

## The Political Testament by Cardinal Richelieu (1638)

Cardinal Richelieu also known as Armand Jean du Plessis (1585-1642), was a son of an officer of the French court and trained for the church at a young age. In 1614, he became a delegate to the Estates-General. During this era Henry IV died leaving Louis XIII, his young son king. In 1624 Marie de' Medici (Henry IV's wife) appointed Cardinal Richelieu to the council of ministers where he later became the president of the council. In 1628 Marie de' Medici appointed Cardinal Richelieu as the first minister to the French crown and as a mentor to her son Louis XIII. Cardinal Richelieu had a great influence over Louis XIII and helped guide him into adult hood where Louis XIII would be anointed king (McKay, Hill, Buckler, Crownston, and Wiesner-Hanks 529-530).

Richelieu was known by the title of the king's "Chief Minister", and could be considered the world's first prime minister. Richelieu's greatest obstacle came during the Thirty Year's War. He wanted to maintain the monarchy's position with Europe and within its own country. Richelieu concluded that the nobility was the biggest threat. The nobility ran the armies, controlled much of the land, didn't have to pay taxes and has a seat in the council. He wanted to consolidate royal power and domestic factions, by restraining the nobility's power. In 1624 he succeeded in reordering the royal council and doing away with the power brokers. After this reordering Richelieu had almost full control over the royal council. In doing this he strengthened the royal council by having royal commissioners to perform financial and judicial task for the council. In 1627 under the watchful eye of Richelieu, Louis XIII ended the Protestant military and political independence. In October of 1628 the city of La Rochelle fell to Louis XIII. Richelieu played a large role in Louis XII's life and the shaping France to be an example of absolute monarchy that other European countries will look at as an example and transformed France into a strong, centralized

state. He was also a patron in the arts. He founded the Academie fransaise and was a leading character in *The Three Musketeers* ("Cardinal Richelieu").

Cardinal Richelieu wrote The Political Testament in 1638. The intended audience in this letter was Louis XIII. This document was written to help Louis XIII in becoming a good king. Cardinal Richelieu was not expecting this document to be seen but anyone else. This document was in secret and was not even published for another half a century and only when it was taken from the Dutch.

In The Political Testament, Cardinal Richelieu told Louis XIII many helpful things about being king. He was appointed to Louis XIII's council and started to place an importance on Louis XII's affairs about the Huguenots, the Nobels and the subjects of the kingdom. He suggested that Louis XII looked beyond his own realm and into the countries and states that border France. The Nobilities are failing to provide armies and they should be treated like commoners because they are not giving all their resources and support to the crown. He also said that the commoners should stay poor because then they will realize how little they have and might the rebel. If the king takes something away from the subjects then he should give them something in return, like managing a military force but he cannot tax the subjects too heavily for it. Along with taxing for the military, Richelieu claimed that the Nobilities should be taxed more heavily than the commoners, since the Nobles have more riches. The king cannot punish too severely and cannot let the little things distract him. The king was put into power by God and therefore the king should be feared, not hated by his subjects. In the document Richelieu set a number of councilors for the inner council of the state. There cannot be more than four men at one time in the council (Wedgwood 47,121,137).

~~The document was written to help guide Louis XIII into being a good king. This document was originally only for two eyes, Louis XIII and Richelieu. Richelieu wanted to analyze what was happening~~

within the country and make the country stronger from the inside out. He also wanted France to an example for the rest of Europe. Besides this being a private document it was also an educational tool to help Louis XIII in the matters of the state.

The basic underlying assumptions that Richelieu is trying to make is that the kingdom is corrupt. The nobles are not being taxed and if the king keeps taxing the commoners then there will be an uprising. Richelieu wants the status system to stay the same and not let the commoners know how bad they have it but have the nobles take more responsibility to the crown. In the documents also assumes that the king is from God and the king has to be humble and kind.

While Richelieu has same valid points in the document, but some of the other points don't seem to be believable. Richelieu was right in saying to tax the nobles and not the commoners so much. This will eventually upset the nobles but since they have more money than anyone they should help out more with the state. He was correct in saying that they king is above everyone else, but he went too far in this saying. "A king should be feared, not hated", a king should be loved by his subjects so that they will do anything that he asks of them and not have to have much military force to make them do something. His document is very believable and could have had a lot of influence on Louis XIII and the absolutism of France.

The society in 1638 seemed to like the way things were. The nobles weren't paying any taxes and the commoners knew their place in society. The only controversy came during the Thirty Year's War when Richelieu became allies with the Huguenots and was almost found as a traitor to the Roman Catholic Church. The society in France at this time is in a transition of becoming an absolute monarchy.

This document changed the way the monarchy and the French government were in this time period. All of the other countries looked to the French absolute monarchy as a guidance. If this document had not been written I don't think that our society would be the same today. Maybe we would still be in a Monarchy of Kings and Queens where no one has any rights, but with this document became the pathway for every other form of government today.

A -  
- Excellent paper, Kristen  
- Good research, although more reading about society in general would have strengthened your analysis

## Bibliography

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- Good
- General histories of the period?
- Journal articles?