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“For the salvation of Russia”: Some Remarks on *Russipetae* in the Twentieth Century

SABINA PAVONE

Working on the “New” Society of Jesus’s *Indipetae* involves dealing with a succession of problems and enigmas caused in large part by an archival arrangement that did not envisage a separate section for this sort of document—unlike that of the “Old” Society. Researching this form of correspondence, then, presents the historian with an archival challenge that involves negotiating a considerable range of documents while, to some extent, entrusting the success of the enterprise to chance discoveries.¹ The sources I will be looking at in this paper are not numerous but constitute an interesting area of study because the dossier is made up of diverse material that obliges the researcher to ask themselves a series of questions about the process of missionary recruitment and identify continuities and discontinuities between the Old and the New Society.

The dossier I will be discussing consists of a small group of documents preserved in the Roman Archive of the Society of Jesus, filed under the heading *Russipetae*—evidently derived from the better known term *Indipetae*, used to denote the letters from Jesuits asking to be sent on Eastern missions.² The term is not, therefore, a neologism I have made up myself but one present in the sources themselves, or at least one employed by those who first organized the material and

¹ There is a considerable bibliography on *Indipetae* letters. See Adriano Prosperi, “‘Otras Indias’: Missionari della Controriforma tra contadini e selvaggi,” in *Scienze credenze occulte livelli di cultura: Convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 26–30 giugno 1980)* (Florence: Olschki, 1982), 206–34; 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*, ed. Massimo Donattini, Giuseppe Marcocci, and Stefania Pastore (Pisa: Edizioni della Scuola Normale, 2011), 179–89; Aliocha Maldavsky, “Las cartas indipetae de los jesuitas europeos, siglos XVI–XVIII, ensayo historiográfico,” *Relaciones estudios de historia y sociedad* 132 (2012): 147–81; Emanuele Colombo and Guido Mongini, eds., “L’‘ardentissima brama’ delle missioni: Nuove fonti per la storia della Compagnia di Gesù tra otto e novecento; Percorsi di ricerca nelle lettere *indipetae*,” *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa* 88 (2016); Emanuele Colombo, Pierluigi Giovannucci, and Guido Mongini, eds., “Vocazioni gesuitiche nella prima età moderna,” *Rivista storica italiana* 3, no. 20 (2020); Emanuele Colombo, “From Paper to Screen: The Digital *Indipetae* Database, a New Resource for Jesuit Studies,” *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 89, no. 117 (2020): 213–30; Paolo Bianchini and Marco Rochini, eds., *La vocazione alla missione nella Compagnia di Gesù: Il punto di vista degli indipeti* (Brescia: Morcelliana, forthcoming); Pierre-Antoine Fabre, Girolamo Imbruglia, and Guido Mongini, eds., *Litterae Indipetae: Una fonte lunga cinque secoli* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, forthcoming).

² See also Costantin Simon, “I gesuiti e la Russia,” *La civiltà cattolica* 140, no. 3343 (October 7, 1989): 355–67.

filed it under that category. Constantin Simon explains that the term was used within the Collegium Russicum for those who studied theology there and adopted the Byzantine rite in view of an eventual mission in Eastern Europe.³ These different nuances are reflected in the letters from the *Russipetae* examined in this paper.

A first group of these documents is made up not so much of requests but of pointers emanating from the provincial and central hierarchy to individuals who seemed most likely to be disposed to take up the challenge of evangelizing in Russia, a mission that had been envisaged as a clandestine one even before the 1917 Revolution.

A second, not very large, group of letters refers to the years from 1917 through the 1930s. Meagre though it is, when cross-referenced with the first group and with other sources from the same holding, it provides us with an insight into the motives guiding the fathers of the Society in the 1920s and '30s in their decisions to dispatch members to far-off and potentially dangerous lands.

A third and much more substantial group is that of the *Russipetae* from the 1940s onward, organized by provenience. This will surely prove the most interesting dossier, but the letters have not yet been made available to scholars.⁴ For the time being, therefore, we must limit our inquiry to the first two groups.

As far as the first group is concerned, we should perhaps think of it as serving as a sort of laboratory facility around the *Indipetae* letters. In this sense, the slender collection can still prove most useful, not only in giving us an insight into how the central administration operated when choosing missionaries to send abroad but also in tracking down from the clues here provided some of the actual corresponding *Russipetae* letters. This first dossier emanates from the Italian assisntancy and does not consist of letters but of heterogeneous documents, including two lists of Jesuits, the first composed for the most part of fathers from the Veneto province, the second containing only four names, two from the Roman province and two from the Neapolitan, but particularly significant ones in relation to our second group of documents. Together with the first list is another, unsigned, sheet containing a series of assessments jotted alongside the names, aimed at identifying the best men to be sent out. Two of them are chosen: Giovan Battista della Pietra, who “could also serve as a superior,” and Domenico Piemonte, apparently a much-loved missionary. To these, a third might be added “so that the community, in its potentially isolated state in those wretched climes, be better provided for, both

³ Simon, “I gesuiti e la Russia.”

⁴ Following the opening of the Vatican secret archives for Pius XII’s pontificate, the Roman Archive of the Society of Jesus has just begun to allow access to its documents for the postwar period (1939 to 1958).

spiritually and in terms of daily cheerfulness and assistance.”⁵ The following names were also added to the provincial’s list: Abele Lombardini,⁶ Lorenzo Viezzoli,⁷ from Fiume; and Vittorio Villenik,⁸ from Zara. Also worth keeping an eye on were the fathers Ragusin from Lussino⁹ and Rosan, again from Zara.¹⁰

The first list is undated and contains some curious anomalies insofar as the place of residence given beside some of the names belongs in most cases to a date *later* than the request to be sent to Russia, the requests being from 1922. To give just one example, Giovan Battista della Pietra is given as the apostolic delegate to Albania,¹¹ a position that he only occupied from 1927,¹² although he had been resident at Scutari, as rector of the college there, since 1913.¹³ An inspection of the registers also reveals that Domenico Piemonte¹⁴ and Giulio Roi¹⁵—who did in due course depart for Russia—lived respectively in Bergamo and Gorizia, but only since (again) 1927. It seems probable that the first list was drawn up only retrospectively, a summary perhaps of an earlier group of records, a sort of pre-printed form that also referred to suitable candidates for Russia. There are eleven of these forms, and the information provided on those Jesuits—fully professed and otherwise—includes the languages each knew and a brief resumé of their capabilities. In one case, there is a clear reference to an *Indipeta* letter in that the

⁵ ARSI, *Nuova Compagnia* [hereafter *NC*], *Assistentia Europae Orientalis* [hereafter *AEO*], 4, (*Negotia et documenta: P. Preseren. Miss. Petentes Russia*), *Ass. It.*

⁶ Abele Lombardini (1874–1931), *Voto di professione dei 4 voti, al vice preposito generale Stanislao Leonardi*, February 2, 1909, in ARSI, *NC, Ass. Italiae, Vota 10, Prov. Veneta*, 61.

⁷ Lorenzo Viezzoli (1887–1970) entered the Society of Jesus in 1901 (see *Catalogus provinciae venetae Societatis Iesu ineunte anno MCMII*, Scodrae, 1902, 38–77).

⁸ Vittorio Villenik [or Willenik] (1872–1925) entered the Society of Jesus in 1906 (*Catalogus provinciae venetae Societatis Iesu ineunte anno MCMVII*, Scodrae, 1907, 39, 80).

⁹ *Voto di professione dei 4 voti, al vice rettore e vice preposito Jacobo Ribera*, August 15, 1898, in ARSI, *NC, Ass. Italiae, Vota 10, Prov. Veneta*, 10.

¹⁰ *Voto di professione dei 4 voti, al rettore e vice preposito Giovanni Pietro Bettini*, February 2, 1903, in ARSI, *NC, Ass. Italiae, Vota 10, Prov. Veneta*, 32.

¹¹ Giovanni Battista della Pietra (1871–1940) entered the Society of Jesus in 1892 (see *Catalogus provinciae venetae Societatis Iesu ineunte anno MDCCCXCIII*, Scodrae, 1893, 10, 61) and was ordained in 1904.

¹² See “Archbishop Giovanni Battista della Pietra, S.J.,” n.d., <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bdpie.html> (accessed June 10, 2022).

¹³ See *Catalogus provinciae venetae Societatis Iesu ineunte anno MXMXIII*, 35.

¹⁴ Domenico Piemonte (1870–1954) entered the Society of Jesus on September 7, 1891; by 1905, he had still not taken his vows but was studying Croat. He finally took his vows on February 2, 1905 and the following year was already in the college at Split. In 1907, he disappears from the rosters of the Veneto province, to reappear in 1909 in Bergamo; from 1910 to 1914, he is in Piacenza and subsequently back in the Veneto.

¹⁵ Giulio Roi (1870–1934) professed the four vows in 1911 before the deputy superior general Stanislao Leonardi (see ARSI, *NC, Ass. Italiae*, February 2, 1911, *Vota 10, Prov. Veneta*, 32). Cf. also the triennial listings, according to which he was in Padua from 1906 to 1913, serving as assistant procurator from October 7, 1913, then, in 1914, advisor to the Veneto province (see the letters in ARSI, *NC, Prov. Veneta*, 1014, 7, 2, 14, 19, 22, 33; 9, 12, 18, 2128, 36, 47). His letters during his mission connected to the American Relief Administration are in ARSI, *NC, Russia 2001*, 5, 68, 78, 79.

pre-printed formula “missionem petit” (petitioned for a mission) is glossed with a date. I have not so far been able to trace the letter to which it refers, but in some of the other entries my attention was drawn to the same formula, emended by hand to “missioni offertur” (offered [himself] for a mission), in every case followed by the identical date of January 14, 1922. I will come back later on to that year 1922. Obviously it is beyond improbable that a bevy of Jesuits would have decided independently to send an *Indipeta* letter on the same day, but extending my research to the Veneto province’s holdings, I finally found a letter from the provincial Giovan Battista Battisti (1874–1948), dated January 14, 1922, in which, writing to the superior general, he proposes a series of candidates for the Russian mission, outlining their qualities and emphasizing, in most cases, their good command of foreign languages, Croat in particular. The names of the Jesuits given in the letter correspond to those in the list tagged with the formula “missioni offertur.” We do not know whether they had themselves shown some prior interest in Russia, but clearly, as we see from the letter, they were chosen by the provincial because of their qualifications. Even in the absence of *Indipetae* letters, this documentation helps us better understand the mechanisms of missionary selection and the preference for a province like the Veneto that was more likely to be able to provide a familiarity with Slavic languages needed for the missions to Russia as it not only had strong links to the Balkans but also maintained a mission in Albania, which could be—indeed, on occasion had proved to be—a useful training-ground for the fathers.¹⁶

Among the fathers selected, Emilio Fulvio Cordignano (1887–1951) and Lorenzo Viezzoli, for example, had completed their education entirely at Scutari and had studied Croat, and we know from Emanuele Colombo that Viezzoli wrote another *Indipeta* from Gallarate in 1938.¹⁷ Antonio Busetti (1870–1948) had studied Slavic languages and knew Albanian well but had been compelled to leave Albania “because of his often offensive language toward Albanians, who are very sensitive. That notwithstanding, he is pious and self-sacrificing, and in robust health.”¹⁸ Luigi Giona, a coadjutor brother in the process of taking his vows, was

¹⁶ The provincial’s particular concern with evangelization is corroborated by a series of further documents aimed at bolstering the Society’s missionary policy and its production of publications to this end. See, for example, the “Programma di una più efficace propaganda per le missioni della Compagnia di Gesù,” in ARSI, *NC, Veneta* 1013, 1, 1921, and a letter from him to the superior general of January 31, 1923, in ARSI, *NC, Veneta* 1013, 4, doc. 39.

¹⁷ Cited in Emanuele Colombo and Marina Massimi, *In viaggio: Gesuiti italiani candidati alle missioni tra antica e nuova Compagnia* (Milan: Il Sole 24 ore, 2014), 115–16.

¹⁸ G. B. Battisti to the superior general, January 14, 1922, in ARSI, *NC, Prov. Veneta* 1013, 4, 5. Cordignano and Busetti were born both near Udine, in the Veneto province.

tagged as a tailor¹⁹ and was preferred to Luigi Sartirana because he played an instrument and “in the missions a little music can beguile the faithful.”²⁰

We might note, in parenthesis, that it was most likely the superior general himself who had encouraged the Veneto province to sponsor the Russian mission. The provincial, while emphasizing his “zeal for the new mission,” took the opportunity to observe that manpower was lacking for the Albanian mission and that while Father Superior Genovizzi had rushed

to see that men were found for Russia, that is, for a new mission, in the case of the no less deserving Albania, we are continually hearing of a shortage of fathers [...]. The best are always being plucked away, so that only the old and the sick and the less able are left.²¹

The first names furnished by Battisti were those of Giulio Roi,²² Francesco Rota, and Domenico Piemonte. Among these, Roi was undoubtedly the best known and most distinguished, both as a scholar and as a personage in the Jesuit establishment. He had in fact been the Veneto province consultant, assistant procurator since 1913, and, from 1917, rector of the Leone XIII College in Milan. Rota had already been a missionary in Scotland and was a fluent English-speaker, even if he had not always toed the line of obedience. Piemonte, on the other hand, was chosen mainly on account of his excellent command of Slavic languages, which he had been able to hone in Sardinia, as chaplain to the Slavic prisoners. Mention of the First World War also surfaces in the *Russipetae* letters of our second group; to have served in some capacity in wartime activities was apparently considered a recommendation in the case of Giulio Roi and other Jesuits on the list.

The *Russipetae* letters of Roi, Piemonte, and Rota have yet to be traced. We cannot therefore know to what extent their inclusion among the suitable candidates was the result of their own coming forward. In Roi’s case, there is a clue to the wishes of the father himself in a letter from the superior general from January 18, 1923, in which, while suggesting his name, the superior general notes that it was the priest who had proposed himself for the mission “and will now most willingly go to Russia.”²³ It appears that Roi repeated his request to be sent to Russia in 1930 since his letter has been traced, again by Colombo.²⁴

¹⁹ Entered the Society April 14, 1920. We do not have any information about his death, so it is reasonable to assume that he was dismissed by the order.

²⁰ G. B. Battisti to the superior general, January 14, 1922, in ARSI, N. Compagnia, *Veneta* 1013, 4, 5. We also have no information about Sartirana’s death inside the Society of Jesus.

²¹ G. B. Battisti to the superior general, January 14, 1922, in ARSI, N. Compagnia, *Veneta* 1013, 4, 5.

²² Entered on April 11, 1891. This date was obtained from a second record card, the first indicating that he was resident at the seminary of Portoré in Croatia.

²³ Letter from Ledóchowski, January 18, 1923, in *NC Russia* 2002, 1, 6. The same folder (*NC Russia* 2002, 1) also contains several letters from Domenico Piemonte.

²⁴ Colombo and Massimi, *In viaggio*, 58.

It is quite likely that further research into the papers of the New Society's Italian branch will unearth further *Indipetae* letters currently unknown to us. It certainly appears that their efforts to add a command of foreign languages to their curricula favored the participation of a number of Jesuits in the 1922 humanitarian mission sponsored by the Holy See to relieve the famine in the Soviet Union under the umbrella of the American Relief Administration (ARA) organized by the US government.²⁵ It seems probable, given that the dates coincide, that this was in fact the very mission to Russia to which Battisti's January 1922 letter refers, but it nonetheless needs to be seen in the wider context of a project that from that date foregrounded the real possibility of the Society founding a full independent mission.

Even before the Bolshevik revolution, a few Jesuits had been clandestinely introduced into Russia, but the prospect of a reconversion of the empire to Catholicism through the efforts of the Society of Jesus became a live one in that same year of 1922, when the Pontifical Oriental Institute²⁶ was entrusted to the Jesuits, and Father Michel d'Herbigny—a key player in the history of relations between Soviet Russia and the Catholic Church²⁷—was appointed its rector. The background to this change of outlook was a turnaround in the confessional situation in Russia: in a major change from tsarist times, the Bolsheviks had declared religious freedom, which appeared to open new scenarios for “spiritual conquest.” For all that, the Polish-born superior general Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (in office 1915–42) was personally considerably more hostile than his secretary of state toward the communist regime.²⁸

²⁵ On the mission, see Dennis J. Dunn, *The Catholic Church and Soviet Russia, 1917–1939* (London: Routledge, 2017), chapter 4.

²⁶ See Vincenzo Poggi, *Per la storia del Pontificio Istituto Orientale: Saggi sull'istituzione, i suoi uomini e l'Oriente Cristiano* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2000).

²⁷ See Dunn, *Catholic Church and Soviet Russia*, chapter 5, “Orthodox–Catholic Ties and the Albertyn Experiment: The d'Herbigny Mission.” From 1920 onward, d'Herbigny had been talking up the idea of an encyclical aimed at the Russian people to persuade them to come over to Rome (see: la Ponzona a cura della Sacra Congregazione, *Pro Ecclesia Orientali, Relazione circa i mezzi più acconci per facilitare il ritorno dei Russi scismatici all'Unità Cattolica*, June 1920, at the close of which there is a reference to the Jesuit's campaign, cited in Morozzo della Rocca, *Le nazioni non muoiono: Russia rivoluzionaria, Polonia indipendente e Santa Sede* [Bologna: Il mulino, 1992], 327n29).

²⁸ See Della Rocca, *Le nazioni non muoiono*, 314–19 and particularly the letter from the superior general reprinted on 315n5, in which he opines that the revolutionary government does not seem “to have emerged from the economic and social conditions of the country itself but [seems rather] a foreign, Jewish government with a splendid international organization behind it, intent on destroying Christian civilization and securing absolute world domination for the Israelites.” Morozzo della Rocca says he has a copy of the letter in his possession but does not give its provenance. On these conversion hopes, see also Étienne Fouilloux, who writes that Catholicism, “the needle of foreign origin in the Russian haystack, did not suffer overmuch from the explosion of anticlericalism that had the Orthodox crying during the civil war” (Fouilloux, “Vatican et Russie soviétique [1917–1939],” *Relations internationales* 27 [1981]: 303–18, here 306).

In 1922, as we have noted, a pontifical relief mission was set up in response to the widespread famine that followed the Russian civil war. The relevant agreement, initially drafted under Benedict XV (r.1914–22) but formalized by Pope Pius XI (r.1922–39), was signed on March 12, 1922 by Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri and Vatslav Vorovsky, the Soviet representative in Italy, and placed the Society of Jesus on the front line. The mission, part of the ARA initiative, was led by the American Jesuit Edmund Walsh, who arrived in Crimea on July 27. Also present alongside him were—at different times—Giulio Roi and Domenico Piemonte, two of the Jesuits identified as “Russipeti” by the Society, who were both deployed to Krasnodar (formerly Ekaterinodar). It is not possible to go into detail here about this mission, which continued through into 1924,²⁹ and on which much work has been done, both by Patrick McNamara in his biography of Walsh³⁰ and more recently by Laura Pettinaroli.³¹ Worth noting, however, is the Society of Jesus’s renewed interest in Russia and the apparently privileged position of the Jesuits within the relief mission.³² What interests me here, in relation to recruiting procedures, is a letter from Superior General Ledóchowski, dated February 25,

²⁹ In the course of the mission, 1923 saw an anti-Catholic prosecution that ended in the execution by firing squad of Konstantyn Budkiewicz for “counter-revolutionary activities” and the expulsion of the Polish archbishop Jan Cieplak, auxiliary bishop of the Mogilëv diocese.

³⁰ See Patrick H. McNamara, *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). McNamara worked on the ARSI holdings but did not consult the *NC Russia* collection. Cf. Louis Gallagher Jr., S.J., *Edmund Walsh, S.J.: A Biography* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1962); John Francis Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Marisa Patulli, ed., *Edmund Aloysius Walsh: La missio Iraquensis; Il contributo dei gesuiti statunitensi al sistema educativo iracheno* (Rome: Accademia Angelica-Costantiniana di Lettere Arti Scienze, 2010); and Edmund Walsh, *The Last Stand: An Interpretation of the Soviet Five-Year Plan* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1931). From June 1922, Gallagher was for fifteen months Walsh’s assistant in the Russian mission. He kept a diary covering this experience, which has been published: *A Jesuit Cossack: A Memoir by Louis J. Gallagher, S.J.*, ed. Joseph P. Duffy, S.J., Joseph P. Duffy Collection of Digital Works, 2018, <https://jesuitarchives.omeka.net/items/show/936> (accessed October 17, 2022).

³¹ Laura Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Saint-Siège (1905–1939)* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 2016).

³² Pettinaroli writes that “au-delà de ces problèmes financiers et d’adaptation à une situation éprouvante, les archives de la Mission font apparaître des dissensions internes qui recourent les différences nationales et la diversité des familles religieuses” (beyond these financial problems and the adaptations that were made in response to a trying situation, the archives of the mission reveal internal disagreements that cut across national differences and differences among the religious orders) (27). In particular, the Italian Salesian Aristide Simonetti bemoaned the fact that Father Walsh had a pronounced predilection for Jesuits over other religious orders, something that was also noted by the future pope Paul VI (r.1963–78) (see Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato—Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, *Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari* [AA. EE. SS.] 4, *PCPR*, sc. 10, fasc. 65, fols. 30–31: sc. 10, fasc. 65, fols. 30–31: note by G. Battista Montini, Rome, October 16, 1923). Some documentation on active Jesuit participation in the ARA mission is contained in a folder kept in the Society’s Roman Archives: ARSI, *NC Russia* 2001, 1902–22, fasc. 3. See also Maria Chiara Dommarco, *Un compito eccezionale e rischioso: Il governo bolscevico e la missione della Santa Sede al tempo della carestia degli anni Venti* (Seriante: “La casa di Matriona,” 2021).

1922—before, that is, the actual signing of the accord³³—that sets out the mission’s criteria and refers to the practice of self-candidature as a factor in the selection of fathers to be sent to Russia: “Furthermore, if there are any, particularly theologians and newly ordained priests, whom God has called to such an arduous and valuable mission, provided they are suitable and adequately prepared, by all means pass their names on to me.”³⁴

The letter was written a month later than the one from the Veneto provincial, but the procedure seems to be the same as that defined then and repeated in the pre-printed forms.

If we leave the ARA mission and return to our *Russipeti* in Italy, we find that it was exactly between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s that a conscious “recruitment policy” for communist Russia intensified, to which the few letters we have so far been able to examine bear witness. In this context, the new rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute would be a key figure in encouraging missionary vocations aimed at the Soviet republic.

On December 24, 1924, Mons. Michel d’Herbigny delivered a lecture in Rome whose main theme was the famine in the Soviet Union. The talk created quite a stir, and the text was published a year later in the Oriental Institute’s magazine *Orientalia christiana*.³⁵ Still in 1925, while Superior General Ledóchowski was outlining a new mission strategy that envisaged the establishment of new colleges in the Far East and Africa, Pope Pius XI organized a Russian expedition for none other than d’Herbigny,³⁶ who was respectfully received by the Soviet authorities, hoping perhaps to improve diplomatic relations with the Holy See. On his side, d’Herbigny mistook their overtures as favorable indications for the prospect of Catholic expansion in Russia, which did not of course occur either then or after a second visit the following year, prior to which he had been secretly consecrated a bishop in Rome by the nuncio Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pius XII [r.1939–58]). In 1929, a Slavic assistency was founded within the Society of Jesus, another indication of the new centrality that Eastern Europe was taking on. In 1930, despite

³³ The accord was signed by Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, the Holy See’s secretary of state, and Vatslav Vorovsky, the Russian republic’s representative in Italy.

³⁴ *De subsidiis colligendis Pro Russia*, in *NC Russia* 2001, 1902–19. See letter in *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu* 6 (Rome: Apud Curiae, 1929).

³⁵ Michel d’Herbigny, “L’aide pontificale aux enfants affamés de Russie,” *Orientalia Christiana* 4 (1925): 1–80 (see also the Italian edition, *L’aiuto pontificio ai bambini affamati della Russia* [Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1925], which is embellished with eighty-four engravings).

³⁶ Original text: “Preterea si qui sunt, praesertim inter Theologis et Neosacerdotes, quod Deus ad tam arduam et fructuosam Missionem impellat, *Provincialibus se offerant*, qui si aptos et debitis ornatos viderint, eorum nomina mihi significant” (Moreover, if there are any, especially among theologians and newly ordained priests, whom God impels to such an arduous and fruitful mission, they have to offer themselves to the provincials, and if they find them fit and worthy, let me know their names). See Dunn, *Catholic Church and Soviet Russia*, cap. 5, section entitled “The d’Herbigny Mission,” 67–70.

the evident failure of his strategy, d'Herbigny was nominated to head a pontifical Pro Russia Commission and was still dreaming of the imminent collapse of the Soviet regime and the opening of Russia's frontiers to the Catholic apostolate.³⁷ This groundless conviction led him to continue favoring Russia-directed vocations among his confrères at least up until 1934, at which point he fell into disgrace in circumstances that remain unclear, losing among other things the ear of Pope Pius XI.³⁸

The *Indipetae* letters currently at our disposal belong, perhaps not coincidentally, to those years, from 1926 to 1934. Connected with them there is also, as noted, a much shorter list containing the names of just four Jesuits: Antonio Sacchetti and Antonio Pignatelli from the Roman province, and Manlio Colucci and Michele d'Amuri from the Neapolitan. Alongside each name, there is a date in brackets, which, by cross-referencing with the *Russipetae* dossier, we can be sure refers to the dates of the letters as sent by the four Jesuits to the superior general. I will return a bit later to these names, but I will at least say here that for three of the four we actually have an *Indipeta* in the second dossier. I have not yet been able to trace Colucci's letter written in 1929 (but Colombo found another letter by Colucci written in 1931), nor a follow-up one from Sacchetti, but in return I have a third from the latter, from after 1930.

We can identify in this group of letters some recurrent themes that confirm the New Society's continuity with the Old, such as the citing of Francis Xavier as a model apostle to the Indies. At the same time, there is no shortage of references to the contemporary political situation, not only to what was going on in revolutionary Russia but also in relation to their own experiences during the First World War. Another recurring element is the constant mention of visits, lectures, encyclicals from one or other of the main protagonists of these events, which gives us an idea of the strength of the propaganda effort kept up by both the Holy See and the Society to keep attention focused on the Russian question. Here too, on the other hand, we must acknowledge a continuity with the missionary propaganda put out by the promoters of the Indian missions in the Old Society.

³⁷ Cf. Paul Lesourd, *Entre Rome et Moscou: Le jésuite clandestin Mgr. Michel d'Herbigny* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1976), and the review by Emile Poulat in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 46, no. 2 (1978): 269–70, where he emphasizes that the Roman documents (ASV, ARSI) were not used here. See also Léon Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel D'Herbigny S.J. and Russia: A Pre-ecumenical Approach to Christian Unity* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1990), which is much better documented but very hostile to the methods employed by d'Herbigny.

³⁸ According to Dunn, it was mainly Superior General Ledóchowski's objections, with those of Polish political leaders and of other players inside the Vatican, to d'Herbigny's lack of diplomacy in running the Commissione Pro Russia that led to his dismissal. As well as researching the Soviet sources, Dunn worked on the documentation in the Archivio della Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Pontificia Commissione, Pro Russia. Cf. Neal Pease, *Rome's Most Faithful Daughter: The Catholic Church and Independent Poland 1914–1939* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009).

In the first letter (1926) of this group, Father Raphael Martinelli (1902–69) recalls the Society’s superior general visiting Villa Carpegna and Anagni on more than one occasion to insist on the urgency of the “problem of converting Russia,” an urgency seconded by the pontiff himself, reiterating that he considered “such missions of great importance to the Holy Church and a most difficult challenge for the missionary.”³⁹ Mention of the superior general’s concern also appears in a letter from Giuseppe Fedi (1930), who in his turn refers to an instruction urging “all those who feel themselves moved by the desire to consecrate their lives to the reconstruction and salvation of Russia to prepare themselves.”⁴⁰ This most likely refers to the letter that Ledóchowski wrote on November 24, 1930 in which he looked forward to a new generation being trained to enroll as missionaries to Russia.⁴¹

The Jesuit Michele Ignazio d’Amuri also alluded to the superior general’s letter and mentioned an encyclical from Pope Pius XI on Eastern Europe.⁴² For good measure, he included too, as a spur to his decision, Mons. d’Herbigny’s visit to Naples, when he had delivered a lecture on Russia, causing him to “think seriously whether I might not also one day enter that country [...] to bring new life to those poor souls.”⁴³

Soviet Russia also lent itself—and this is a key factor linking the old *Indipetae* and these new requests—to a vocation to martyrdom: “What could be finer,” wrote Martinelli, “than to give one’s life for the one you love, that is, for Jesus,”⁴⁴ a sentiment shared by Giandomenico Lucheschi (1894–1950), Michele d’Amuri, and by Giuseppe Fedi, the latter also emphasizing that he had already sent many letters to this end and was now repeating his request “to be accepted as a missionary, not in any case but to Russia.”⁴⁵ In the past, an indifference as to missionary destination had been considered a positive qualification, but it seems

³⁹ Raphaël Martinelli to the superior general, Anagni, Pontificio Collegio Leoniano, September 24, 1926, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.*

⁴⁰ Giuseppe Fedi to the superior general [in pencil: scholastic, fourth year in theology, n. 1902, i. 1918], Chieri, March 13, 1930, ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.*

⁴¹ A first letter from Ledóchowski on the same theme (*Tristissima situazione religiosa in Russia e il nostro compito riguardo ad essa*, February 1930) is quoted in Colombo and Massimi, *In viaggio*, 58.

⁴² The encyclical nearest in time to the one Amuri might be referring to is *Rerum orientalium*, issued on September 8, 1928 (full text available at <https://www.papalencyclica-ls.net/pius11/p11reror.htm> [accessed October 17, 2022]), but in my view it is more likely that he had in mind the 1926 *Rerum ecclesiae* (http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/encycl-icals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19260228_rerum-ecclesiae.html [accessed June 23, 2022]).

⁴³ Michele Ignazio d’Amuri to the superior general, Chieri, Casa S. Antonio, June 27, 1930, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.*

⁴⁴ Raphaël Martinelli to the superior general, Anagni, Pontificio Collegio Leoniano, September 24, 1926.

⁴⁵ Giuseppe Fedi to the superior general, as above, note 41.

that, under pressure of political circumstances, the specific desire to be sent to Russia might now be an incentive to being chosen by the superior general.

We do not know what became of Martinelli's and Fedi's requests, unlike that of the scholastic Antonio Sacchetti, who made much in his letter of another factor in his favor, a professional one. Sacchetti wrote, in fact, that he had a degree in civil engineering and electronics, and this would allow him to "penetrate where a priest would not normally be able to go."⁴⁶ We can establish from the Society's records that Sacchetti did in fact set out as a missionary, but his destination was not Russia but China, where he served in the Pengpu mission, which was affiliated to the Society's Turin province. He wrote from there to the superior general again, nonetheless, in 1933 "humbly" requesting, once more, to be allowed to go to Russia, where it seemed to him there was "greater urgency." He referred back to his previous *Russipeta* letter in which he had made a point of the engineering qualification that might stand him in good stead in Russia; as to languages, he stressed his good command of English and French and added that he was well placed to learn Russian as there were something like thirty-five thousand nationals in Shanghai.⁴⁷ So in Sacchetti's case, the desire to be sent abroad as a missionary was granted, but the posting was not the one he had wanted, and he continued to press for relocation—which would not, in the event, occur.

Another important theme that emerges from this admittedly meagre group of letters is that touched on above of previous experience in the First World War, where the fact of having lived through the conflict is cited as a useful precedent to back up the vocation to martyrdom expressed in the letters. We find as much, for example, in Fedi's letter in which the hope of martyrdom is adduced as a longstanding desire. Fedi details his feeling of needing to make good on what he

⁴⁶ Antonio Sacchetti, scholastic, to the superior general, Rome, November 8, 1929, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.* Antonio Sacchetti, born June 29, 1901, ordained Rome, November 8, 1929. Took his vows in China on February 2, 1942 (ARSI, *Vota* 11, *Prov. Veneta*, 514). Entered the order in 1926, studied theology in France, and from 1933 we find him at the Catholic mission in Bengpu studying Chinese (see *Catalogus prov. Taurinensis Societatis Iesu ineunte anno 1934*, Turin, 1933, *Residentia Pengpu*, 33; *Catalogus prov. Taurinensis Societatis Iesu ineunte anno 1935*, Turin, 1934, *Residentia Pengpu*, 33; *Catalogus prov. Taurinensis Societatis Iesu ineunte anno 1936*, Turin, 1935, *Residentia Pengpu*, 34). Remained in China throughout the Second World War. In 1945, he was regional superior. In 1950, he was an advisor to the visitor (though effectively from 1948) in Shanghai. In 1952, he was teaching at the "Aurora" University in Shanghai, and in 1954 on the island of Formosa, of which he also wrote a *Historia domus*. After 1957, he disappears from the rosters and may have died outside the order because he does not appear even in that of the deceased.

⁴⁷ Antonio Sacchetti to the superior general, Pengpu, October 30, 1933 (ARSI, *NC, Taurinensis, Missiones* 1001: *Missio Pengpu 1922–1950*, 4 [1933–35]), 10. See also the copy of Sacchetti's April 7, 1935 letter, included in the letter from Father Antonio Tisconi, April 12, 1935 (ARSI, *NC, Taurinensis, Missiones* 1001: *Missio Pengpu 1922–1950*, 4 [1933–35], 27). A further two long letters on the state of the mission in Bengpu and on the advisability of splitting it into two, entrusting one part to the Turin province and the other to the Roman, were sent by Sacchetti to the superior general in his role as advisor: January 1, 1948, in ARSI, *NC, Taurinensis, Missiones* 1001: *Missio Pengpu 1922–1950*, 9 (1948), 10.

had not managed to achieve during the war, when “the privilege conceded me by His [God’s] Vicar to anticipate the dangers of the military life, bringing forward my priesthood by two years.”⁴⁸ Reference to the war is even more central to Giandomenico Lucheschi’s second letter, where his time with the army is cited to emphasize his many years on the front line “amid danger and discomfort,”⁴⁹ which, the Jesuit seems to imply, have prepared him for the challenge of Russia. Lucheschi’s case is interesting, and indeed unique in this dossier, insofar as it is possible to reconstruct the rather bumpy path of his missionary vocation. The Jesuit had in fact written a first letter on March 25, 1930 stating his desire to undertake “any mission that the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus might wish of me, whether here or elsewhere.”⁵⁰ His proclaimed indifference notwithstanding, Lucheschi insisted on his desire for martyrdom, citing, as mentioned, his years with the military. He claimed to have a gift for languages and to know French and some English and German, but to aspire above all to a mission “inter paganos” (among the heathens) and this because “on a mission, and one to Russia in particular I would be further from my egypt [*sic*] and from everything that speaks to me of flesh and blood.”⁵¹ He claimed to have discussed as much with the provincial, who “told me this was a worthy desire and I should prepare myself for it.” But the provincial’s words were not enough for him because he still wanted to carry out “the Most Holy Will of Our Lord as conveyed to me by my superiors.” He was therefore addressing the superior general himself, who had recognized in him a “spiritus supernaturalis et plena animi indifferentia” (supernatural spirit and complete indifference of mind).⁵² The words quoted came in fact from the (typed) attached reply to a second letter written by Lucheschi on April 18. The superior general wrote accepting his candidature while regretting that he could not at that juncture respond materially to his request, but that he should pray and prepare himself. In his second communication, Lucheschi reiterated his desire for “affliction” and emphasized the enduring nature of his aspiration. Nonetheless, a penciled note from March 30, 1931 declared him “exclusus” (excluded) without further explanation. We do not know what may have

⁴⁸ Giuseppe Fedi to the superior general, as above, note 41.

⁴⁹ Yet another of his, signed “Giandomenico” (it is therefore him in the *catalogus defunctorum*), spiritual father at the C. Arici College, Brescia, day of the annunciation [March 25], 1930. A favorable opinion of Lucheschi is given by the provincial P. Grana in a letter to the superior general following a visit to the Brescia college (Milan, March 18, 1930). Since his first *Indipeta* follows only a few days behind this letter, it seems likely that on this occasion he had received some encouragement from the provincial (ARSI, NC, *Veneta*, 1014, 6, 42). In another of June 23, 1930 from Venice (ARSI, NC, *Veneta*, 1014, 6, 52), Lucheschi is mentioned as an energetic young man, less than forty years old, spiritual father to the pupils.

⁵⁰ Domenico Lucheschi to the superior general, Brescia, [March 25], 1930, in ARSI, NC, *AEO*, fol. 4, *Ass. It.*

⁵¹ Domenico Lucheschi to the superior general, Brescia, [March 25], 1930, in ARSI, NC, *AEO*, fol. 4, *Ass. It.*

⁵² Domenico Lucheschi to the superior general, Brescia, April 18, 1930, in ARSI, NC, *AEO*, fol. 4, *Ass. It.*

happened during the just under a year separating his second letter from the final decision, but it is the case that Lucheschi remained in Brescia as spiritual father to the pupils of the college⁵³ and died in the bosom of the Society, obedient still to the decisions of his superiors.

Different again was the letter of Brother Luigi Cimadori, a notably ungrammatical communication that expressed a desire to be sent to the Indies, even among the assistants if need be, rather than the professed fathers, a solution that had been quite common in the Old Society. Cimadori, as it happened, had been a prisoner in Russia during the war, but he made clear that he had not learned the language in those three years. He was not, then, bringing up that experience in order to claim knowledge of the country but rather because it had been that circumstance that had stoked his missionary ardor:

Your Worship should know that I was a prisoner in Russia, and during my confinement in the barracks I set up a little altar round which in the evenings when the bells rang we prisoners could gather, beginning in the fine month of May by reciting the rosary and then in June going on to the Chaplet of the Sacred Heart, so that the Russian guards took me for a priest. But at the beginning of these two months of devotion, the devil tried to put a spoke in my wheel and when I started on the rosary with a little participation on the prisoners' part, a few chunks of old bread were launched at my head, but I was not deterred and "no pain, no gain." In due course, I also asked grace of the Sacred Heart to minister to a schismatic priest and sought grace to ask for myself, miserable sinner, his Apostolic Benediction.⁵⁴

Other letters in the dossier, such as that from Antonio Maria Pignatelli, maintain a profession of indifference to "whatever might be offered me in any of the Society's ministries."⁵⁵ This indifference was linked with the desire of martyrdom, because Russia was the region that

more than any other is in need of spiritual assistance, and because it offers a greater scope for toil and suffering, because there more than anywhere it is likely I may be called upon to shed my blood for he who shed his for my redemption, because in the last resort those peoples are dearer to Christ as

⁵³ Cf. Giulio Roi to the superior general, Ex. Off., Brescia, October 18, 1931 (ARSI, *NC, Veneta*, 1014, 9, 21). See also a letter from the same, of April 25, 1932: "Congregationes Marianae alumnorum recte et ferventer a P. Lucheschi reguntur" (ARSI, *NC, Veneta*, 1014, 9, 36).

⁵⁴ F. Luigi Cimadori to the superior general, Bergamo, January 14, 1932, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.* Cimadori, too, alludes to the superior general's appeal for missionaries to Russia.

⁵⁵ Antonio Maria Pignatelli to the superior general, Monte Falcone Appennino, Convento del Sasso, Scuola apostolica, August 7, 1930, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.* Fourth vow taken before the Roman provincial and deputy superior general Raffaele Bitetti on August 19, 1939.

being his—although not belonging to our church—his, through faith in him and through baptism.⁵⁶

Colombo has also discovered a second 1931 request from Pignatelli to be sent to Russia, and we also have another, rather ungrammatical first letter from the Jesuit Manlio Maria Colucci in the dossier, dated 1932, and a follow-up from 1935, once again unearthed by Colombo.⁵⁷

In concluding these brief notes on the *Russipetae*, it is worthwhile emphasizing that the opening letter from the Veneto provincial Battisti, the case of Antonio Sacchetti, and the multiple letters discovered in different holdings by Colombo and myself might give us a useful methodological hint on how to pursue future archival excavations by looking specifically for the *Indipetae* letters of Jesuits unhappy with their postings.⁵⁸ As I have more than once had occasion to note, there exists—for the New Society—no dedicated *Indipetae* archival holding, and they have therefore to be hunted down in disparate corners of the archives. A full-scale sweep is the only answer, and to that end the collective research project promoted by Boston College seems to me a most welcome initiative.

⁵⁶ Antonio Maria Pignatelli to the superior general, Monte Falcone Appennino, Convento del Sasso, Scuola apostolica, August 7, 1930, in ARSI, *NC, AEO*, 4, *Ass. It.*

⁵⁷ Colombo and Massimi, *In viaggio*, 60–61, 78, 91–92, 180–82 (letter by Manlio Maria Colucci, Naples, April 8, 1931).

⁵⁸ Analogous cases to Sacchetti's of missionaries asking for a different posting can be found in the Naples province, regarding the coadjutor Gaetano de Tommaso, who after serving in New Mexico and being appointed to the Aquila college on his return to Italy, asked to be sent instead to Ceylon or any other overseas mission (see letter to the superior general, Aquila, June 13, 1929, in ARSI, *NC, Neapol.*, 1017, 10, 3). Similarly, Gennaro Casolaro, Galle, Ceylon, n.d., asks the superior general to send him to Australia, in ARSI, *NC, Neapol.*, 1017, 10, 10.