

The Wars of Religion

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HENRY IV

THE EDICT OF NANTES

(1598)

Henry IV (1589–1610) was the Protestant king of Navarre who led the Huguenot cause during the French wars of religion. His grandmother was Marguerite de Navarre and his mother Jeanne d'Albret, both educated and remarkably talented women. Henry achieved the French throne through a series of accidents, the last of which was the assassination of Henry III in 1589. It was clear that no Protestant could ever command the allegiance of the mass of French people or peacefully rule in the Catholic capital of Paris. Henry converted to Catholicism, defeated his enemies, and ended the long years of religious warfare.

The Edict of Nantes was the compromise settlement that granted limited toleration for the Huguenots. It was a landmark in the history of religious toleration, though its main features were watered down under Louis XIII. The Edict was finally rescinded under Louis XIV in 1685.

Henry, by the grace of God king of France and of Navarre, to all to whom these presents come, greeting:

Among the infinite benefits which it has pleased God to heap upon us, the most signal and precious is his granting us the strength and ability to withstand the fearful disorders and troubles which prevailed on our advent in this kingdom. The realm was so torn by innumerable factions and sects that the most legitimate of all the parties was fewest in numbers. God has given us strength to stand out against this storm; we have finally surmounted the waves and made our port of safety—peace for our state. For which his be the glory all in all, and ours a free recognition of his grace in making use of our instrumentality in the good work. . . . We implore and await from the Divine Goodness the

same protection and favor which he has ever granted to this kingdom from the beginning. . . .

We have, by this perpetual and irrevocable edict, established and proclaimed and do establish and proclaim:

First, that the recollection of everything done by one party or the other between March, 1585, and our accession to the crown, and during all the preceding period of troubles, remain obliterated and forgotten, as if no such things had ever happened.

We ordain that the Catholic Apostolic and Roman religion shall be restored and reestablished in all places and localities of this our kingdom and countries subject to our sway, where the exercise of the same has been interrupted, in order that it may be peaceably and freely exercised, without any trouble or hindrance; forbid-

ding very expressly all persons, of whatsoever estate, quality, or condition, from troubling, molesting, or disturbing ecclesiastics in the celebration of divine service, in the enjoyment or collection of tithes, fruits, or revenues of their benefices, and all other rights and dues belonging to them; and that all those who during the troubles have taken possession of churches, houses, goods or revenues, belonging to the said ecclesiastics, shall surrender to them entire possession and peaceable enjoyment of such rights, liberties, and sureties as they had before they were deprived of them.

And in order to leave no occasion for troubles or differences between our subjects, we have permitted, and herewith permit, those of the said religion called Reformed to live and abide in all the cities and places of this our kingdom and countries of our sway, without being annoyed, molested, or compelled to do anything in the matter of religion contrary to their consciences . . . upon condition that they comport themselves in other respects according to that which is contained in this our present edict.

It is permitted to all lords, gentlemen, and other persons making profession of the said religion called Reformed, holding the right of high justice [or a certain feudal tenure], to exercise the said religion in their houses.

We also permit those of the said religion to make and continue the exercise of the same in all villages and places of our dominion where it was established by them and publicly enjoyed several and divers times in the year 1597, up to the end of the month of August, notwithstanding all decrees and judgements to the contrary.

We very expressly forbid to all those of the said religion its exercise, either in respect to ministry, regulation, discipline, or the public instruction of children, or otherwise, in this our kingdom and lands of our dominion, otherwise than in the places permitted and granted by the present edict.

It is forbidden as well to perform any function of the said religion in our court or retinue, or in our lands and territories beyond the mountains, or in our city of Paris, or within five leagues of the said city.

We also forbid all our subjects, of whatever quality and condition, from carrying off by force or persuasion, against the will of their parents, the children of the said religion, in order to cause them to be baptized or confirmed in the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church; and the same is forbidden to those of the said religion called Reformed, upon penalty of being punished with especial severity.

Books concerning the said religion called Reformed may not be printed and publicly sold, except in cities and places where the public exercise of the said religion is permitted.

We ordain that there shall be no difference or distinction made in respect to the said religion, in receiving pupils to be instructed in universities, colleges, and schools; nor in receiving the sick and poor into hospitals, retreats and public charities.

Those of the said religion called Reformed shall be obliged to respect the laws of the Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church, recognized in this our kingdom, for the consummation of marriages contracted, or to be contracted, as regards the degrees of consanguinity and kinship.

QUESTIONS

1. Does Henry IV grant complete liberty of conscience in his edict? If not, how is freedom of religion restricted?
2. What is the position of the Catholic church under the edict?

3. *The Edict of Nantes* is often seen as a step toward religious toleration. How tolerant is it?
 4. Although the edict helped restore order to France, many people argued that it created more problems than it solved. Can you think what some of these might have been?
 5. The edict was a declaration made by the king alone, without the advice or assistance of any other governmental institution. What does it reveal about the power of the monarch? About the king's role in religious affairs?
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CARDINAL RICHELIEU

THE POLITICAL TESTAMENT

(1638)

Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal and Duke Richelieu (1585–1642), was the son of a minor official of the French court. He was trained for church service and made his mark as a delegate to the Estates-General of 1614. He was brought into the service of Louis XIII by the Queen Regent, Marie de Médicis, and eventually became the king's favorite and chief advisor. An able diplomat and a master politician, Richelieu played an important role in the consolidation of the royal state. His principal goal was to centralize administration and to harness the power of the nobility and localities. He was chiefly responsible for French foreign policy, including France's participation in the Thirty Years' War.

Written for the instruction of Louis XIII, Richelieu's *Political Testament* contains the cardinal's assessment of his own achievements. It was composed over the course of several years, with the last events mentioned dating from 1638. It was not published for another half century, and then only in a pirated Dutch edition.

When Your Majesty resolved to admit me both to your council and to an important place in your confidence for the direction of your affairs, I may say that the Huguenots shared the state with you; that the nobles conducted themselves as if they were not your subjects, and the most

powerful governors of the provinces as if they were sovereign in their offices.

I may say that the bad example of all of these was so prejudicial to the welfare of this realm that even the best courts were affected by it, and endeavored, in certain cases, to diminish

