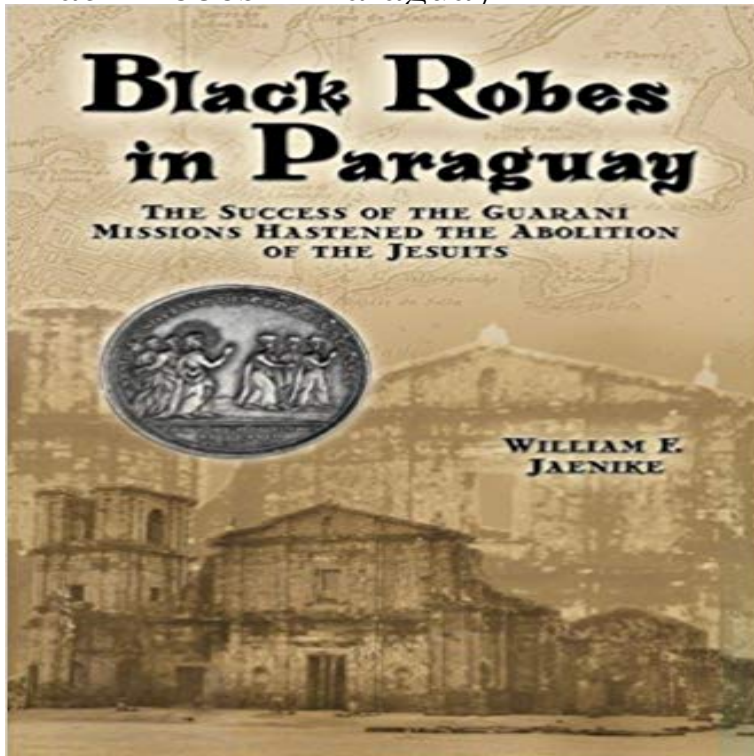


Black Robes in Paraguay



This slice of 17th and 18th century western history is a saga of love, savage violence, and betrayal that reads like fiction. While it is centered on a famous Roman Catholic order, its international and religious scope makes it of interest to armchair historians of all beliefs including Protestants, Jews, agnostics and secular humanists. In colonial South America the Jesuits established missions among the Guarani. As the Portuguese and Spanish slavers descended on Paraguay, the Jesuits sought to protect these stone-age Indians in their missions. Their resistance to the colonists attacks contributed to the political problems of the church with Catholic monarchs back in Europe. As a consequence, the monarchs pressured a frightened pope to abolish the Jesuit order. In the long, tortured history of European colonization of the Americas, these Jesuit Black Robes in Paraguay stood out as a breed apart, even from their fellow Jesuits elsewhere. Leaders of the anti-Catholic, anti-Jesuit Enlightenment such as Voltaire and Raynal rallied to the side of these extraordinary Paraguay missionaries. Raynal wrote that never has so much good been done for mankind with so little evil. Ironically, the heretic monarchs of Russia and Prussia invited hundreds of the former Jesuits to run their colleges. In doing so, they inadvertently saved these outcasts to become the nucleus around which a reinvigorated papacy would re-establish the Jesuit order forty years after its abolition.

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