno riempito di sommo giubilo il cuore, che gode dell'altrui felicità; così pure m'hanno spronato a ricorrere alla somma Benignità di Vostra Paternità per essere ancor io consolato, benché per altro indegnissimo sia d'una tal gratia . . . tocco da santa invidia d'un tanto bene ne' miei stessi Compagni" (ARSI, *FG* 750, fl. 396–396v, Caltagirone, October 1, 1716).

<sup>48</sup> "Non ho minore obbligo di patire per Christo, anzi di lunga maggiore, di quello, che ha un altro compagno mio di classe ... già eletto da Vostra Paternità alla tanto da me desiderata impresa. Spero dunque nella paterna giustizia" (ARSI, *FG* 750, f. 503, Frascati, July 29, 1717).

<sup>49</sup> "ome un Mendico, che già sognò d'essere straricchito . . . sano, e robusto. . . . Assicuro a Vostra Paternità che sono d'ottima complessione, e godo perfetta salute, siché son atto . . . l'uffizio più laborioso di guattero . . . più penose" (ARSI, *FG* 751, ff. 401–401v, Palermo, November 11, 1729). It is not known what happened to him nor whether he remained in the Society of Jesus.

## A. The Generals' Answers

If successfully requesting missionary work was difficult, then so too was the complex selection process. The superior general had the last word, but since he could not know all the petitioners personally, he relied heavily on what others had reported about them. Local superiors often vouched for petitioners by including their own letters with the petitions; but at times, they did the opposite: they warned the general not to accept certain men, while simultaneously trying to convince the latter to change their minds about the missions. A Jesuit's family could also exert considerable influence, especially if his was a noble or wealthy lineage.

Within the superior general's network of consultors, procurators also played a vital role. They were responsible for the economic, administrative, and legal aspects of the missions. During their return visits to Europe from assignments abroad, they sought new recruits from among Jesuits at different stages of their studies, evaluating their skills and the firmness of their vocations. They then provided the general with names of the most suitable candidates.

But even as the order's highest authority, the superior general was not completely free to decide as he wished. Evidence of his limitations appears in their preserved letters, written to both Jesuits and to externs, as found in a collection entitled *Epistulae generalium*.<sup>50</sup> For example, after the general had approved a petition of Ignazio Maria Romeo for the Indies, he received a letter from Romeo's father, a marquis, who pleaded with the general not to send his son, because that would have ruined his family, leaving him with no

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<sup>50</sup> Despite scholarly interest in the *litterae indipetae*, this particular source remains unfamiliar to many historians and is little utilized, especially with regard to the applications for the missions. About the *Epistulae generalium*, see Édmond Lamalle, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso: l'Archivio generale della Compagnia di Gesù," in *Archiva Ecclesiae* 34–35, no. 1 (1981–1982): 114–15; Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, "Indipetae Polonae: Kołatanie do drzwi misji chińskiej," (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2015); and Elisa Frei, "The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo, SJ (1676–1724?), Petitioner for the Indies: A Jesuit Seen through His *litterae indipetae* and the *Epistulae generalium*," in *AHSI* 85, fasc. 170 (2016/II): 365–404.

help, and leaving his mother with another lost child. The general rescinded the permission he had given to Romeo.

Many of the letters written by superiors general in response to Jesuits' petitions have been lost. Fortunately, however, much of their essential content has been preserved. Since "every superior who commits his authority in a decision must keep in his letter-book a recorded transcription of it," it was all the more necessary in the case of the generals to be able to account for all of their decisions.<sup>51</sup> To that end, all of the replies sent by the Roman secretaries to the generals' numerous addressees—usually religious, but also laity—were summarized and preserved in the *Epistulae generalium*.

Jesuits who sent petitions to the general often included other personal matters. Roman secretaries answered by sending congratulations, best wishes for spiritual or physical healing, advice on how to behave in complicated situations, and exhortations to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with consecrated religious. As a result, the letters cultivated between many Jesuits and their generals personal relationships, which did not cease once the petition to go to the Indies had been denied. Most of the early modern Jesuits never became famous for anything, and many of them suddenly disappear from the Roman documentation. The only mark that they left in history were their *litterae indipetae* and the general's responses to them.

To judge by the responses to Sicilian Jesuits—and there is no reason to believe that their situation was unique—the generals tended to reply within a few weeks to many, if not all, of the *indipetae*. The responses usually included expressions of thanks for the application, and since most of the petitioners mentioned Francis Xavier, the replies also included hopes that the petitioners would resemble him not only "in his desire missions of the Indies" but above all "in his virtue."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Lamalle, "L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso," 113.

<sup>52</sup> One example among many is in ARSI, Sic. 39, C. 63r, Palermo, January 15, 1703.

Generals rarely made promises that they did not intend to keep. But often they vaguely hinted that future departures for a mission were still possible, if the right conjunction of circumstances occurred and if the candidate continued to show himself suitable for religious life overseas. In the case of petitioners who were particularly tenacious and anxious to leave, the general invited them to be patient and to persist in their desires for a vocation to the Indies.<sup>53</sup> And in responding to Jesuits who were convinced that they would find peace of mind only if they were sent to the overseas missions, the general urged them to submission and obedience, reminding them that they always could find peace of mind in their own province.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond their yearning for the Indies, many Jesuits expressed restlessness and dissatisfaction with their daily routines, with the environments—usually a college—in which they studied or taught, or both. The general replied to one: “I desire for you every possible peace of mind and satisfaction: but be sure, this cannot depend on the change you desire of place, and task [...] It seems to me that you should rightly find fulfillment in taking care of the tasks that you are assigned to, in the place where you are now.”<sup>55</sup>

## **B. A Case Study: Francesco Maria Riccio**

Now we turn to a case-study whose protagonists are the Sicilian Jesuit Francesco Maria Riccio and his superior general Fr. Michelangelo Tamburini. As noted earlier, the real reason that many men applied to the Society was that they wished, above all, to escape their current living situations for the sake of a radically different life. In

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<sup>53</sup> See for instance: “Proseguite a pregarlo [il Signore], che a me manifesti la sua **santissima** divina volontà, e dia a voi forza per eseguirla” (ARSI, *Sic.* 40, c. 3, Messina, January 1704).

<sup>54</sup> A petitioner was for example invited to “esercitarvi non meno negli attuali ministerii . . . in qualsivoglia luogo . . . che ne’ santi desiderii di maggiori fatiche in paesi fin rimoti, con piena indifferenza” (ARSI, *Sic.* 40, c. 13r, Mazara, January, 28, 1704).

<sup>55</sup> “Desidero a Vostra Reverenza ogni maggior quiete d’animo, e sodisfazione: ma sia pur certo, che questa non può dipendere dalla mutazione ch’ella designava di luogo, e d’ufficio. . . . Piuttosto parmi che abbia giusta occasione di più contentarsi nei ministerii, ne’ quali viene costì occupato” (ARSI, *Sic.* 40, c. 144v, Palermo, November 3, 1704).

that sense, inauthentic or shaky vocations usually resulted in an exit from the order. Riccio is just one of many examples of young men who remained Jesuits only during their “petitioner phase.”

The Italian scholar Gian Carlo Roscioni has noted that a sizable percentage of the petitioners whose tracks he tried to follow, like Riccio, disappeared from Jesuit documentation after a short time.<sup>56</sup> Beyond archival accidents and unavoidable lacunae in the records, this happened because many Jesuits, frustrated in the desire that had brought them to the Society, decided to abandon its ranks. This was especially frequent in those who had not yet pronounced their final vows, or those who were still uncertain whether they wished to be priests or brothers. It also depended on whether their families would have the financial resources to support them if they left the Society.

Riccio is the author of five surviving *litterae indipetae* dated between 1716 and 1718. There were earlier letters also, but these have been lost. He was born in Palermo in August 1693 and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of sixteen. He studied rhetoric and philosophy in his hometown and then taught in the colleges of Monte Reale (1717), Trapani (1718), and Messina (1721). The following year, Riccio began theology studies, the final stage before ordination. After two years, however, while holding the grade of approved scholastic, he left the Society, and no traces of him can be found after 1724: all that is known is that he did not die in the Society.

Riccio’s first preserved petition for the missions dates to 1716, but it is certain that the general had received others petitions from him earlier, because in 1714 the general wrote that he was “edified and at the same time consoled” by Riccio’s *indipetae* (plural).<sup>57</sup> Tamburini declared himself more and more inclined to satisfy Riccio’s longings because of Riccio’s “perseverance in asking for it” and “holy impatience shown in

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<sup>56</sup> Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Il desiderio delle Indie. Storie, sogni e fughe di giovani gesuiti italiani* (Einaudi: Torino, 2001). This situation is similar in the Italian assistency of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because a large percentage of the petitioners, after several months or years of insisting on their pleas to go to the missions, no longer appears in the ARSI documentation.

<sup>57</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 46, c. 82, Palermo, April 30, 1714.

desiring such a high commitment." Impatience, like envy, could be holy if it were directed to the right purposes. The general invited Riccio to "rouse and increase" his "fervent yearnings," but at the same time to lead a life that made him worthy of obtaining the missions.

Riccio's second preserved letter of 1716 followed the completion of his philosophy studies. He indicated that those studies had prompted further growth of "those holy desires of the Eastern Indies," suggesting that his fervor was increasing along with the number of his petitions.<sup>58</sup> He also noted that he had read or perhaps heard of a letter written "by a superior of those Countries" to the rector of the college in Palermo, where Riccio was living at the time. Riccio did not provide further details about the letter or "the Countries," except to note that the superior had complained about the lack of "workers for those souls, too much in need of help." Riccio felt inspired by this complaint, and he planned to make a private vow to request the Indies.

Finally, the Sicilian begged the general to allow him to study theology "outside of this province." It was not uncommon—as research on the *litterae indipetae* has shown—for a Jesuit to ask to move far from his hometown for the stated purpose of devoting himself more profitably and without distractions to his studies. Riccio claimed that, by leaving Sicily, he would find himself "more free and disentangled from relatives who, being many people and in many places, pester me all day."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> ARSI, FG 750, c. 329, Palermo, April 11, 1716.

<sup>59</sup> About the role of natural families, see Prosperi, "Il figlio, il padre, il gesuita," 112–55; and *La vocazione*. See also Roscioni, *Il desiderio delle Indie*, 149–61. On the tight relationship between spiritual and natural families, see Miriam Turrini, "'Il fine di aiutar giovani non è perché si facciano religiosi.' Istruzioni per una guida spirituale gesuita della prima Compagnia," in *Università e formazione dei ceti dirigenti*. Per Gian Paolo Brizzi, *pellegrino dei saperi*, ed. Giancarlo Angelozzi, Maria Teresa Guerrini, and Giuseppe Olmi (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2015), 187–98; "Poco oltre la soglia: Racconti autobiografici di aspiranti gesuiti a metà Seicento," in *Studi Storici. Rivista trimestrale dell'Istituto Gramsci* 3 (2014): 585–614; "I racconti della vocazione nel *Menologio* del gesuita Giuseppe Antonio Patrignani (1730)," in *La fede degli italiani*. Per Adriano Prospero, ed. Guido Dall'Olio, Adelisa Malena, and Pierroberto Scaramella, vol. 1 (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011), 253–64; "La vita scelta? Appunti per una storia della vocazione in età moderna," in *Dai cantieri della storia. Liber amicorum per Paolo Prodi*, ed. Gian Paolo Brizzi and Giuseppe Olmi (Bologna: CLUEB, 2007), 145–59.



The strong term that Riccio used, “pester,” was probably meant to allude to a classic principle of religious life that had been derived from the gospels: “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”<sup>60</sup> In the Jesuit *Constitutions*, Ignatius had cited this passage explicitly, with the intention of emphasizing that a new Jesuit should completely detach himself from his family.<sup>61</sup> This of course had been a staple exhortation of medieval religious life.

In addition to the classic consideration of separation from one’s family, Riccio added another *tòpos* of the *litterae indipetae*: the idea that local superiors, provincials, and families were conspiring to frustrate the designs of aspiring missionaries. “[T]o many people it often happened,” wrote Riccio, that they were “impeded by this Province.” But in his own case, his “scarce merits” did not justify such an “arrest,” because even if he went to the missions, the Sicilian Province would not be losing anyone of consequence!

Riccio’s statement might seem paranoid to modern readers, but a close reading of many *litterae indipetae* does give the impression that it was not without some truth. Especially for documents coming from the *Provincia Sicula*, one gets the impression that various parties were working together to block many requests for overseas missions. Future studies of generals’ letters promise to provide evidence whether—and in what ways—families tried to hinder the petitions of their sons and brothers in this regard.<sup>62</sup>

In Riccio’s letter appears a rather stringent insistence that he be allowed to leave Sicily, regardless of whether he was permitted to go to the Indies. Riccio did not specify if it would be enough to be relocated to the Italian peninsula, or if he preferred, like other of his Sicilian companions, to move to Portugal. As it happens, missionaries often set sail for the Indies from Lisbon onboard Portuguese ships. Since the usual season to set sail was March or April, Jesuits often had to wait for sever-

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<sup>60</sup> Luke 14:26 (NAB). See also Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29; Luke 9:57–62.

<sup>61</sup> *Constitutions* 61.

<sup>62</sup> See Frei, “The Many Faces.”



al months in Lisbon. In the meantime, they studied new languages and became acquainted with their future new colleagues in the missions.

However, the general did not seem impressed by Riccio's desires to leave. One gets the impression that he was having doubts about the legitimacy of Riccio's motivations, since he answered Riccio in less than one month, but very tersely, simply thanking him for his request, and not renewing the same hopes that he had given him only two years earlier.<sup>63</sup> After a few months, Riccio sent yet another letter to Rome, complaining bitterly of his unease. He had been confident that, "at the first opportunity," he would have been given instructions to depart to the Indies. But instead, quite unexpectedly and to his great consternation, he learned that two of his confreres had been chosen instead, and were about to leave Sicily.

To Riccio's mind, his pleas had been ignored. He had felt such a strong vocation "since the last century [...] and as soon as I was still a Novice I began to write to Your Paternity; and I have continued to do so to the Present." Riccio was seized by "such a great discouragement" that he felt desperate. He had nevertheless decided not to give up; after a day spent praying in front of an image of the Virgin, he felt a calling to write another request. For this reason, "from the bottom of my heart," and "with the warmest tears in my eyes," Riccio implored the general to console him. Tamburini had done it already with other people "less old than me, both in Religion, and in this Vocation, although more ancient in spirit."<sup>64</sup> Riccio had been complaining that the most recent missionaries to be chosen were older than him in biological age but not in terms of tenure in the Society, and that they had not spent as much time as he making petitions for the Indies.

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<sup>63</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 47, c. 48, Palermo, May 4, 1716.

<sup>64</sup> "Hebbi fin dal secolo la Vocazione e da Novizio cominciai à scrivere a Vostra Paternità; ed ho proseguito sino al Presente . . . la mia sconsolazione è stata grande, benché mi conformassi di continuo alla volontà del Signore; il quale dispone ogni cosa secondo la sua maggior gloria. Io però non mi son perduto d'animo . . . Prostrato à piedi di Vostra Paternità la priego con tutto l'intimo del cuore, e colle più calde lacrime agli occhi, che si degnasse consolare me, come si è degnata consolare tanti altri meno antichi di me, e nella Religione, e in questa Vocazione, benché più antichi nello spirito" (ARSI, *FG* 750, C. 359, Palermo, July 20, 1716).

Riccio gave to the general one last argument, prefaced with an expression of trust in the intercession of Mary, who Riccio hoped had inspired “fervent lines” in him, and who he also hoped had moved the general’s “soul [...] to console me.” Then, Riccio gave his reason:

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*For this reason, “from the bottom of my heart,” and “with the warmest tears in my eyes,” Riccio implored the general to console him.*

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his own advanced age made him tremble. “Do you know when there will be another occasion like this?” he wrote to the general. “I consider myself already aged, being 23 years old.” The general responded only one week later. He wrote that he felt sorry for Riccio’s “affliction of spirit” because of his exclusion

from the list of missionaries.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, he urged him not to despair and to keep alive his “longing [...] encourage it [...] increase it even more, and offer it assiduously to the Lord, while at the same time sacrificing [his] will to the divine dispositions.”

By this response, the general seemed to imply that Riccio’s moment might come one day. This was not uncommon, but generals did not write it in all of the *indipetae* letters. In this case, Tamburini seems to have done it because of the petitioner’s young age—although Riccio himself thought that he was almost decrepit. Indeed, the general invited Riccio not to put his hopes elsewhere—as older petitioners were frequently asked to do—but rather to cultivate and increase them in hopes of future openings. It seems the general had not ruled out the possibility of sending Riccio to the Indies, provided that Riccio demonstrated greater virtue, perseverance, and patience.

About a year later, in 1717, Riccio wrote the general once again, informing him that his “vocation to the Eastern Missions” was growing within him, together with the “ardent desire and longing” he had always felt for those places.<sup>66</sup> Riccio reminded the general, as a gentle reprimand, that he had received from him “big promises, a long time ago.” Consequently, Riccio could not be blamed if he felt a “holy envy” at seeing his confreres’ petitions answered. He concluded that he did

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<sup>65</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 47, c. 80, Palermo, July 27, 1716.

<sup>66</sup> ARSI, *FG* 750, c. 434, Monreale, February 2, 1717.

not feel discouraged, and he promised (or threatened?) the general that “I will not, however, stop tormenting, so to speak, Your Paternity, until the day you will let me be part of the same fate you granted to others.”

A few weeks later, Tamburini assured Riccio that “the moment was not far away to send workers to the East Indies, the ones you long for.”<sup>67</sup> When it came, Tamburini promised he would certainly remember Riccio’s “repeated expressions of fervor.” Even here, the general seems open to Riccio’s request, since it is difficult to imagine that he would have promised Riccio the next departure if he had really intended to leave him in Sicily. In the replies of Tamburini and his predecessors to other Jesuits, they tended to include vague pledges only, and they usually preferred a more subtle strategy that seemed both to promise and not to promise something at the same time.

Three months later, Riccio wrote the general yet again of his holy envy and of his “near hopes” of satisfying his “desire of the Eastern Missions.”<sup>68</sup> Riccio was aware that “many others of this Province” had been consoled, while he had not yet received any communication.

Since Riccio believed that the general preferred “people with a priestly degree”—that is, ordained Jesuits—he declared himself “not only ready to do this, but wanting to do it.” He was not alone in thinking that the Society preferred to send ordained members to the missions. Scholastics and brothers could receive a missionary assignment, but it was rarer. But if Riccio attributed the reason for his not being selected to the fact that that he was not a priest, it is certain that he was never ordained.

About two months later, the general briefly thanked Riccio for having “repeatedly asked for the Eastern Missions,” but this time, the general did not intimate any glimmer of hope that Riccio had a future there.<sup>69</sup> Tamburini counterbalanced the previously optimistic forecasts with a very neutral letter. It could be a mere coincidence,

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<sup>67</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 47, c. 183r, Monreale, March 25, 1717.

<sup>68</sup> ARSI, *FG* 750, c. 485, Monreale, May 15, 1717.

<sup>69</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 47, c. 243, Monreale, June 7, 1717.

but it seems that the Roman secretary practiced, at least in the case of Riccio, a familiar strategy. A positive reinforcement was always followed with generic formulas that did not guarantee either the departure for the Indies or its opposite.

Riccio wrote his last *indipeta* about a year later, its brevity suggesting that he was losing hope.<sup>70</sup> He recalled how long he had asked “with warm petitions the Eastern Missions,” and the “holy envy” he felt whenever he saw such a “consolation” offered to so many of his confreres. He found this barely tolerable, because the general had repeatedly rekindled in him “strong hopes of being consoled on a near occasion.”

Were it not for the existence of the general’s previous responses from Rome, Riccio’s complaints might seem exaggerated. And to be sure, many petitioners for the Indies did lie or omit important information from their letters to the general. In Riccio’s case, however, one can verify his claims that the general had given him reasons to hope for an imminent departure. Riccio concluded his letter by imploring the general not to forget him, and to grant him as soon as possible the “longed-for grace.”

Two years passed. Riccio was living with sixteen Jesuits at the college in Messina, enjoying good health and teaching humanities. But even then, the assessments of superiors about the twenty-seven-year-old were unflattering: his “intelligence,” “judgment,” “practical wisdom” and “profit in humanities” were mediocre, while “practical experience” was rated as “null,” despite Riccio’s ten years in the Society. Curiously, under the column *ad quo ministeria Societatis habet talentum*—that is, which skills a Jesuit has, and for what tasks—his superior had written nothing. Was it a simple oversight, or a deliberate implication of the writer that Riccio could not usefully serve the order?<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> ARSI, FG 751, c. 31, Trapani, March 25, 1718.

<sup>71</sup> See ARSI, Sic. 104, c. 73 for the *Catalogus Primus*, and Sic. 105, C. 73 for the *Secundus*. From the *Catalogi Triennales*, it is possible to know basic biographical data of every Jesuit in the world. These registers were compiled approximately every three years: the *Catalogus Primus (sive publicus)* provided general information, which, with little variation among them, listed: “Nomen et cognomen,” “Patria,” “Aetas,”

In 1720, Riccio was once again reassured in writing—this time apparently after two years of silent waiting—that the general had “all the propensity” to grant him the much desired missions, according to the general’s assistant for the Indies.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Tamburini had concluded that, for economic reasons, the circumstances were not favorable.<sup>73</sup> It seems that these ambiguous and fluctuating communications did not cheer Riccio at all.

In 1722, Riccio was allowed to accept money from his family, on the conditions that he left it with the rector and obtained his permission before spending it in any way.<sup>74</sup> A year later, he was teaching grammar and humanities at the College of Palermo.<sup>75</sup> Then, in 1723, the general contacted Riccio about a controversy regarding a local relic. The details of the story are unknown, but the general noted that Riccio was “agitated.” He invited him to keep calm and

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“Vires,” “Tempus Societatis,” “Tempus Studiorum,” “Ministeria quae exercuit,” “Gradus in Litteris,” and “Gradus in Societate.” Using a number only in place of the complete name—“Numerus respondens nomini,” known to the superiors only—the *Catalogus Secundus (sive secretus)* analyzed these Jesuits’ characteristics even more deeply, recording their “psychologies,” personal attitudes, and talents: “Ingenium,” “Prudentia,” “Experientia Rerum,” “Profectus in Litteris,” “Naturalis complexio,” “Ad quo ministeria Societatis habet talentum.” The *Catalogus Tertius (sive rerum)* registered practical information concerning every Jesuit house. About this source, see Cristiano Casalini, “Discerning Skills: Psychological Insight at the Core of Jesuit Identity,” in *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ways of Proceeding within the Society of Jesus*, ed. Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016), 189–211; Kateřina Bobková-Valentová, “Come elaborare la biografia di un gesuita? Rassegna delle fonti di registro dell’ordine, loro conservazione, accessibilità e valore documentario nella prospettiva di una sistematica elaborazione di un database biografico,” in *Bollettino dell’Istituto Storico Ceco di Roma* 9 (2014): 111–45; José Manuel Díaz Blanco, “Un sistema de información en la Europa del siglo XVII, los catálogos trienales de la Compañía de Jesús,” in *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 23 (2014): 341–69; Marina Massimi, “Engenho e temperamentos nos catálogos e no pensamento da Companhia de Jesus nos séculos XVII e XVIII,” in *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicopatología Fundamental* 11, no. 4 (2008): 675–87.

<sup>72</sup> ARSI, Sic. 49, c. 15, s.l., April 15, 1720.

<sup>73</sup> The general to Riccio: “avendo il Collegio Romano mantenuto molti studenti di cotesta Provincia [Sicula], e mantenendone attualmente . . . non sarà così facile, almeno per ora, il soddisfare a vostri desiderii” (ARSI, Sic. 49, c. 15, s.l., April 15, 1720).

<sup>74</sup> ARSI, Sic. 50, c. 59, Palermo, May 2, 1722.

<sup>75</sup> ARSI, Sic. 107, c. 112 for the *Primus*, and Sic. 108, c. 34v for the *Secundus*.

to consult his superiors before doing anything. The general also asked Riccio's rector to keep an eye on him.<sup>76</sup>

It seems likely that this incident—whatever it was—was the final straw that prompted Riccio to leave the Society. In May 1724, with the degree of *scholasticus approbatus*, Riccio's name is found on the list of the *dimissi* from the Jesuit residence in Regalbuto, a small town in Sicily.<sup>77</sup> Quitting the Society was not a matter of a few days. Riccio must have been thinking about this radical resolution at least since the end of the previous year, which corresponds to the time period of the affair involving the relic.

Riccio left the Jesuits about the age of thirty-one, after five years of petitioning for the Indies (1714–1718), and after a total of fifteen years in the Society. By that time, in 1724, he had probably abandoned any hopes of his candidacy being accepted, although it was still possible for Jesuits of his age to be sent to the overseas missions. Moreover, it seems that Riccio had not even established good relationships with his superiors: the issue of the relic had raised the alarm of his local superior, his provincial, and the superior general.

It is also possible that Riccio's activities as teacher and preacher were carried out with too little enthusiasm. As for the money that he had accepted from his relatives, did something happen in his family that made it financially possible for him to live outside the Society? Did pressure from relatives compel him to go back to a secular life managing the family business? It is impossible to know without more research. But because Riccio always seemed disillusioned with his relatives, going back to his family must have been a decision that he was forced to make.

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<sup>76</sup> ARSI, *Sic.* 50, c. 215, Palermo, spring 1723.

<sup>77</sup> In ARSI, *Schedario unificato, sub nomine*, Riccio is registered, on May 21, 1724, as “dimissus e Residentia Regalbuti”; see also *Sic.* 170, f. 184.

## Conclusion

Riccio's story, as read through his *indipetae* and the general's replies, illustrates well the strategies practiced by the curia of the Society of Jesus when dealing with the thousands of petitioners for the Indies who were, during the early modern age, bombarding Rome with their emotional letters. The strategy employed by Roman secretaries towards Riccio was typical for other applicants. The generals probably alternated hopeful replies with vaguer ones, rarely guaranteeing anything in the near future, because this approach was effective. In Riccio's case, however, it seems to have contributed to the Jesuit's departure from the order.

The preserved letters of the superiors general in the Roman archives not only help to reconstruct the lives of individual Jesuits, but also, more broadly, to understand the convoluted dynamics at work in appointments to the overseas missions. They offer the generals' perspectives and provide clues that otherwise would remain unknown, or that could be inferred only from the *indipetae*, which are not always trustworthy. Many factors beyond the skills and character of the Jesuits, including the intervention of Jesuits' families, were involved in the selection of missionaries.

I believe that this article highlights the close connection between the disappointment that a Jesuit felt and his decision to quit the order. The Roman letter-books confirm the truth of statements contained in many *indipetae*, and it seems clear that many petitioners mistook—perhaps more or less intentionally—the generals' vague affirmations about future possibilities as clear and certain confirmation of the petitioners' requests. They replied by writing something along the lines of, "Thank you for all the hopes that you have given me."

Regardless, in the case of Riccio, it happened to the contrary: while he was eager to depart for the missions, he seems to have been a realist who did not read too much between the lines. Instead, it was the general who for many years had given him false hope. Usually the aspiring missionaries had jumped upon vague replies as positive indications, or they actively denied any opposition coming from their religious and natural families. Only the *epistulae generalium* can confirm these hypotheses.

Finally, one might wonder whether Riccio's dismissal from the order was caused by frustrated desires, or whether, conversely, the Society's superiors did not send him because they thought that his vocation was not strong enough. One cannot know for sure. And Riccio's case is just one among many others. Despite the integration of data within the *indipetae* and *epistulae generalium*, most of the stories of the petitioners for the Indies are destined to remain inconclusive, especially in the case of those who later left the order. Nevertheless, it is micro-histories like these that make the history of the Society of Jesus even fuller and more fascinating.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

I knew Fr. János Lukács when he was at Weston Jesuit School of Theology for his licentiate. I was either the first reader or the only reader of his thesis, which became the basis of his first essay in *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*.<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Lukács has done it again. He has given the readership an insightful and challenging issue of *STUDIES*. I continue to marvel at his command of English and his great insights into Jesuit spirituality.

His two examples of how he helped the novices come to grips with parts of the *Constitutions* were wonderful. I wish that I had read those before I became assistant novice director many, many years ago. My thanks to Fr. Lukács for taking the time to write this essay. I hope that formators and provincials will take his suggestions and insights seriously and act on them.

William A. Barry (UNE)  
Campion Center  
Weston, Massachusetts

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<sup>1</sup> János Lukács, SJ, "The Incarnational Dynamic of the *Constitutions*," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2004).

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