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“You only torment and upset yourself”: Replies to a Restless Writer at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century¹

ELISA FREI

Introduction

Ignatius of Loyola (c.1491–1556) founded the Society of Jesus in 1540 as an apostolic order, but from the very beginning its members were also committed to teaching and preaching. Many joined because they had the missions in mind, preferably overseas and in an exotic environment. Spending their lives as preachers or school teachers could cause a sense of frustration that is hard to identify from official sources because of the delicate and personal character of this emotion. Unedited documents preserved in the Roman Archives of the order allow us to more closely follow the careers of some Jesuits in order to understand what their daily struggles were.

Jesuits could show restlessness, discomfort, and agitation in four main ways: first, being unable to tolerate staying in their residences, because they were convinced their superiors and/or relatives were plotting against them.² Second, once accepted as missionaries, they would refuse to leave for a destination that differed from the one they had chosen. Third, they would not accept the general’s refusal to send them to the overseas missions, repeatedly urging that they at least be moved to a different religious house. Finally, many of them would stay in the Society but not behave properly, expressing their constant torment and paranoia to the general and consequently forcing him to console and reassure them time after time.

¹ “Deponga ella ogni sollecitudine, ché non serve che a travagliarla e inquietarla,” letter from the superior general Michelangelo Tamburini to Giovanni Filippo Ricci, Syracuse, December 21, 1711 (Rome, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [henceforth ARSI], *Sicula* [henceforth *Sic.*] 44, fol. 169).

² These definitions are intended here as categories belonging to the history of emotions and psychology, and not only related to Ignatian spirituality. Every Jesuit had, in the latter sense, to be “indifferent” to what happened to him, but this did not exclude a constant “restlessness” in his soul. *Litterae indipetae* are the perfect example of how Jesuits oscillated between desire (for the missions) and indifference (for every choice the superiors would have made concerning their destiny). On the topic of indifference and *indipetae*, see Anna Rita Capoccia, “Per una lettura delle ‘indipetae’ italiane del Settecento: Indifferenza e desiderio di martirio,” in *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* 1 (2000): 7–43, and Giovanni Pizzorusso, “Le choix indifférent: Mentalités et attentes des jésuites aspirants missionnaires dans l’Amérique française au XVIIe siècle,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 109, no. 2 (1997): 881–94.

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Giovanni Filippo Ricci (1666–post 1733) followed all four of these paths, as this essay shows on the basis of his *litterae indipetae* (Petitions for the Indies) and the generals' replies to them. These two sources can be fruitfully explored in combination to integrate life stories that sometimes seem clear and linear but are not. Petitions for the Indies—and the answers to them—are often the only traces of most of the men living within the Ignatian order: “unknown” Jesuits.³ They shed some light not only on these early modern lives but also on Jesuit autonomy, networking skills, relationships with spiritual and natural families, self-control, graphomania, and vocation—in general, and for the Indies.⁴

Litterae indipetae

Religious orders could give to their members what Ulrike Strasser defines as “an attentive and sustained response to the deepest concerns of the[ir] soul that was difficult to come by in other social and institutional arenas.”⁵ During the constant wars, famines, and crises of the early modern period, becoming a Jesuit was a way to live in a tight system of relationships while tending to a higher and common good. *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (For the greater glory of God) was the motto of the

³ “Unknown” in two ways: first, the superior general did not know most of the petitioners for the Indies nor had he had a personal relationship with them before their *indipetae*. Second, there are no documentary trails about the majority of these Jesuits apart from what they wrote about themselves in their *indipetae*, what the generals answered, and the data on them in the *catalogi* of the order. These triennial personnel lists provided general information on all the members of the Society of Jesus and are therefore another useful source for some basic data about petitioners for the Indies. On the catalogs, 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: 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,” *Bollettino dell’Istituto Storico Ceco di Roma* 9 (2014): 111–45.

⁴ On the missionary vocation of the Society of Jesus, see Adriano Prosperi, *La vocazione: Storie di gesuiti tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016). Concerning the so-called (East and West) “Indies,” see Camilla Russell, “Becoming ‘Indians’: The Jesuit Missionary Path from Italy to Asia,” *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 9–50; Amélie Vantard, “Les vocations missionnaires chez les jésuites français aux XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles,” *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* 116, no. 3 (2009): 9–22; Charlotte de Castelneau L’Estoile, “Élection et vocation: Le choix de la mission dans la province jésuite du Portugal à la fin du XVIe 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.

⁵ 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 Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 45–70, here 48.

Society of Jesus, and all its members lived under the aegis of an affectionate father (the superior general in Rome), who took care of them. Jesuits shared with their brethren beliefs and goals.

The Society of Jesus had—and still has—a strong missionary vocation. While many Jesuits spent their lives working as teachers, administrators, domestic helpers in their native territories, most of them dreamed at least once of being sent to work in the most distant “Lord’s vineyards.” To do so, they applied directly to the general in Rome through the so-called *litterae indipetae*. Their authors were *Indias petentes*, that is, those asking to be sent to the Indian missions.

There are more than fifteen thousand *indipetae* preserved today in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus. This paper focuses on this extraordinary source while putting it into relation with the generals’ answers as summarized in the *Epistulae generalium* (Letters written by the generals).⁶ As well as writing to express their missionary desire, Jesuits also wrote to the general for many other reasons. These registers therefore contain congratulations, advice, consolations, and encouragements. From time to time, Jesuits found themselves addressing the general from a wide variety of roles: novices, aspiring missionaries, students, teachers, priests, preachers, domestic helpers. They turned to their ultimate superior for suggestions, to seek comfort in trials, or to receive a solution for issues they could not discuss with anyone else.

For Jesuits, difficulties raised by natural (parents, siblings, and relatives) and spiritual (superiors, teachers, and confrères) families were one of the most frequent reasons to personally contact the superior general. In the case of aspiring missionaries, both families could in fact seem to be preventing them from best serving the greater glory of God. One of the petitioners’ most common worries was that they were not understood or not appreciated by their natural or religious families.

In the first case, they thought their families were refusing to accept their vocation and were trying to stand in the way of their departure. The reasons were multiple, and understandable: once gone, these men would not have helped in the management of the family, would never return, or could die during the long and perilous journey. The generals were subjected to complex negotiations, within and outside their religious order, that determined whether their members would serve as missionaries. Given the elevated status of many Jesuits’ families, such decisions

⁶ The *Epistulae generalium* have not received the attention they deserve, especially in relation to the petitions for the Indies. See Edmond Lamalle, “L’archivio di un grande ordine religioso: L’Archivio generale della Compagnia di Gesù,” *Archiva ecclesiae* 34–35, no. 1 (1981–82): 89–120, here 114–15; chapter 6 on the Polish petitions of Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, *Indipetae Poloniae: Kołatanie do drzwi misji chińskiej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2015); and Elisa Frei, “The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo, S.J. (1676–1724?), Petitioner for the Indies: A Jesuit Seen through his *Litterae indipetae* and the *Epistulae generalium*,” *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 85, fasc. 170 (2016/II): 365–404.

about who would head the household and who was permitted to leave it carried consequences that went beyond it and likely affected the socio-political fabric in which the Jesuits were operating. Many petitioners never saw their dream realized because of unmarried sisters needing help, sick mothers protesting their departure, or angry fathers kindly but imperiously inviting the general to listen to them and not to their sons.⁷

As for opposition from the spiritual environment, many aspiring missionaries complained that they did not feel understood by their local superiors, often to the extent of seeming paranoid. Analyzing more deeply the documents related to the missionary appointments, however, it becomes clear that many *indipetae* never reached their destination because the superiors, who were to act as intermediaries, did not forward them to Rome. First of all, religious superiors could be emotionally attached to their spiritual sons, as an early modern Jesuit complained, being “suspicious, because, as I see and know, [my superiors] love me of a love that could prevent me from leaving.”⁸ He was right in his distrust: his superior annotated the epistle with words clearly aiming at discouraging his departure, claiming that his health was very bad. In cases like this, it is not clear who was speaking “the truth”: the petitioner describing himself as healthy and ready to leave, or his superior depicting him as ill for “egoistical” or practical reasons, because he did not want to lose a precious resource (in this case, a painter). For a spiritual father—and for a natural one as well—allowing one of “his” Jesuits to be sent far away meant that his province invested large funds and energy in someone’s education without having any positive income.

How could petitioners for the Indies cope with this kind of opposition? First of all, by bypassing the mediation of local superiors and writing directly to the general in secret, as some of them admitted to doing. They could explain that their province was already overfilled, and that they were so miserable that losing them would be a benefit for their community.⁹ They could also underline how only the

⁷ See Elisa Frei, “*In nomine patris*: The Struggle between an *Indipeta*, his Father, and the Superior Generals of the Society of Jesus (1701–1724 ca.),” *Chronica mundi* 13, no. 1 (2018): 107–23.

⁸ “Suspetto, perché, come veggo e conosco, mi amano di un certo amore che forse potrebbe ciò impedirmi,” letter by Nicolò Mastrilli destined for the general’s eyes only (ARSI, *Fondo gesuitico* [henceforth *FG*] 733, fol. 11/1, Naples, June 23, 1590). This epistle has also been quoted by Alessandro Guerra in an article that is a brilliant introduction to the first *litterae indipetae* of the Society of Jesus and the desire for martyrdom: “Per un’archeologia della strategia missionaria dei gesuiti: Le *indipetae* e il sacrificio nella ‘vigna del Signore,’” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 13 (2000): 109–91, here 152.

⁹ These were the strategies used, for instance, by Sardinian (who belonged to the Spanish assistancy) and Portuguese Jesuits and described respectively in Raimondo Turtas, “Gesuiti sardi in terra di missione tra Sei e Settecento,” *Bollettino di studi sardi* 2 (2009): 49–82, and Castelnuovo-L’Etoile, “Élection et vocation,” 21–43.

general was responsible for their destiny, and all the other (lay or religious) people were not acting “in the place of God” like him.¹⁰

Some Jesuits complained rather openly against what they saw as the obtuseness of local superiors. For instance, a Jesuit wrote:

There is such an excellent youth here in Sicily, as for number and skills, but the solicitous fathers of this province either do not know or do not think about the enormous necessity of those [missionary] countries, and that a young man, called there by God and instead held here for their reasons, would lose or uselessly employ his life here.¹¹

Even if their petition was accepted, Jesuits did not calm down until they were on the ship, being afraid that their superiors would try to stop them right up until the last minute. Thus, they wrote to the general, again inviting him “to solicitously inculcate in this provincial father the immediate execution of Your order,”¹² or “not to listen to the objections that are constantly made against us here, in Sicily,”¹³ or, even more directly, “not to tell anyone about my license and the date, not until two days before I will be able to leave this kingdom.”¹⁴

Giovanni Filippo Ricci as a Petitioner for the Indies

Indifference was a fundamental virtue for every Jesuit and a cornerstone of Ignatian spirituality. As for the missionary appointment, Jesuits had to adjust their hopes to what their superiors believed were the order’s most pressing needs. The best destination was, for everyone, the one chosen by God. Probably for these reasons, most petitioners did not express a preference for any destination.

This is not what Giovanni Filippo Ricci did. Born in 1666 in Malta—at the time belonging to the Italian assistancy and to the Sicilian province—he had nothing to do with the illustrious Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and spent his life

¹⁰ “In luogo di Dio” as, among many others, Giovanni Battista Vignoli specified in one of his *indipetae* (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 305, Rome, November 17, 1714).

¹¹ “In Sicilia v’è ottima Gioventù, ed in numero ed in abilità che i Padri solleciti di questa Provincia o non sanno o non pensano l’enorme necessità di quelle Parti, e che un Giovane chiamato là da Dio e qui trattenuto per tali motivi o perderebbe o impiegherebbe qui inutilmente la vita,” complained Ignazio Maria de Franciscis (ARSI, *FG* 751, fol. 394, Palermo, July 23, 1729).

¹² “Inculcare premurosamente a questo Padre Provinciale la subita esecuzione del suo ordine” (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 328, Messina, April 11, 1716).

¹³ “Non prestare orecchio all’opposizioni che continuamente ci fanno qui in Sicilia” (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 353, Palermo, July 4, 1716).

¹⁴ “Non comunicare con niuno la licenza e quando Vostra Paternità mi vorrà consolato, se non due giorni prima che debba partire da questo Regno,” as Giovanni Battista Marino wrote (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 358, Palermo, July 20, 1716).

mostly in the Sicilian and Maltese islands. His most-documented activity was bombarding three generals of the Society of Jesus with complaints: the Spanish Tirso González de Santalla (1624–1705, in office 1687–1705), the Italian Michelangelo Tamburini (1648–1730, in office 1706–30), and the Bohemian Franz Retz (1673–1750, in office 1730–50).

Only eight *indipetae* by Ricci survive, written between the years 1690 and 1705. This is not an impressive number, but he certainly sent many more letters to Rome, as is clear from the dozens of replies written to him by the generals over a period of more than forty years. These replies are preserved in the above-mentioned *Epistulae generalium*. While it is not possible to know what Ricci wrote directly, the replies clarify how he mainly wrote to the generals to complain about *everything*.

Giovanni Filippo Ricci started applying for the Indies when he was twenty-four years old. He was interested in the East, particularly China and Japan. Francis Xavier (1506–52) had healed him from a mortal illness, and from then on he wanted to follow in the footsteps of the “Apostle of the Indies.”¹⁵ Four years later, however, his favored destination drastically changed: Ricci asked to be sent to the West Indies with the procurators of Mexico in order to move to California.¹⁶

Less than two months after his petition, the general granted Ricci what he wished for. Ricci was happy with the news, even if he already showed some signs of interior agitation in his thanksgiving letter.¹⁷ The Jesuit was worried: his provincial seemed unsure about his destination, which he believed was Mexico. Ricci’s superiors did not agree and were planning to send him to California instead. Facing these uncertainties, Ricci wrote directly and angrily to the general: “When have I ever had this desire, to change my province with any other? I did it only to move to *that* mission [California].”¹⁸ He would not have done anything without a written proof signed by the general, assuring him that he would leave for California as soon as he arrived in Mexico.

Then, suddenly, Ricci fell ill, and his departure was canceled. He was moved for some time to Loreto, in central Italy, and then went back to Sicily. After a few years of documentary silence, Ricci reappears, asking to have his license for the Indies back. The general seemed skeptical about this issue and told him clearly:

¹⁵ ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 301, Trapani, January 6, 1690.

¹⁶ ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 106, Loreto, February 18, 1702.

¹⁷ ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 109, Loreto, April 8, 1702.

¹⁸ “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, fol. 109, Loreto, April 8, 1702.

You shall not desire new changes, and I shall not grant them to you, if I really want your Good [...] lay down all your bitternesses, all your shadows and devote yourself to work peacefully and fervently at the same time [...] this is the only way for you to be admired and respected by all of us [...] everyone will be happy [...] that you stayed here, using your apostolic spirit in Sicily, and never went to California.¹⁹

Ricci did not accept this verdict, and a few weeks later he contacted the general again. Even if he was completely cured of any disease and ready to go more than ever, Ricci felt inexorably unwell at the thought of being forced to spend his life where he was. He begged to leave Sicily as soon as possible, this time declaring himself indifferent to any “mission of the East, and West.”²⁰ The general, however, did not change his mind in the following months.²¹

In this intense correspondence, one can appreciate the Roman diplomatic strategy: it oscillated between a sporadic directness and harshness, and a frequent good-naturedness and empathy. The generals and their secretaries knew how to reassure and comfort every single Jesuit, showing understanding and not displeasing him to the point that he would want to leave or damage the order. After the first license—the one Ricci refused—the generals never promised anything similar again. This notwithstanding, Ricci went on with his pleas because, all things considered, thanks to the Roman strategy nobody felt entirely hopeless or embittered.

In 1705, Ricci “confessed the truth,” probably in an attempt at acknowledging his past mistakes and receiving what he wanted. He admitted why he had refused to leave for the Americas: “I got sick, yes, but not with a serious illness [...] to confess the truth to Your Paternity, I was shocked for some things I had been told about the Indies.”²² After that moment of panic and the convalescence in northern Italy, Ricci finally came to appreciate the chance he had lost and believed he would never be happy again.

¹⁹ “Né da lei si debbono desiderar nuove mutationi, né da me desideroso del suo bene si possono concedere [...] tutte le amarezze, e [...] le ombre [...] operare con pace insieme, e con fervore [...] tutti la rimireranno con la dovuta stima, ed affetto, tutti si rallegreranno di haverla recuperata, tutti giubileranno, che faccia sperimentare alla Sicilia gli effetti del suo Apostolico spirito, che non andò a diffondere nella California” (ARSI, *Sic.* 39, fol. 63^v, Caltanissetta, January 22, 1703).

²⁰ “Non posso riposare, né trovo quiete dai stimoli, che ho continui di quella Vocazione [...] Missione del Oriente, ed Occidente” (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 128, Caltanissetta, March 5, 1703).

²¹ “Talenti a favore di cotesta Provincia” (ARSI, *Sic.* 39, fol. 122^r, Alcamo, November 5, 1703); “Maggior quiete d’animo e sodisfazione [...] mutazione ch’ella desidera di luogo, e d’officio [...] contentarsi de’ ministerii, ne’ quali vien costi occupata” (ARSI, *Sic.* 40, fol. 144, Palermo, November 3, 1704).

²² “Ammalatomi peristrada con una non grave infermità, mi sbigottii [...] per confessar il vero a Vostra Paternità [...] per altre cose dettemi del’Indie [...] dal’allora [...] il mio cuore ha perduto la sua quiete, sempre aspiro, sempre desidero l’Indie, con impeti ed ansie continue” (ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 228, Sicily, December 26, 1705).

Ricci after the *Indias petens*-Phase

The letter containing Ricci's "confession" is also his last petition for the Indies. To follow his story, the generals' letter-books are therefore of utmost importance.²³ From 1705 on, more than once every year, every year for about thirty years, and probably until the end of his life, Ricci constantly sent complaint letters directly to three generals about a range of topics. What kept him a "restless" soul were mainly three issues: his unsatisfied desire to leave for the Indies, or at least to change college and city; more or less imaginary quarrels with local superiors, who did not understand him; and the fear that his superiors or confrères were gossiping about him in pamphlets secretly sent to Rome. Three generals therefore had to comfort him on these points, respectively trying not to discourage him too much while not giving him what he wanted, to convince him not to worry about other people's hypothetical comments and not to feed his paranoia, and to assure him that the Roman entourage would never believe anything bad about him without sufficient proofs.

In 1705, Ricci sent the last of his *indipetae*. After three years, he contacted the general again, asking for permission to change province. He was told to keep in mind that this would happen and "for the destination you wish, but only if it is possible, and this depends on external circumstances."²⁴ Ricci was also invited to live "quietly" in the meantime, putting aside every "apprehension." Sooner or later, Ricci would have what he wanted—which, as the general described it in another reply, was "to get out of that place."²⁵

One year later, the general again exhorted him to "calm down." He also hoped that Ricci had done everything "in such a way that nobody can complain about you in any way."²⁶

In 1710, Ricci was no longer in Sicily but very close to it, in his native Malta. He was afraid that some "lost soul" was speaking ill of him, and thus the general assured him one more time that he would always have "a very special thought" for him, being "particularly happy in doing justice to you."²⁷

The following year, the general shared in three letters to Ricci a "great sorrow" for what had happened but always invited him to "be patient" and wait for

²³ In the *Catalogi triennales*, the judgments on Ricci were not particularly enthusiastic either.

²⁴ "Se è possibile dove desidera, benché ciò dipenda assai dalle esterne" (ARSI, *Sic.* 42, fol. 17, Mazzarino, January 1708).

²⁵ "Quieto [...] apprensione [...] uscire da costà" (ARSI, *Sic.* 42, fol. 276, Mazzara, September 24, 1708).

²⁶ "Quietarsi [...] in modo, come spero, che nessuno abbia di che dolersi di lei" (ARSI, *Sic.* 43, fol. 109, Syracuse, April 9, 1709).

²⁷ "Un pensiero assai speciale [...] goderò in maniera particolare poterle fare tutta quella giustizia che le compete" (ARSI, *Sic.* 44, fol. 34, Malta?, February 17, 1710).

better moments,²⁸ forgetting “every worrying thought” and behaving with “all due moderation,”²⁹ because “every concern of yours only keeps you troubled and restless,” preventing him from living “with quiet and religious peace.”³⁰

In 1712, the general seemed brusquer about Ricci’s desire. He wrote him quite clearly that, at the moment, it was impossible for him to “precisely decide what to do [...] about the fulfillment of your longings.”³¹

One year later, the general forbade Ricci to reach Loreto in pilgrimage, for he already knew he could not have stayed there. At that time, Ricci was living in Sicily again, in the town of Noto. He bitterly complained about that location and begged to go back to Syracuse. The latter was the city where he had lived until recently and from where he had wanted to escape with the same urgency. The general denied that Ricci’s new place was a punishment and that his superiors resented him, saying simply that “sometimes superiors cannot do anything they would want to do.”³² In the same year, the general had to write to Ricci about the missions again, because Ricci had restarted petitioning for the Indies even though he was already fifty. The general did not conceal his puzzlement about a missionary outcome for Ricci: “Your age does not allow such resolutions anymore [...]; if you leave, all the work you have done here would be lost, like everything you are doing for God’s glory in our lands [...] going *there* would be totally useless.”³³

One year later, Ricci had apparently surrendered, because the general praised him for the “religious indifference” he finally manifested in his last letter. However, the general also had to repeat that it was impossible for him to realize Ricci’s “desires about the Indian missions [...]; even if you think you feel good, your age cannot guarantee anything.”³⁴ The following year, the general could not give Ricci any new hopes, and clearly invited him to “stop thinking about the Indies.”³⁵

²⁸ “Gran dispiacere [...] pazienza” (ARSI, *Sic.* 44, fol. 4, Syracuse, January 12, 1711).

²⁹ “Ogni sollecitudine [...] con la dovuta moderazione” (ARSI, *Sic.* 44, fol. 95, Syracuse, May 25, 1711).

³⁰ “Ogni sollecitudine che non serve che a travagliarla e inquietarla [...] con quiete, e pace religiosa” (ARSI, *Sic.* 44, fol. 169, Syracuse, December 21, 1711).

³¹ “Fare determinazione precise [...] di propensione all’adempimento delle sue brame” (ARSI, *Sic.* 45, fol. 6, Syracuse, February 1, 1712).

³² “I superiori alle volte non possono tutto quel che vorrebbero” (ARSI, *Sic.* 45, fol. 152, Noto?, March 13, 1713).

³³ “Senza dubio sodisfarei se non la vedessi in un’età che non ammette simili risoluzioni, ben prevedendo che sarebbe colà inutile la sua andata, e intanto si perderebbe il molto bene che fa in queste nostre parti in servizio, e gloria di Dio” (ARSI, *Sic.* 45, fol. 263, Noto?, November 6, 1713).

³⁴ “Religiosa indifferenza [...] desiderii intorno alle Missioni delle Indie [...] la sua età benché le paia di stare bene [...] non è tale da potersi promettere tanto” (ARSI, *Sic.* 46, fol. 7, Noto, January 8, 1714).

³⁵ “Pensare più all’Indie [...] età già inoltrata” (ARSI, *Sic.* 46, fol. 155, Noto?, April 22, 1715).

Ricci as a “Resigned” Local Preacher?

After a short documentary silence of two years, Ricci reappears in 1717 in Malta as a preacher.³⁶ He declared himself totally pleased with his preaching activities, and the general probably breathed a sigh of relief.³⁷ After a couple of months, however, the Maltese Jesuit contacted him again, complaining about some local confrères who were speaking ill of him.³⁸ The general assured him that “no lament about you has ever arrived in Rome, on the contrary, I received here many good statements about your wise behavior and your passionate zeal.” Even if what Ricci suspected had been true, the provincial would have been able to “immediately quieten any gossip against your name.”³⁹

After a few months, the general seemed more skeptical about Ricci’s conduct. He was exhorted to “behave in such way that you will never meet any chance of apprehension,” without becoming “easily upset by unforeseen difficulties.”⁴⁰ The general also had to explicitly order Ricci not to move without his superiors’ authorization.⁴¹

Three years later, Ricci was still in Malta and still complaining about his location.⁴² The general nonetheless refused any transfer, exhorting him to be “dependent and submissive, as any subordinate must be to his superior.” The following year, the general tried to quieten Ricci’s “indisposition” and “anxiety,”⁴³ promising to do anything he could to put the necessary remedy to a difficult situation but inviting him to piously go on with his works.

After three years, Ricci was still residing in Malta. He still wanted to go to Loreto, but the general forbade it once again because there was no “vacant position” there. Ricci had to stay where he was: he had “to optimally serve the Lord and the Society of Jesus with your talents in your native land.” Traveling at his age, moreover, was too dangerous.⁴⁴

³⁶ ARSI, *Sic.* 101, fol. 33 for the *Catalogus primus* and *Sic.* 102, fol. 29 for the *Secundus*.

³⁷ ARSI, *Sic.* 47, fol. 244 (Malta, June 7, 1717).

³⁸ ARSI, *Sic.* 48, fol. 26 (Malta, March 7, 1718).

³⁹ “Prontamente [...] ogni diceria contraria al di Lei buon nome [...] finora [...] veruna doglianza da Persone esterne contro di Vostra Reverenza, ma più tosto mi sono venuti attestati assai onorevoli alla savia condotta del fervente suo zelo” (ARSI, *Sic.* 48, fol. 34, Malta, March 21, 1718).

⁴⁰ “Continuare a portarsi in modo, che non habbia a incontrare occasioni di moleste inquietudini [...] facilmente inquietare da contrattempi” (ARSI, *Sic.* 48, fol. 90, Malta, July 25, 1718).

⁴¹ ARSI, *Sic.* 48, fol. 119 (Malta, December 23, 1719).

⁴² “Dipendenza, e sommissione che devesi da sudditi al Superiore” (ARSI, *Sic.* 50, fol. 116, Malta, September 7, 1722).

⁴³ “Indisposizione [...] angustie” (ARSI, *Sic.* 50, fol. 240, Malta, August 23, 1723).

⁴⁴ “Luogo alcuno vacante [...] talenti da servire ottimamente il Signore, e la Compagnia in cotesta sua Patria [...] allontanarsi nella vecchiaia [...] d’incomodo” (ARSI, *Sic.* 52, fol. 121, Malta?, July 1726).

In 1727, Ricci celebrated his sixtieth birthday. The general praised him for “the authentic marks of religiousness” he showed, being “finally resigned to the arrangements of the holy obedience.”⁴⁵ The general wrote this because he thought that Ricci had executed his order to move from Malta to Noto. Ricci, however, was still in Malta, from where he sent to the general a letter “to keep as a self-justification,” in case the local superior—with whom he had a bad relationship—would have sent to Rome something against him. Ricci also begged the general to do him all the justice he deserved.

Ricci’s next letter filled the general with “great anguish”: he immediately replied to it, remembering all the “religiosity” showed by Ricci until that day, during his life in the Society, and also the affection he felt for him because of that. He prayed God to give Ricci “the necessary enlightenment not to let you be mistaken in this big step you are planning to take.”⁴⁶ The nature of this “big step” is not mentioned, but these words are very similar to those used when (usually younger and less experienced) Jesuits wanted to leave the Society to pass to another religious order.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, a year later Ricci was still a Jesuit, still in Malta, and still complaining that accusations against him were supposedly being sent to Rome, in particular by the rector of his college.⁴⁸ The general had to reassure him again that he did not have to worry about them, but to keep in mind the importance of “behaving as a subject toward his direct superiors,” without creating any “reasonable chance for any complaints by anyone.”⁴⁹ The general wrote him again in the same year, inviting him to keep calm and not to go to Loreto as he wanted to do, especially without his superiors’ consent.⁵⁰

The following year, the general expressed solidarity with Ricci’s “bitternesses” about a “very delicate matter.” Ricci was once again sure that someone was sending to Rome letters containing criticism of his behavior, but the general denied this. In any case, he would have judged everything with objectivity

⁴⁵ “Autentico contrassegno della sua Religiosità [...] rassegnato alle disposizioni della Santa Obbedienza [...] a giustificazione sua propria [...] la giustizia che se gli deve” (ARSI, *Sic.* 52, fol. 439, Noto, November 3, 1727).

⁴⁶ “Rammarico [...] religiosità [...] il lume necessario per non errare nel gran passo che meditate di fare” (ARSI, *Sic.* 53, fol. 223, Messina, October 25, 1728).

⁴⁷ This happened, for instance, in the case of another Sicilian Jesuit, Ignazio Maria Romeo, to whom the general wrote: “The anguish of seeing you engaged in a decision that would bring little honor to yourself, or the Society [...] do not put yourself at risk of losing in one moment all the capital of esteem and credit that, in the course of many years of religious life among us, you have acquired in the presence of men, and perhaps also the great accumulation of merits earned from God up to this point” (ARSI, *Sic.* 50, fol. 192, Palermo, March 8, 1723).

⁴⁸ ARSI, *Sic.* 53, fol. 197 (Malta, October 10, 1729).

⁴⁹ “Buon suddito verso gli immediati [...] superior [...] ragionevol motivo alle altrui querele” (ARSI, *Sic.* 54, fol. 105, Malta, May 22, 1730).

⁵⁰ ARSI, *Sic.* 54, fol. 147 (Malta, July 3, 1730).

and not be “hasty in lending them my ear.”⁵¹ The general also invited Ricci not to worry about the “rumors” against him for the following two years and to remember how “those, who try to please mankind, are not Christ’s slaves.”⁵²

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Ricci’s story ends here, as “incomplete” as many other Jesuits’ lives. The most probable explanation for the general not sending any more letters to Ricci is not that the latter stopped complaining, but that he passed away. However, his name does not appear on the lists of the dead Jesuits, which would ordinarily suggest that he died outside the Society of Jesus.⁵³

Ricci’s case-study is interesting and well documented, but it is not unique. Browsing through the *Epistulae generalium*, it becomes clear that many Jesuits wrote to the general in a first phase of their life as petitioners for the Indies and later maintained a fairly regular correspondence with him for many years. This epistolary exchange was, obviously, particularly frequent if Jesuits performed administrative duties and therefore had to discuss many practical issues with Rome. The refusal of a missionary application seems another relevant trigger for a long-lasting correspondence with Rome, based on the discomfort showed by many Jesuits, that continued for years (sometimes until their deaths) to keep a one-to-one relation with the general *soli*—the only person that they believed would truly understand them.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Rammarichi [...] molto ragionevoli, essendo così gelosa la materia in cui l’aggravano [...] precipitoso nel dare ad esse orecchio” (ARSI, *Sic.* 54, fol. 339, Malta, June 24, 1731).

⁵² “Dicerie [...] non è servo di Cristo chi cerca di piacere agli uomini” (ARSI, *Sic.* 55, fol. 84, Malta, November 10, 1732).

⁵³ Joseph Fejér, *Defuncti secundi saeculi Societatis Jesu, 1641–1740* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1985–90). These lists may not be totally precise, and research on Ricci’s life is still ongoing.

⁵⁴ Jesuits always had the chance to write to the general *soli*, with letters destined for his eyes only, but this was only very rarely the case with *indipetae*. As for other frustrated aspiring missionaries, who insisted on “restlessness” in their letters, see, for instance, my essays “Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo”; “‘Signed in Blood’: Negotiating with the Superior General about the Overseas Mission (18th Century),” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 1–34; “‘To go to China or Japan [...] not to stay in these colleges’: Jesuit Procurators of China and Petitioners for the Indies (1640s and 1690s),” *Oriente’s aura: Macau Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3 (2018): 81–102; “‘The ardent desire to spread all my sweat and blood’: Italian *Litterae indipetae* between 1690 and 1730,” in *Narratives of Suffering, Persecution, and Disappointment in the Early Modern Period: Giving Birth to New Martyrs*, ed. Leonardo Cohen (Lisbon: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Centro de Estudos de História religiosa, 2020), 121–28. See also Michela Catto, *La Compagnia divisa: Il dissenso nell’ordine gesuitico tra ’500 e ’600* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009); Jean-Pascal Gay, *Jesuit Civil Wars: Theology, Politics, and Government under Tirso González (1687–1705)* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); and Silvia Mostaccio, *Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during the Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615)* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

This paper aimed to demonstrate, first of all, the importance of the generals' answers in reconstructing the lives of single Jesuits. *Litterae indipetae* are an extraordinarily rich source because they can inform a history of the missions that takes into consideration as many elements as possible, starting from the motivations expressed by the petitioners. More widely, they also give voice to "common" people, whose traces would have been lost if they had not written them. Given the intimate content of many petitions—and, consequently, that of the generals' replies—this source makes it possible to write a history of emotions "from below." Petitioners for the Indies were part of the same "emotional community": they shared a common vocabulary, theoretical and practical knowledge, were familiar with the same books, and had a uniform religious and, in some regards, scholastic background.⁵⁵

The importance of the generals' answers does not refer only to the present but also to the past. The generals and their secretaries spent an incredible amount of time answering thousands of "insignificant" and "unknown" Jesuits.⁵⁶ Moreover, while it is true that in many cases it was just a matter of answering with a generic thanks to a one-off petition, in many others the answers implied a real *ad hoc* psychological consultation, which had to take into consideration the personality, talents, manias, and fears of every single Jesuit. This raises further questions: the first folio of letter-books reports the name of the person who materially summarized the various letters sent from Rome. But who was the person who *elaborated* these answers? Did he consult with the generals only about the most delicate questions and persons? Was there a secretary who dealt specifically with replies to the *indipetae*, or did it depend on the geographical area involved? From the answers to Ricci, it becomes clear that, even over forty years and with the succession of three generalates, *all* of the writers were more or less updated on his specific case. Even if Ricci had been a regular correspondent for Rome, he was essentially a person without any particular skill, role, or importance, nor, it seems,

⁵⁵ This definition was used by Barbara Rosenwein to describe "systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore." See Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 821–45, here 842. See also Susan Broomhall, *Ordering Emotions in Europe: 1100–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Jan Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 237–65; and, more recently, Yasmin Haskell and Raphaële Garrod, eds., *Changing Hearts: Performing Jesuit Emotions between Europe, Asia, and the Americas* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

⁵⁶ This research shows that the generals at the turn of the eighteenth century answered with the same constancy and readiness to almost *every* petitioner of the Sicilian province. There is no reason why this should have happened just in the case of Sicilian Jesuits, as preliminary research on Austrian *indipetae* seems to confirm. See Elisa Frei, "Ego tui oblitus non sum: Muzio Vitelleschi's Replies to *Litterae indipetae*," *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* (forthcoming, summer 2021).

illustrious relatives. If such great attention was devoted to him, this means that there was indeed a meticulous effort to take care of the relationship not only between the general and the local superiors (rectors, provincials, procurators, and others) but also between the general and every single Jesuit. Was it *because* or *despite* the fact that Ricci was an obsessive troublemaker?

Finally, this paper demonstrates the importance of apparently secondary and less-used sources in order to provide a more exhaustive picture of the Society of Jesus and its members. The image of the Society as a monolithic order, in which the individual Jesuits blindly obeyed the general, is no longer the prevailing one. It is not so simple, however, to find tangible traces of negotiations and “restlessness” from below. A sort of personal discontent was expressed directly to the general, and this is also significant: many Jesuits used to consult not with their direct superiors but with their highest authority to deal with relatively “minor” issues. These individuals showed not only that they had a spirit of initiative but also a certain pride, in considering their complaints worthy of the general’s attention. And, with some exceptions, they acted this way not because of a natural boldness or arrogance, but because the Society of Jesus made them feel that way: important and worthy of attention.