THE EARLY JESUITS AND THE ROAD

Mario Scaduto

Mario Scaduto (1922-1995) was an expert on the history of the Italian Jesuits in the sixteenth century, writing three large volumes about the years following Ignatius' death, when Diego Laínez and Francis Borja led the Society. This seminal article[1] is a by-product of those books, and reports lovingly on the 'spirituality of the way' to be found in the letters of Jesuits from those periods.

MANY, INDEED MOST, OF THE EARLY JESUITS knew both the fears and the consolations of the road. They travelled it in all weathers, by night and by day, alone and in groups, in conversation but also in long periods of silence. They knew how roads could be spacious and level. They knew too about stony country lanes with twists and turns and perilous mountain paths. But whatever the case with all that, the road always had another, more important significance for them: it was a means of connection with other people and a means of encountering God. The help of souls was part of their very existence; it was for the sake of this service that people travelled from one place to another, or for that matter stayed where they were.

Ignatius himself had been a great traveller. When he dictated his *Reminiscences*, he seems himself to have recognised, fifteen years on, how much of his spiritual adventure had been linked to the road, when he referred to himself as 'the pilgrim'. Pedro Ribadeneira, a young disciple of Ignatius, once saw that blood was flowing from his feet, sore and worn as they were from the road:

> . . . but he, making nothing of his own pain, was striding forth, and encouraging himself by turning round to me and saying, 'it's nothing, Brother Peter, it's nothing'.

[1] The article was first published as 'La strada e i primi Gesuiti', *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu*, 40 (1971) pp. 335-390. We are very grateful to the Editor of this journal for permission to reproduce this abridged English version. Interested readers are referred to the original for full references, and also for a generous selection of the primary texts.

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Ignatius had set out some general norms for travel in the *Constitutions*, while leaving superiors free to decide on details. They could go 'like the poor', without a horse or food, or else in greater comfort; they might have letters of introduction or not. The criterion was always to be 'the greater edification of one's neighbour and the divine service'. The norms were codified in rules written by Polanco, Ignatius' secretary, and by Nadal, one of his closest advisers. Laínez, Ignatius' successor, published these; and it was only a decade later, under Francis Borja, that travelling on foot disappeared.

The first Jesuits referred to journeys, quite significantly, as 'missions'. These missions could cover matters of government, ministry and study; those in formation undertook pilgrimages. Letters show that superiors generally took care not to send people alone, above all because of the risks involved in travelling without a companion. They often took letters patent, and sometimes a formal safe conduct document. They wore what was then their normal dress: a black soutane, with a hat, a cloak and a pair of shirts. Often they would be dressed a little better than at home, and there are complaints about superiors who were lacking in care and generosity on this matter. Especially if they were travelling in Protestant countries, they were meant to dress reasonably well, 'so as not to look like beggars' in the eyes of 'the heretics'—as Peter Canisius several times admonished people raggedly dressed in Germany. Novices on pilgrimage were instructed to wear warm underclothes as a protection against the cold, but their outer wear was to be 'like that of the poor', in order to promote both their own growth in humility and the edification of others. This latter consideration was an intense concern, so much so that people would avoid travelling on feast days in order not to cause scandal, even though this was in principle permitted. They were not to travel more than 40 miles in one day. Despite the austerities, the financial sums invested in travel were relatively high.

For the early Jesuits, travel was an evocative adventure: always busy, often tough, sometimes really painful. The road helped them see how their particular way of life fitted into the wider history of Christianity. As we shall see, travel provided a vast, varied backdrop, often a rough one, with surprises and hazards at every turn. Bad weather, or the incomprehension of others, or sheer human wickedness tested and strengthened people's characters, preparing them to work for Christ. Every street corner, every bend along the way, could become—

and indeed did become—a place of unobtrusive apostolic ministry, of decisive pastoral encounter.

Travel by Sea

For important journeys, travel by sea was preferred; it was quicker and less problematic—at least if everything went smoothly. The journey from Naples to Palermo took 33 hours in good weather and with favourable winds. But in other circumstances, it might take much longer: 60 hours or more. One letter sent to Laínez as General tells of a voyage on this route that lasted a full week:

> . . . the water came in with such force, and in such great waves, that we were all drenched and our wits befuddled. . . . When we wanted to move the sail, the ropes broke. At that point we all raised our hands to heaven with fervent prayer, afraid that we would be food that day for the fish. We were all like sardines piled one on top of the other, because we were in total fifty passengers in such a small ship.

Storms in that part of the Mediterranean were frequent. Erasmus Völker described a journey in 1561 from Naples to Palermo as follows:

> . . . the sea was too frightening, too horrible, for words. The winds were so violent and strong that the sailors lowered the sails; the waves were like mountains, high enough to smother the ship, and they buffeted the ship from side to side, so much so that the ship was in danger of being lost with all hands. And this was on the high seas, with no possibility for escape.

Similar tales were told of journeys in the Adriatic, between Ancona and Venice. Völker had another difficult experience here, three years later, in 1564:

> . . . after we had gone a short distance, a contrary wind sprang up, which . . . so disturbed the sea that we and our boat were in danger. Because my shipmates had never been in this sort of danger before, they were in quite low spirits, and full of melancholy. . . . Since I had been on another occasion in this kind of danger, and indeed more so, I tried to cheer them up, either comforting them or teasing them.

Besides the difficulties with the weather, there was also the hazard of unbearable fellow-passengers—squalid people or convicts, who could make a ship into an 'epitome of Hell', as well as the dark threat of ambush from pirate ships. Völker's party were also worried about rumours that the Turks had taken some religious as prisoners. In 1565, Bartolomeo Vallone, a Sicilian, was captured between Venice and Ancona, along with a German Jesuit. 'As they made him enter the pirate galley', wrote the Jesuit rector in Venice to Borja, 'they dealt him enormous blows to the head with some kind of wooden stick'. The German tried to escape and drowned; for Vallone, this beating was the beginning of a Calvary that was to last for 14 months, during which the idea of his being rescued comes up frequently in superiors' correspondence. Eventually he was released, from Alexandria in Egypt. He was ordained in 1572; he then went as a missionary to Goa, dying there in 1578.

Travel by Road

Journeys by land had their difficulties too, but of different kinds—difficulties which began even before departure. Drivers and horses were a frequent source of vexation. Gian Filippo Casini told Borja about a journey to Naples in October 1562:

> Because of the route that these people made us take, we were always travelling through woods. Nowhere could we find anything to eat until nightfall. Because we did not know about it, we had not made provision—we thought we would find an eating-place as usual. But Our Lord provided through one gentleman who gave us a loaf of bread, and through another who was in a hut and sold us another two loaves.

Here, too, there were problems with robbers. Attacks of other kinds could also occur. Völker wrote to Polanco in 1561, recounting how he and others had passed below a high mountain, from which 'some wretched and villainous men at the top' had thrown down 'enormous rocks'.

Another Jesuit wrote of a journey on a horse whose underbelly was crowded with sores:

> To put it reverently, he stank like a dead dog. He would only move forward if you beat him; and we had to buy some wine and bread and give him morsels soaked in the wine so that he could move forward.

Emond Auger told of a horse that had a mind of its own. It threw all four members of Auger's party in succession. Auger remarked drily that 'he inspired little confidence'. Sometimes, however, the poor animals were not themselves to blame. A little nag ridden by Giovanni Maldonado in 1563, 'was lame in one foot, and therefore could never walk straight. He had a very old wound on his back, for he also lacked a part of his bone.' When it began to rain, he got stuck in the mud, and there was no way of getting him out; nor could he ford streams. Stefano Baroello wrote of his 'laborious journey' in 1565:

> Three times the horse fell. The first time it got up at once, and left me in the mud. The second time, it landed on my leg, with the result that neither it nor I could move. The third time it fell backwards, but nevertheless threw me off, leaving me caught in the brambles.

Passers-by came to the rescue on this occasion, as also later in the journey:

> I was riding a horse that was quite old and lazy. I did not have my eyeglasses, and found myself in a place that made me gasp. If you went forward, it looked as though the horse would not get through; nor was there room to turn round. I had to dismount—but my left foot got stuck in the stirrup. It was a sorry sight to see this fat old man upside down with his leg trapped.

Injuries, too, caused difficulties. Otto Briamont writes of his travels in the Alps, coming down the St Gothard pass to Altdorf:

> . . . my left knee swelled up. It was in any case quite weak, and it became very inflamed, with the result that I could not use it at all, or manage even the slightest movement from one place to another. Thus, with enormous difficulty, Fr Jona carried me on his horse; I had one foot in the stirrup, and the other on the horse's neck, holding myself on the saddle with one hand in front and the other behind. For where we were, there was no surgeon or any other sort

> of help. I travelled the whole day in this state, like a gipsy, until I got here (which is about halfway). When we dismounted, Fr Jona—who is a giant—carried me in his arms into the inn, indeed right into the bedroom, and looked after all my other needs—and this with a charity and cheerfulness to match his size.

It was quite normal to travel in a state of fever or injury.

The Two Pilgrims, Jacques Callot (1592/3-1635)

It is thus no wonder that people often lost their way; they were in a weakened state, and they were frequently unfamiliar with the territory. Lorenzo Maggi tells us, with some irony, about an adventure he had in September 1558:

> We left Rome on the 20th of this month. We made a good beginning to our journey: we took two detours of some nine or ten miles,

> having been misdirected by people we had asked about the route. If it had not been for two men, friends of ours whom we had met in a thick wood, who took us along with them, we would have landed back in Rome that evening when we had expected to reach Borghetto. . . .
>
> Friday morning we left Amelia and set off for Perosa. When night fell, we were still on horseback. Then we lost the way, and therefore had been wandering around by moonlight for some five or six hours before we got to the inn. In order to calm us down further, the landlord took his time about answering us. After many insults and mutterings, in the end 'he filled the hungry and gave rest to the weary'.

Rain was one of the worst tortures: the theme recurs insistently, obsessively, in the correspondence. We can cite one vivid example, from a Jesuit in Milan in 1565:

> . . . on the same day, that group of seven who are off to France turned up. They were in good health, but tired, and under strain from the heavy rains that we have been having in these days. Not far from here, two of them had spent the whole night in the open air, marooned on an island the size of a small room between two branches of a river. They had not been able to get across the second branch because it had become very deep; nor could they turn back because of how the branch they had already crossed had swollen up.

Rivers, indeed, often played cruel tricks. Gian Filippo Casini tells us about what happened to him and a companion:

> We had to cross two rivers by boat. At the second, there was a great danger that we would lose Brother Michael. He had already crossed the first one with some others. The drivers had refused to let us travel together, nor could we wait for each other. Thus it was that he was crossing the second river while I, along with some others, was crossing the first. At that point the two others were already submerged to their neck (the boat was still giving them a bit of support), while Michael had grabbed hold of a cord that was suspended between the two sides of the river, and was travelling by this means, though even for him the water was up to his chest. He was in this way dragging the boat and getting it to move across, with the other two inside it. So it was that Our Lord saved these two

> through Michael's means—the boatman had already swum away in flight across the river. After that we all prayed, along with those whom he had helped. No-one had wanted to go into the water, given the size of the river. But, when human help had been lacking, divine help supplied.

Cassini's last point here is typical of the serenity, even joyfulness, with which these Jesuit travellers accepted their discomfort—a serenity reminiscent of Francis' *Fioretti*.

Observers of People and Places

It was not the case, however, that these travellers lived in peaceful, unrealistic detachment from everyday events. They had a sharp eye for people and places: they had a quite unusual sensitivity for what was a time of serious social upheaval. Lorenzo Maggi's letter to Laínez in 1558, already cited, tells us how,

> . . . on Sunday we arrived in Montepulciano, where the troops for the Duke of Florence were assembling (it wasn't clear where they were off to). No money was being given to the soldiers. We felt very sorry for those poor wretches: though they had nothing else with which to support themselves and their families except their own hands, they were being forced to enlist.

This kind of sensitivity to the poorer classes is, for its time, quite unusual: it might lead historians to revise some judgments about the early Jesuits and elitism.

The road was also a place from which to observe the countryside and local culture. Otto Briamont's letter, already cited, gives us some rich examples of life in the Alpine regions.

> . . . this whole region is very hemmed in. It is all surrounded by rocks and very high mountains. Anyone looking round feels that they are in a monastery shut in by very high walls—and it is quite constricted, given that in Altdorf we are no more than a day's journey from the summit of St Gothard.

He reports on the animal life, and on how it reminds him of Scripture. The blood of some of these is regarded as medicinal. Bells occasionally ring in the villages as a way of summoning the men to hunt the bears

down; the bears' heads can be seen spiked on the gates of the towns. There are partridges with feet all covered in feathers, though it is more like hair than feathers. The people, for their part, know how to feast. They have solemn banquets, with game of various rich kinds. As for drinking, each one has a medium-sized silver cup; and then there are two or three large tankards from which everyone drinks, cups that are clearly very ancient. The feasts typically end with a preparation of stiffly beaten cream and chestnuts, reminding the learned Briamont of a line from Virgil. After three or four hours—and with a final swig from the communal cups—the feast comes to an end.

Briamont is, of course, in Swiss territory. The mountain people are keen to fight against Zwingli's followers for 'the old faith'. Briamont is harsh in his judgments. Writing of Bernardino Ochino (1487-1584), a famous convert to Protestantism whose daughter was getting married at the time he was writing, Briamont expresses the wish that 'they had burnt him like they did Zwingli'. These were hard times, and people lost their sense of proportion—but we might at least remember the commitment and affection which motivated Ignatius himself to take risks in seeking Ochino's return to Catholicism.[2]

The Road and the Jesuit Vocation

The road also had a significant function within the Jesuits' formation structures. The journey was a kind of test, and served to weed out those were unsuited. At the end of April 1560, a small group of Jesuits left Rome for Vienna. On the way, or perhaps in Venice, one of the party, a Fleming called Antonio 'behaved quite unusually badly both regarding obedience and modesty'. The superiors in Rome were informed about this, and became alarmed, for they were also aware of 'other grounds for suspecting that he is not straightforward'. They told Benedetto Palmio to hold the young man in Venice, and to make him work in a hospital, 'where he can serve the poor and do penance, or else go off in God's name'. Meanwhile, some bad reports had arrived about another Fleming, Gisbert. Palmio was told either to dismiss the pair of them, or to keep them both in the hospitals, 'or else send them to Rome on pilgrimage, not giving them a penny and without their getting any financial help at all . . . one after the other, not together'.

[2] Igantius to Claude le Jay, 12 December 1545, *MHSJ* EI I, pp. 343-344.

The journey was a way in which future apostles could be tested. The various natural obstacles that have been mentioned, and the human malice they encountered, tested these men's virtue and conduct, and shaped them into people who could be sources of inspiration for others. Here is a description of a group in the early stages of a journey from Rome to Gaeta in 1559:

> . . . in the inns, we spent the time like this. Firstly, we rested together in rooms which we had been able to acquire that were separated from everyone else. Then, while some saw to the food, the rest prayed; then grace was said, and we ate in an orderly fashion. After having eaten and given thanks to Our Lord, one gave exhortation to the others. . . . On the road, in the inns, and everywhere, the brothers always proceeded decently, with great love and charity, helping each other whenever they were in need, all cheerful and good-spirited.

Auger reported on his journey to Loreto as follows:

> . . . if you knew the consolation (as God gives it to us to feel), the spirit and the cheerfulness of the brothers, I expect you would be more assured of what is said: 'whenever I am weak, then I am strong', and 'power is made perfect in weakness'—bearing in mind that we were almost all either delicate, or weak, or sick, and little used to such discomforts. We were singing psalms, litanies and other devout things, when innkeepers or passers-by would have expected us to be sorrowful.

A pupil at the college in Vienna, who later became a Jesuit, recorded some years later the impression made on him by a group that passed through the city in 1552:

> . . . their countenance was robust, tough; their hands were not white and smooth, but hardened and blackened, as if burnt by the sun. In sum, their whole physique appeared accustomed to labour and to discomfort. At the same time, there shone forth from them such learning, such liberty of spirit, such candour and such piety that all Vienna was caught up in admiration. For my part, I had the sense of having cast eyes not on ordinary people but on apostles of God.

In the end, the road was a place of ministry, of the apostolate—and very fruitfully so. It served as an extension of the pulpit or the confessional, but was more accessible, closer to people. Unexpected encounters could happen. Maggi met a generous benefactor who confided his desire to become a Jesuit; Briamont found a former diplomat who turned out to be a very useful contact; Angelo Davisi met Cardinal Vitelli in Spoleto in 1561, who offered alms very promptly, alms that were welcome owing to the prices in the inns. They also found, more significantly, people in need of spiritual help. In this way, the squares and crossroads became places for improvised instruction.

The road became a place of ministry

The long journeys often enabled ministry to happen even before people arrived at their goals. Manoel Gomes's journey to Cyprus illustrates the point. He left Rome with Clemente Pucci, a brother. Two days after their departure it was a Sunday, and he wanted to celebrate Mass. This desire, held 'despite how the sterile mountains and uninhabitable countryside protested the contrary', led them to a rural parish church, where people used to come for Mass. He celebrated Mass, preached and distributed communion; he gave alms to those who were most needy, and gave the parish priest some needed instruction. Gifts in kind flowed from the houses near the church: eggs, loaves, chickens, fruit. They were, of course, left behind with the parish priest, but they were the sign of the good things that had been planted, and of the consolation that had been felt.

They moved on, and stopped for a day and a half at Pesaro. Here they found two Jesuits from the community at Loreto engaged in ministry. They also learnt that a 32-year-old priest had a concubine, and Gomes went to confront him at home. He encouraged the priest to send the woman away, while nevertheless making sure she would be secure. He was successful, and left further help to his confrères from Loreto. They then sailed from Pesaro to Venice, and came across 'some opinions that smacked of heresy'. Personal contact led to fruitful dialogue, so much so that one of those who were behind such ideas eventually came to him in Venice to make a confession.

They sailed to Cyprus in the same ship as the Archbishop of Nicosia with his retinue. The latter remarked on how,

> . . . all his own family were sending into the ship—depending on what they could afford or what they wanted to do—baskets and strongboxes full of comforts for the sea. When he saw that we were not doing anything like that, he twice told me that I should get my stuff loaded. I replied that all our stuff was already with us on the ship; however, His Reverence and Lordship should forget any concern for our case, because we were well looked after. As indeed we were, sustained by the arms of the richest Gospel poverty, which is the greatest and richest treasure that this Egypt of ours can boast. Therefore nothing was lacking; poverty was supplying it in another form throughout the whole voyage, much more so than externally it seemed we were lacking.

Ministry during journeys always had this unprogrammed quality; it emerged from one-off encounters. During the voyage just mentioned, Gomes was aware of 'not a little fruit from our small labours' on the way to Cyprus, whether among the members of the bishop's entourage, or among the passengers and the sailors. Hatreds were resolved; theft vanished; 'the sins of sodomy that often happen on ships' were

eliminated. In short, 'this ship seemed every morning and every evening like a monastic choir'.

There are numerous examples of whole groups carrying out ministry in this way. One case must suffice here. Louis Coudret wrote to Laínez in 1558:

> . . . on our journey we preached in many places, such as Siena, Florence, Bologna, Pisa, Parma, Plasentia, with large audiences and—so it was said to us—with great fruit. . . . Whenever we saw that something was afoot in the streets, and a great crowd of people, we got down from our horses and preached. Most people listened to us willingly, even if others who were rather uncouth laughed at us and cursed us. One time, once they had heard the sermon, they left the dance and all went away.

Pierre Favre

If we were to seek out one prototypical Jesuit traveller, the obvious person would be Pierre Favre.[3] He was almost always on the road, normally on foot, occasionally on a mule. He carried some books with him, such as the breviary, and also—as of 1543—a portable altar. He had nothing other than this small luggage, and no other homeland except these roads: 'our roads', as he would call them. He lodged with friends; on the road he would spend nights in inns, in hospitals, or even in the open air. Though he was rarely alone, he was constantly exposed to dangers of all kinds. Throughout the then Empire, the roads had a bad reputation: in Savoy, the highwaymen used to disguise themselves as pilgrims in order to kidnap distinguished personages and seek a ransom; in Spain, there were similar problems. Then you have to reckon with the 'great plagues', with soldiers and their harassments, and with the political tensions. Put all that together, and you have a reasonably good picture of the reality within which Favre had to work each day.

However, what made him really suffer was not so much these exterior dangers, but rather the constant uprooting which his

[3] In this eloquent final section, Scaduto follows, more closely than we might expect, the remarkable introduction to the French translation of Favre's *Spiritual Diary* (*Mémorial*) by Michel de Certeau (Paris: Desclée, 1959), pp. 41-54. English readers may now consult *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, edited and translated by Edmond C. Murphy, John W. Padberg and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

journeying involved. When he arrived in a new country, he was alienated: the culture, the language, the ideas were not his. Gradually he would adapt—but then it would be time to pack his bag again and depart. Nevertheless, every city that he left behind left a deep mark in his heart, a nostalgia for it. They all remained present to him even as he was continuing further along his path and making new friendships.

Yet Favre often thought in terms of a deeper, less fragile unity which remained amid all the ruptures: 'the Spirit that can exile hearts from their homelands' is also the one 'who fills the face of the earth'. By moving from town to town and extending the network of his acquaintances and apostolic concerns, Favre made his own this Spirit of the whole universe. He thus ended up with the desire 'not to remain in one place, but to be a pilgrim for the whole of his life in one or other part of the world'.

He had a sharp sense of the tensions between Catholic Spain and the Protestant Rhineland. Since reconciliation was not possible, and since the Emperor who ruled both was incapable of restoring true unity, there was a need to reconstruct it in a different way: centred on the papacy, on prayer and on ministry. Favre dedicated his life to this cause: he was an agent of reconciliation, entrusted with missions from the Pope. At the same time, he recognised interiorly that there was no hope for this enterprise, humanly speaking. Yet his 'universal spirit' still sent him along a path of ecumenism: he could draw together in the same prayer the great figures of this divided Europe: the Pope, the Emperor, the King of France, the Sultan of Turkey, Calvin, Luther. In his prayer, he brought together the capital cities, both ancient and modern, that represented these opposed powers: Wittenberg, Geneva, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Moscow, Alexandria and Antioch.[4]

Moreover, the communion of saints was there to sustain him. The pilgrim was moving through a world in which heaven was interested, a world in whose history heaven played a part, a world whose tiniest details could thus take on a significance that was universal.

[4] Favre, *Spiritual Diary*, nn. 25, 33.