

I also made a resolution on a further matter. With a view the better to unite in myself alone all the authority of a master, although there must be in all affairs a certain amount of detail to which our occupations and also our dignity do not permit us to descend as a rule, I conceived the plan, after I should have made choice of my ministers, of entering sometimes into matters with each one of them, and when they least expected it, in order that they might understand that I could do the same upon other subjects and at any moment. Besides, a knowledge of some small detail acquired only occasionally, and for amusement rather than as a regular rule, is instructive little by little and without fatigue, on a thousand things which are not without their use in general resolutions, and which we ought to know and do ourselves were it possible that a single man could know and do everything.

I have never failed, when an occasion has presented itself, to impress upon you the great respect we should have for religion, and the

### "A Frightful Plot": The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685)

THE DUKE OF SAINT-SIMON

On October 22, 1685, Louis XIV annulled the Edict of Nantes, which had provided political and religious freedom for the French Protestants, or Huguenots, since 1598. Louis was determined to control a nation that was unified politically under his rule and religiously under his faith; Catholicism was to be the only accepted religion for the French people. The revocation was hailed by Catholics but was not without its critics even at court, as reflected in the opinion of the Duke of Saint-Simon, which follows the text of the treaty.

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, without the slightest pretext of necessity, and the various proscriptions that followed it, were the fruits of a frightful plot, in which the new spouse was one of the chief conspirators, and which depopulated a quarter of the realm; ruined its commerce; weakened it in every

"The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes" is from James H. Robinson, ed., *Readings in European History*, vol. 2 (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), pp. 288-291.

deference we should show to its ministers in matters specially connected with their mission, that is to say, with the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries and the preaching of the doctrine of the Gospels. But because people connected with the Church are liable to presume a little too much on the advantages attaching to their profession, and are willing sometimes to make use of them in order to whittle down their most rightful duties, I feel obliged to explain to you certain points on this question which may be of importance.

The first is that Kings are absolute *seigneurs* [Lords], and from their nature have full and free disposal of all property both secular and ecclesiastical, to use it as wise dispensers, that is to say, in accordance with the requirements of their State. . . .

#### CONSIDER THIS:

- What was the most important advice that Louis gave to his heirs? What does this reveal about the character of Louis XIV? What was important to him?

direction; gave it up for a long time to the public and avowed pillage of the dragoons; authorized torments and punishments by which many innocent people of both sexes were killed by thousands; ruined a numerous class; tore in pieces a world of families; armed relatives against relatives, so as to seize their

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property and leave them to die in hunger; banished our manufactures to foreign lands; made those lands flourish and overflow at the expense of France, and enabled them to build new cities; gave to the world the spectacle of a prodigious population proscribed without crime, stripped, fugitive, wandering, and seeking shelter far from their country; sent to the galleys nobles, rich old men, people carefully nurtured, weak, and delicate;—and all solely on account of religion. . . .

The king congratulated himself on his power and his piety. He believed himself to have brought back the days of the apostles, and attributed to himself all the honor. The

bishops wrote panegyrics of him; the Jesuits made the pulpit resound with his praise. All France was filled with horror and confusion; and yet there was never such triumph and joy, such boundless laudation of the king.

#### CONSIDER THIS:

- What was the Edict of Nantes? Why was it invoked in 1598 and why did Louis XIV revoke it? Was this a wise move politically? Are you persuaded by the Duke of Saint-Simon's criticism? If you accept his criticism as valid, then how would you characterize the absolute rule of Louis XIV? Was he a tyrant—or a wise monarch?

### The Sighs of Enslaved France (1690)

PIERRE JURIEU

As a result of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the persecution of Huguenots began in earnest. The author of the following memoirs cannot be positively identified, but they are probably from the pen of Pierre Jurieu, a Calvinist pastor who had fled to Holland. Louis endured much criticism from such dissidents in exile. Jurieu's memoirs are among the most provocative because they characterize Louis's absolutism as oppressive and responsible for many of the ills of France.

The oppression of the people is caused primarily by the prodigious number of taxes and excessive levies of money that are everywhere taken in France. Taxes and finance are a science today, and one must be skilled to speak knowledgeably of them, but it suffices for us to relate what we all feel and what the people know of the matter. There are the personal and [land taxes]. There are taxes on salt, wine, merchandise, principal, and revenue. This miserable century has produced a flood of names [of taxes], most of which were unknown to our ancestors or, if some were known, they were not odious because of the moderation with which they were imposed and levied. . . . It does not serve my purpose to acquaint you

with the details of these taxes so that you may feel their weight and injustice. It will suffice to enable you to understand the horrible oppression of these taxes by showing (1) the immense sums that are collected, (2) the violence and abuses that are committed in levying them, (3) the bad use that is made of them, and (4) the misery to which the people are reduced.

First, dear unfortunate compatriots, you should realize that the taxes that are taken from you comprise a sum perhaps greater than that which all the other princes of Europe together draw from their states. One thing is certain, that France pays two hundred million in taxes of which about three-fourths go into the coffers of the king and the rest to expenses

"The Sighs of Enslaved France" is from William F. Church, ed. and trans., *The Impact of Absolutism in France: National Experience under Richelieu, Mazarin and Louis XIV* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), pp. 102-105. Copyright © 1969 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Reprinted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

of collection, tax-farmers, officials, keepers, receivers, the profits of financiers, and new fortunes that are created in almost a single day. For the collection of the salt tax alone, there is a great army of officers and constables. . . .

If tyranny is clear and evident in the immense sums that are levied in France, it is not less so in the manner of collecting them. Kings were established by the people to preserve their persons, lives, liberty, and properties. But the government of France has risen to such excessive tyranny that the prince today regards everything as belonging to him alone. He imposes taxes at will without consulting the people, the nobles, the Estates, or the Parlements. I shall tell you something that is true and that thousands know but most Frenchmen do not. During Colbert's ministry [supervisor of the royal finances] it was discussed whether the king should take immediate possession of all real and personal property in France and reduce it to royal domain, to be used and assigned to whomever the court judged appropriate without regard for former possession, heredity, or other rights. . . .

How much abuse and violence is committed in the collection of taxes? The meanest agent is a sacred person who has absolute power over gentlemen, the judiciary, and all the people. A single blow is capable of ruining the most powerful subject. They confiscate houses, furnishings, cattle, money, grain, wine, and everything in sight. The prisons are full of wretches who are responsible for sums that they impose upon other wretches who cannot pay what is demanded of them. Is there anything more harsh and cruel than the salt tax? They make you buy for ten or twelve sous per pound something that nature, the sun, and the sea provide for nothing and may be had for two farthings. Under pretext of exercising this royal right, the realm is flooded with a great army of scoundrels called constables of the *gabelle* [salt tax] who enter houses, penetrate the most secret places with impunity, and do not fail to find unauthorized salt wherever they

think there is money. They condemn wretches to pay huge fines, cause them to rot in prison, and ruin families. They force salt upon people everywhere and give each family more than three times as much as they can consume. In the provinces by the sea, they will not permit a poor peasant to bring home salt water; they break jugs, beat people, and imprison them. In a word, every abuse is committed in levying this and other taxes which is done with horrible expense, seizures, imprisonments, and legal cases before the collectors and courts with costs far above the sums involved. . . .

This is how all of France is reduced to the greatest poverty. In earlier reigns, that is, during the ministries of Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin, France was already burdened with heavy taxes. But the manner of collecting them, although not entirely just, nevertheless exhausted the realm much less than the way in which they are collected today. . . . The government of today has changed all of this. M. de Colbert made a plan to reform the finances and applied it to the letter. But what was this reformation? It was not the diminution of taxes in order to relieve the people. . . . He increased the king's revenue by one half. . . .

After this, if we examine the use that is made of these immense sums that are collected with such abuses and extortion, we shall find all the characteristics of oppression and tyranny. It sometimes happens that princes and sovereigns exact levies that appear excessive and greatly inconvenience individuals, but are required by what are called the needs and necessities of the state. In France there is no such thing. There are neither needs nor state. As for the state, earlier it entered into everything; one spoke only of the interests of the state, the needs of the state, the preservation of the state, and the service of the state. To speak this way today would literally be a crime of lese majesty [treason]. The king has taken the place of the state. It is the service of the king, the interest of the king, the preservation of the provinces and wealth of the king. Therefore the king is all

and the state nothing. And these are no mere figures of speech but realities. At the French court, no interest is considered but the personal interest of the king, that is, his grandeur and glory. He is the idol to which are sacrificed princes, great men and small, families, provinces, cities, finances and generally everything. Therefore, it is not for the good of the state that these horrible exactions are made, since there is no more state. . . .

This money is used solely to nourish and serve the greatest self-pride and arrogance that ever existed. It is so deep an abyss that it would have swallowed not only the wealth of the whole realm but that of all other states if the king had been able to take possession of it as he attempted to do. The king has caused himself to receive more false flattery than all the pagan demi-gods did with true flattery. Never before was flattery pushed to this point.

Never has man loved praise and vainglory to the extent that this prince has sought them. In his court and around himself he supports a multitude of flatterers who constantly seek to outdo each other. He not only permits the erection of statues to himself, on which are inscribed blasphemies in his honor and below which all the nations of the earth are shown in chains; he causes himself to be represented in gold, silver, bronze, copper, marble, silk, in paintings, arches of triumph, and inscriptions. He fills all Paris, all his palaces, and the whole realm with his name and his exploits, as though he far surpasses the Alexanders, the Caesars, and all the heroes of antiquity.

#### CONSIDER THIS:

- What were some of Pierre Jurieu's criticisms concerning Louis's reign? In his opinion, how was France "reduced to the greatest poverty"?

#### THEME: THE POWER STRUCTURE

### THE ARCHITECTURAL FOUNDATION

#### *The Palace of Versailles*

In 1661, Louis XIV began construction of his famous palace at Versailles, about 20 miles from Paris. By 1668, two shifts of laborers were working constantly, and by 1682, enough of the palace had been completed to warrant Louis's move from Paris. Amid the construction that continued until 1710, Louis lived, along with most of the French aristocracy, entertaining lavishly and administering the affairs of state.

The expense of the palace was indeed a concern, especially to Jean Colbert, who supervised the royal finances. Still, in 1665, Colbert did not doubt that such a venture was an essential component of Louis's monarchy. In the second selection, Louis himself reveals the necessity of a palace on such a scale as Versailles.

#### *"A Celebration of Greatness"*

JEAN COLBERT

If Your Majesty desires to discover where in Versailles are the more than 500,000 ecus spent there in two years, he will have great difficulty

in finding them. Will he also deign to reflect that the Accounts of the Royal Buildings will always record the evidence that, during the

"A Celebration of Greatness" is from Gilette Ziegler, ed., *The Court of Versailles in the Reign of Louis XIV*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1966), p. 26. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

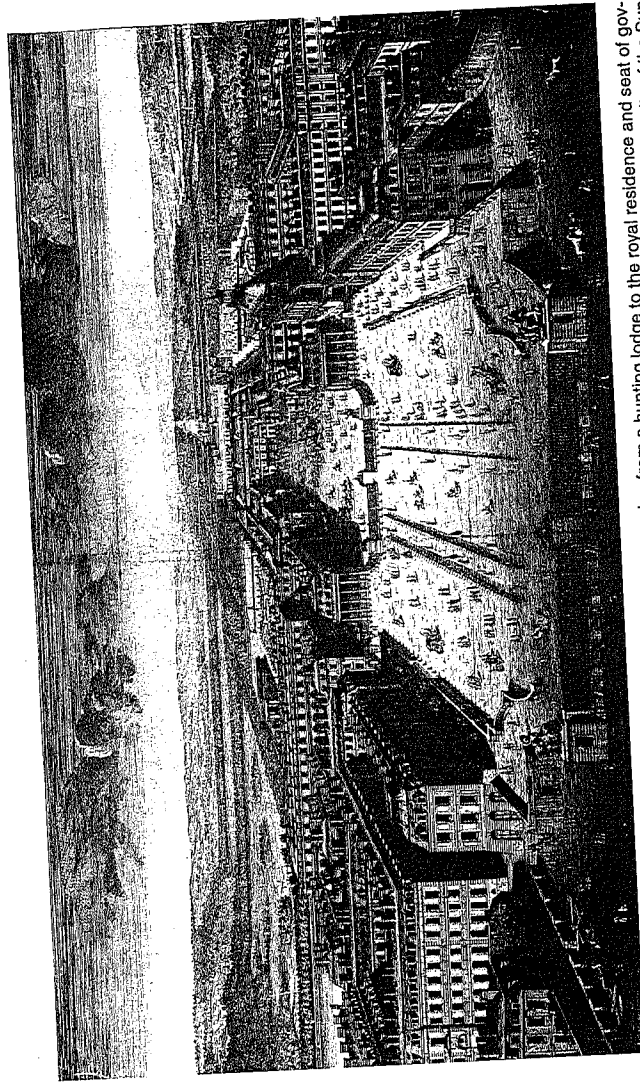


FIGURE 2.4 The facade of Versailles as it appeared after its expansion from a hunting lodge to the royal residence and seat of government (ca. 1682). A center of culture, the palace also served as propaganda, being symbolic of the absolute authority of the Sun King. From "Great Palaces of Europe" (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1964, pg. 47). British Museum

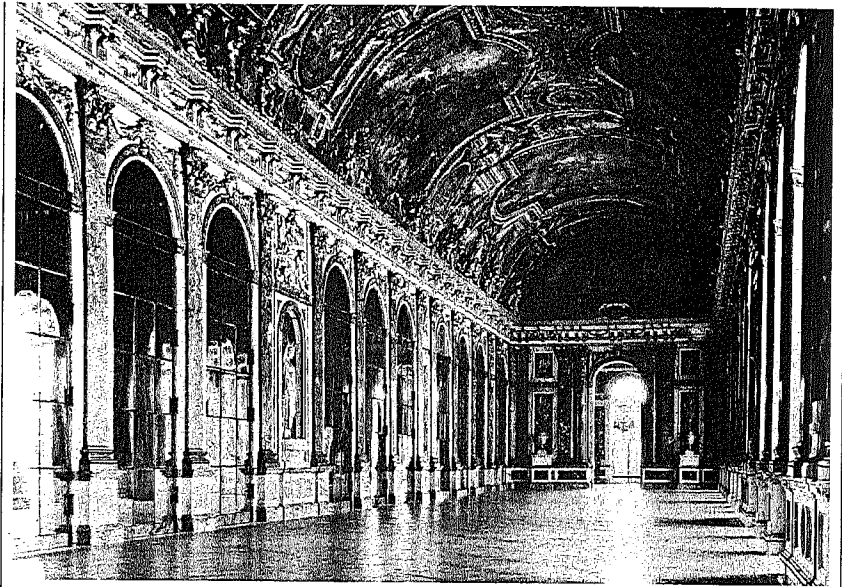


FIGURE 2.5 The Hall of Mirrors in the palace of Versailles. (French Government Tourist Office)

time he has lavished such vast sums on this mansion, he has neglected the Louvre, which is assuredly the most superb palace in the world and the one worthiest of Your Majesty's greatness. . . . And God forbid that those many occasions which may impel him to go to war, and thus deprive him of the financial means to complete this superb building, should give him lasting occasion for regret at having lost the time and opportunity.

Your Majesty knows that, apart from glorious actions of war, nothing celebrates so advantageously the greatness and genius of princes than buildings, and all posterity measures them by the yardstick of these superb edifices which they have erected during their life. O what pity were the greatest and most virtuous of kings, of that real virtue which makes the greatest princes, to be measured by the scale of Versailles!

### *Visible Majesty*

KING LOUIS XIV

Those who imagine that these are merely matters of ceremony are gravely mistaken. The peoples over whom we reign, being able

to apprehend the basic reality of things, usually derive their opinion from that they can see with their eyes.

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CONSIDER THIS:

■ Look closely at the picture of Louis's palace at Versailles. In what ways did this structure reflect the character of Louis's monarchy? According to the preceding comments about Versailles, was the palace an effective propaganda medium? Why?

THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE:

■ What was the difference between English absolutist government under Charles I and French absolutism under Louis XIV? Why were the English so unwilling to tolerate the personal rule of Charles I and the French so willing to serve Louis XIV? Note that the English fought a civil war from 1642 to 1649

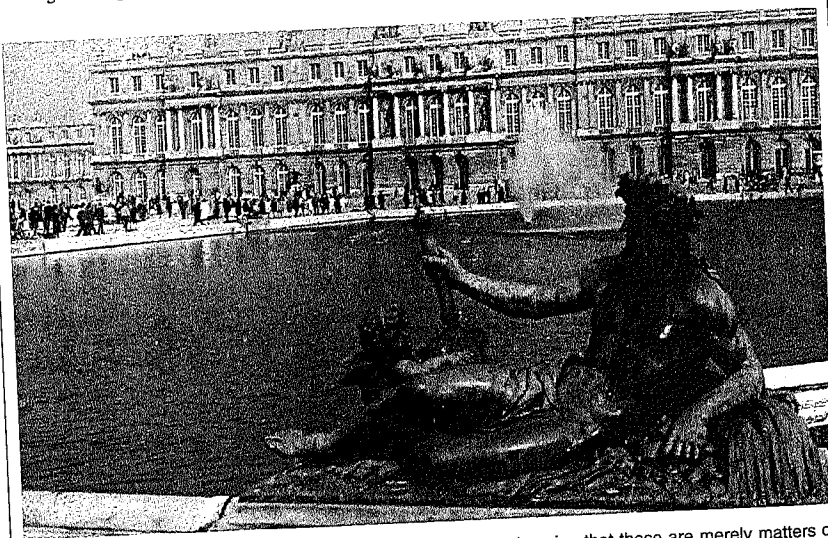
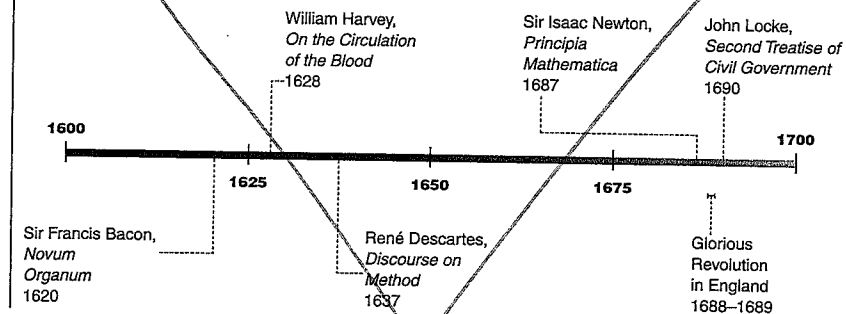


FIGURE 2.6 View of Versailles from the Gardens: "Those who imagine that these are merely matters of ceremony are gravely mistaken. The peoples over whom we reign, being able to apprehend the basic reality of things, usually derive their opinion from that they can see with their eyes." (Perry M. Rogers)

over this issue. The French monarchy collapsed in violence in 1789 at the outset of the French Revolution. What advantages did the English obtain in their competition with France by undergoing their domestic chaos earlier?

■ To what extent do you think absolute rule is a so-called natural form of government, generally acceptable to most people, especially if it is benign or even enlightened so that the best interests of citizens are promoted? Do people want a government that provides for their security and happiness but prevents the participation and personal responsibility that a democracy demands? What are your own opinions on the subject?

"DARE TO KNOW!":  
THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION



*Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has. It never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but struggles against the divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God.*

—MARTIN LUTHER

*All nature and nature's law lay bid in night / God said let Newton be and all was light.*

—ALEXANDER POPE

*The real and legitimate goal of the sciences, is the endowment of human life with new inventions and riches.*

—FRANCIS BACON

*Science has done more for the development of western civilization in one hundred years than Christianity has done in eighteen hundred years.*

—JOHN BURROUGHS

CHAPTER THEMES

- **Social and Spiritual Values:** The advancements of the Scientific Revolution were the result of a spirit of rational inquiry and confidence in the ability of human beings to understand and improve their world. Do the demands of science necessarily preclude the validity of religion? Can science and religion coexist with mutual respect and even admiration?
- **Revolution and Historical Transition:** Why do certain eras of history seem to explode with creativity and intellectual risk whereas