

FIVE PARAGUAYAN PARAGRAPHS

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*The most beautiful victory one can
achieve is victory over oneself.*

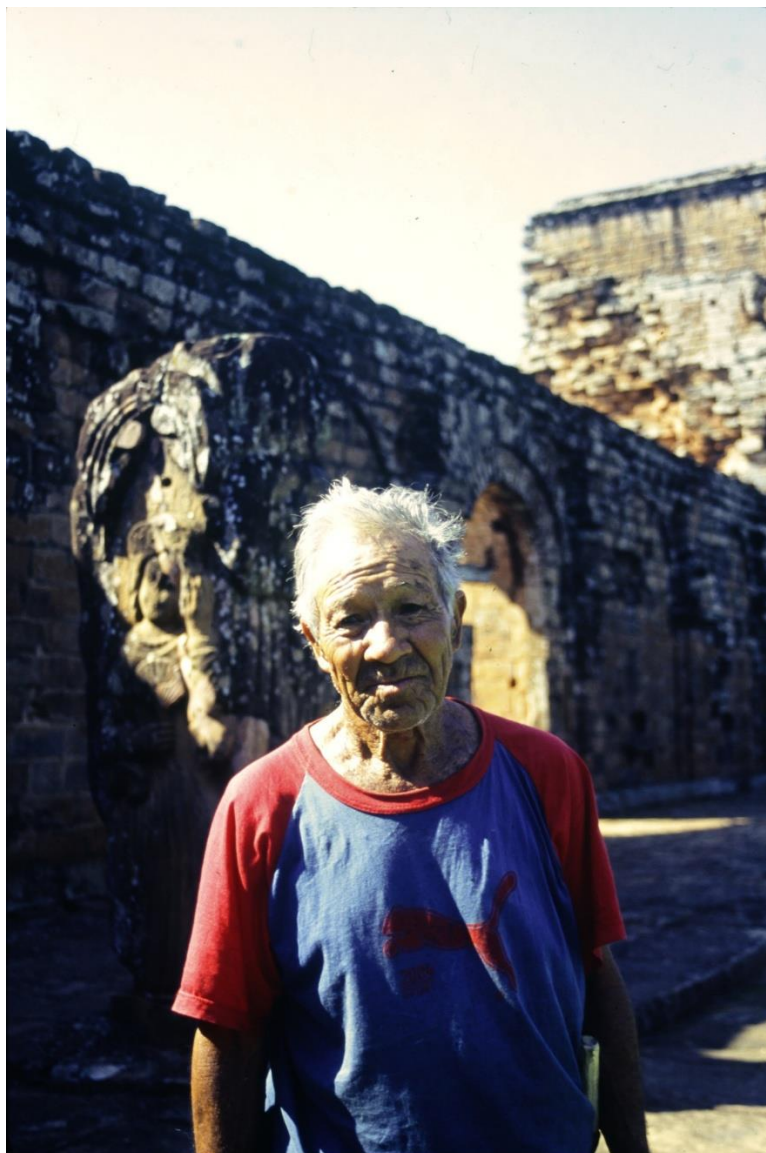
Saint Ignatius of Loyola



Jesús de Tavarangue

Little remains of the Jesuit Mission of Jesús de Tavarangue, located in the Itapúa Department in southeastern Paraguay. Being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with its sister mission, La Santísima Trinidad del Paraná, Jesús de Tavarangue is one of the country's most important historical monuments and one of the most notable architectural creations in the entire artistic collection of the Jesuits – which is the name given to the religious members of the Society of

Jesus, the religious order founded by the Spanish hero and saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1534 and approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, in the historical context of the Counter-Reformation.



Ángel, one of the Paraguayan friends I had

Along with Ángel, I remember other Paraguayan friends I had throughout my life, namely Victor Hugo, Augusto and Rubens, the only one whose full name I still can recall: Carlos Rubens Aldama, my classmate at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, studying cartographic engineering, in the 1980s. Our friendship was deep and unbroken; it lasted exactly 30 years: in the year 2010, Rubens left this uncertain and everchanging world and departed, heading for Eternity. *Requiescat in pace.*



Main access to the temple of *Jesús* and the temple itself

The construction of the architectural complex dates back to 1760, seven years before the Jesuits were expelled from Paraguay. Left unfinished, the colossal church was intended to replicate the Italian Church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in Rome. As I wrote in another place, the direct inspiration for the creation of Misiones “came from the book *Utopia*, written by the English sage, martyr and saint Thomas More (1478-1535). The same subject had already attracted the attention of the Greek philosopher Plato two millennia earlier; it is even possible to think of more ancient precursors to the idea of creating a human society living harmoniously and sharing goods. What is known for certain is that, throughout the history of culture, the *Misiones* created by the Jesuits beginning in 1609 among the Guaraní Indians were the most accomplished and lasting practical result of this same project in the history of the Americas.”¹

¹ J.V.G.O. “A utopia dos jesuítas”, in *Cidade Nova*, n. 5, São Paulo, May, 2009.



The temple, seen from another vantage point

Also called *Reducciones*, the Misiones consisted of indigenous settlements established in the New World, whose organization, urbanization, and administration were the responsibility of Jesuit priests, mostly of Spanish and Portuguese origin – all this within the context of the evangelization requested by Jesus Christ himself, therefore, still at the dawn of Christianity (Mk 16,15). Contrary to what the detractors of Spain and Portugal claim, in line with the *leyenda negra* (black legend), the fact is that the Native Americans benefited (and greatly!) from the Jesuit initiative, which they willingly joined. This is what Bolivian historian Hernando Sanabria Fernández (1909-1986) proves in his book entitled *Cristóbal de Mendoza: Apóstol de los Guaraníes*, first published in 1976, which is a bibliographical reference in line with a more recent work, from 2022, by Argentine historian Marcelo Gullo Omodeo (1963), namely *Nada por lo que pedir perdón. La importancia do legado Español frente a las atrocidades comitidas por los enemigos de España* (*Nothing to Ask for Forgiveness for: The Importance of the Spanish Legacy in the Face of the Atrocities Committed by Spain's Enemies*) – both works, let us emphasize, being fundamental references for understanding the historical truth pertaining to Latin American culture as a whole.



Asunción, capital of Paraguay

With a modest surface area of 247,000 square kilometres and lacking a coastline, Paraguay, formerly part of the Spanish Empire as a member of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, currently shares borders with Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil. If we compare South America to a vast living being, Paraguay would be situated at the height of its heart; this is why it is considered the “Heart of South America”. Combined with this central location, its strategic position in relation to the great rivers of the La Plata Basin (the second largest basin of the continent, surpassed only by the Amazon Basin) also counts, making Paraguay a natural hub for hydrographic connections between neighbouring countries, a natural facilitator of trade and transportation in general. I have been to Paraguay only once, and for a short period, but it was an experience intense enough to leave me with significant and lasting impressions, notably the kindness and warmth of the Paraguayan people.