



God's Soldiers: Adventure, Politics, Intrigue, and Power--A History of the Jesuits

Jonathan Wright

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Throughout history members of the Society of Jesus, popularly known as Jesuits, have been accused of killing kings and presidents, have traveled as missionaries to every corner of the globe, founded haciendas in Mexico, explored the Mississippi and Amazon rivers, and served Chinese emperors as map makers, painters, and astronomers. As well as the predictable roll call of saints and martyrs, the Society can also lay claim to the thirty-five craters on the moon named for Jesuit scientists. Jesuits have been despised and idolized on a scale unknown to members of any other religious order; they have died the most horrible deaths and done the most outlandish deeds.

Whether loved or loathed, the Jesuits' dramatic and wide-ranging impact could never be ignored. By the mid-eighteenth century, they had established more than 650 educational institutions. They were also strongly committed to foreign missions, and like the secular explorers and settlers of the Age of Discovery, they traveled to the Far East, India, and the Americas to stake a claim. They were especially successful in Latin America, where they managed to put numerous villages entirely under Jesuit rule.

The Jesuits' successes both in Europe and abroad, coupled with rumors of scandal and corruption within the order, soon drew criticism from within the Church and without. Writers such as Pascal and Voltaire wrote polemics against them, and the absolute monarchs of Catholic Europe sought to destroy them. Their power was seen as so threatening that hostility escalated into serious political feuds, and at various times they were either banned or harshly suppressed throughout Europe.

God's Soldiers is a fascinating chronicle of this celebrated, mysterious, and often despised religious order. Jonathan Wright illuminates as never before their enduring contributions as well as the controversies that surrounded them. The result is an in-depth, unbiased, and utterly compelling history.

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