

2.3. How to Apply for this License

The second chapter of the fourth book of *Misión a las Indias* explains “how a religious person should behave in order to present his desires and apply for the license to his superior.”³⁴ One of Pallas's first concerns was the fact that not a few Jesuits volunteered as missionaries but, once they had obtained permission to leave, regretted it. This happened because some applied with superficiality and in haste, without having first analyzed their desire, ascertaining whether it came from God or from “the most astute deceiver of humans.”³⁵ Pallas believed, in fact, that the devil could urge men to apply for the missions, especially in the case of novices, whose spiritual “armor” he could easily penetrate.

How could a young, inexperienced Jesuit discern the veracity of his vocation? Pallas advised, first of all, to look at the calling: When did it start and for how long had it been going on? If its source seemed reasonably godly, the aspiring missionary had to expose it with honesty to one or more superiors.³⁶ The young acolyte in question would have probably been invited to wait, and if after this communication he experienced a “perturbation of the soul,” this was the clearest indication that the inspiration came not from God, but from the devil. On the contrary, if the applicant stayed “indifferent and resigned in his claims and obedient,” this meant that the vocation originated from God.³⁷

As Pallas recalled, only a spiritual father was able to evaluate and put to test the vocation of a Jesuit. Time was crucial, especially for those who applied “during the fervors of their novitiate.”³⁸ The spiritual father could not only judge, but also assign prayers, mortifications, and meditations. The aspiring missionary had to offer himself to God entirely, as a slave or property. Pallas also listed for the sake of his readers a series of questions, as if it were God himself who was asking them—the candidate was required to answer them all in the affirmative.

Once the candidate had obtained from his superiors the approval to apply, Pallas went on to explain concretely “how you should ask for this license.”³⁹ First of all, the request should not include a favored destination—indifference was essential.⁴⁰ If a candidate included a specific place, concentrating only on this place, he would end up looking at all the others “with little pleasure . . . sadness,

34 “Como se ha de aver el religioso en proponer sus deseos y pedir licencia al prelado para esta Misión.” Pallas, 235.

35 “astutissimo engañador de los hombres.” Pallas, 236.

36 Pallas, 237.

37 “perturbación en su alma . . . indiferente y resignado en su pretención y obediente.” Pallas, 237.

38 “con los fervores del noviciado.” Pallas, 238. Pallas also proposed here the meditation by Ignatius called “Llamamento del Rey temporal” (The Call of the Temporal King).

39 “cómo se deve pedir esta licencia.” Pallas, 240.

40 Pallas, 240.

and melancholy.”⁴¹ The best destination was the one decided by God, which would not cause any disappointment leading to the loss of the precious missionary vocation.

The majority of petitioners for the Indies followed Pallas’s advice; those who did not might experience restlessness and discomfort because their desires were not satisfied and express it quite clearly to the superior general himself. The Sicilian Jesuit Giovanni Filippo Ricci, for instance, applied at the beginning of the eighteenth century specifically for the California missions. He obtained permission to leave, but refused it as soon as he became aware that his final destination may not be California, but Mexico. He openly complained to General Michelangelo Tamburini: “When did I ever express a desire to change my province with another one? I applied only to go to those [California] missions.”⁴² Ricci refused to leave as long as he did not have in his hands a written certificate that California would be his final destination. Since this document never arrived, Ricci feigned illness, and in this way “forced” his superiors to keep him in the Italian assistancy. A few years later, however, he bitterly regretted the lost opportunity and tried to change the general’s mind—in vain. If this Jesuit had only had the chance to read Pallas’s handbook, he might have been more prepared regarding his desires (specifically, by not stipulating any destination) but also about the actual situation in the Americas.

Back to *Misión a las Indias*, Pallas concluded this very practical section with an *exemplum* of a petition for the Indies.⁴³ In a dozen lines, he condensed all of the aspects of such an application he saw as fundamental. Pallas used Latin for this, but the majority of petitions from the Spanish and Italian assistancy were written in Spanish and Italian.⁴⁴ Did Pallas employ Latin even though he was writing a Spanish-language book because he wanted to appear more educated and formal? Or were his ambitions more universal than a Spanish-speaking readership?

Pallas’s *exemplum* starts with a sentence about the durability of the vocation—as he had previously noted, the general needed to know that the applicant was not possessed by a juvenile whim. After explaining that his vocation had been properly discerned and tested, his prototype guaranteed his full availability,

41 “con poco gusto . . . tristeza y melancolía.” Pallas, 240. The topic of disappointment in the American missionary life was extensively examined in Maldavsky, *Vocaciones inciertas*.

42 “quand’io mai ho avuto questa volontà di cambiare la mia con nessun’altra Provincia? e solo mi sono mosso per andare alla detta Missione, bisognosissima di operarii.” ARSI, FG 750, f. 109, Loreto April 8, 1702.

43 Pallas, *Misión*, 240–41.

44 Ongoing research based on the *litterae indipetae* published on the Digital Indipetae Database (<https://indipetae.bc.edu>) shows that most of the Spanish and Italian Jesuits wrote in their vernacular languages. The situation was different in other assistancies—the majority of letters composed in the Austrian and French territories, for instance, were in Latin. In other cases, including the Polish area, the written language of choice was exclusively Latin.

ready to submit to God's will, to suffer in the name of Christ—even to die if necessary. The writer then testifies to how his vocation was approved by his local superiors; his petition was therefore not a personal, egoistic desire, but a sign of obedience to a religious calling. After having underlined his obedience and humility (the more the better for both), the candidate entrusted himself totally to the general's choice. As for the destination, Pallas listed almost all possible missionary scenarios: generic Indies (which included everything, both western and eastern, and sometimes also "our Indies," i.e., Europe), China, Peru, and Japan. In order to be more precise, he also identified the different people he was ready to evangelize: "infidels, schismatics, and heretics." The ideal candidate should state that his only aim is to "imitate Christ in enduring hardships, so that naked I may follow naked Jesus, and act as a true soldier of his cross." It was not his personal will urging him to plead for the missions, but his desire to do God's will. The letter's conclusion was another appeal to the superior general's paternal benignity.

Although he apparently never wrote any *indipetae*, Pallas's model is concise and concrete. It contains information that could help the general and his secretaries make a choice from among the thousands of petitioners knocking at the doors of Rome. At the same time, some fundamental data seems to be missing here—there is no mention of age, physical condition, time spent in the Society, or studies and tasks completed.⁴⁵

Moreover, this *exemplum* lacks any personalization. It does not mention any particular fact or situation that induced the writer to apply; for instance, how his desire for the Indies was born (readings, pictures, missionaries in the family, etc.); whether he had this desire before entering the order; whether there was a miraculous healing after an almost deadly disease; or whether the vocation was accompanied by supernatural signs. The letter also does not refer to any missionary model, though it was a very common practice to include a few names, first and foremost the Apostle of the Indies Francis Xavier.

Even if Pallas's letter is interesting, many questions still remain, the most important being whether the Roman Curia preferred such a prepackaged letter, instead of a more fervent and inflamed one. Assigning a Jesuit to the missions was a very complex process of negotiation among secular and spiritual powers. It was a kind of pyramid, with the petitioner at its base and the Roman superior general at its apex, which also implicated many other interests: the availability of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns to support missionary expeditions; possible

45 See, for instance, the circular letter address of General Tamburini to all provincial superiors, "*De mittendis ad Indias novis operariis*," preserved in ARSI, *Epp. NN.* 9, f. 3. The communication was to be publicly read in the Jesuit residences for the purpose of increasing and promoting vocations to the Indies. After this letter, there was an "explosion" of *indipetae* in the Italian assistancy: thirty-seven in 1721 was almost tripled a year later. Frei, *Early Modern Litterae Indipetae for the East Indies*, Appendix.

resistance by members of the petitioner's family (especially in the case of noble households); and various Jesuit offices (rectors and local superiors who were able to support or hinder a missionary departure, as well as procurators of the overseas missions who had the means to bring with them dozens of missionaries). Finally, and often ignored by petitioners, was that the situation of the missionary country was of the utmost importance; for instance, during the Japanese *sakoku* (closure to any contact with strangers) it was impossible to send men there, even with the best-written of letters.

2.4. How to Bid Farewell to Relatives and Other Practical Questions

If petitioners for the Indies had had the chance to read it, another section of *Misión a las Indias* would have been very relevant: obtaining permission to leave was, in fact, not enough, because before sailing for the Indies, Jesuits had to decide whether to say farewell to their families or not.

Pallas dedicated a whole chapter to this thorny issue, asking himself and his public “whether it is convenient to say goodbye to your relatives before your departure.”⁴⁶ He considered it “one of the most important things” to know for an aspiring missionary. Pallas was aware that most of his readers would have considered it pure cruelty not to say a last goodbye to their families, even if only out of the obligation that sons felt toward those who gave them life and an education. Some Jesuits, on the other hand, would have preferred not to see their parents because of a “holy hatred and annoyance” they felt toward them. Pallas and his readers knew the Christian message: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”⁴⁷

Leaving to become a missionary was a sort of death. It meant a definitive detachment from everything that was known and familiar; missionaries definitely never returned, and not all of their parents accepted this without protest.⁴⁸ They could try to dissuade their sons, crying and screaming, raising a flurry of emotions that would negatively influence the Jesuit, who had been happy before but was now upset after visiting them.

Among petitioners for the Indies, there are many examples of families who tried to stop their sons, both spiritual and natural. The Sicilian Ignazio Maria

46 “Si convien yrse a despedir de sus parientes antes de la partida.” Pallas, *Misión*, 242.

47 Luke 14:26. “Obligación . . . sancto odio y aborrecimiento . . . si quis non odit patrem suum et matrem . . . non potest meus esse discipulus,” Pallas, 242.

48 With a few exceptions; for instance, if a missionary was appointed as a procurator he had to return to Europe.

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