Henry VIII And Louis XIV Essay, Research Paper

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Henry VIII and Louis XIV were both men whose accomplishments on a

national level for their respective countries of England and France were great,

but whose very different personal problems gave them a negative impression in

history.

The two leaders had very different ruling styles, but with a few similar

themes throughout. Perhaps the best thing to look at first is their very

different attitudes toward God and God?s power in monarchy and state. Henry

VIII on England grew up as a very strong Catholic, at the insistence of his

mother and father. He was known to be ?a man of daily devotionals, setting an

example for his people? (Canon 76). His own writings, most especially a book of

Catholicism entitled The Sanctoreum earned him the title from Pope Leo III the

title ?Defender of the Faith.? His book had served as an answer to the

teachings of Martin Luther, a man whose principals Henry later put into effect

in his very own country, in the Protestant Reformation.

France, however, was a very strongly Catholic country where the Roman

church had a great deal of influence. Louis, although supposed not to be a very

fastidious devote of the religion, or any religion, took part in a minor

reorganization of the Roman Catholic Church inside France. It is apparent now

that Louis basically went along with the reforms dictated by the pope in regards

to religion.

In economic matters, the two rulers perhaps differed even more greatly.

Henry was a fastidious economist, often commenting about the expense of things

at the royal court, and taking action to have whatever the latest offense to the

treasury happened to be. Louis, however, spent extravagantly, sparing no

expense for himself or his nobles. His ultimate goal was once again to make the

court of France the center of fashion and art once again. He created Versailles,

a monstrosity of Baroque art, most of it gilded with pure gold and other

precious metal. It is a sprawling country estate with an even more spectacular

exterior than interior. Louis bankrupted the Treasury of France through another

extrvangance as well: his wars. Louis fought four major wars. His great aim

was to make himself supreme in Europe. As a start, he planned to conquer all

lands west of the Rhine River. He gained several important territories, but was

always checked by the alliances that other countries formed to oppose him. In

the War of Spanish Succession, England took an important part in defeating him,

leading to animosity between the two countries and their respective rulers.

This war, which ended in 1714, left France exhausted and weakened.

Both men had a common ability to see the goodness in other men as royal

advisors. Both hired surprisingly intelligent and wise men to run their affairs

for them, perhaps Henry even more than Louis XIV. One of Henry?s chief advisors

is immortalized in Shakespeare?s ?The Life and Times of Kind Henry VIII?.

Cardinal Wolsey is spoken of there as ?a man such as history had never yet laid

their eyes upon, a man who could have others get his own will enforced?

(Shakespeare 78). Wolsey spent little time at the British court, but the time

he spent was valuable. He served as chief advisor to a young, newly crowned,

and impressionable King Henry. He formed Henry?s ideas about government, spoke

for the monarch in assembly, and reputedly taught Henry everything he knew about

economics from an early age. Two other advisors are also known to history as

serving in Henry?s later life, Thomas Cromwell and Thomas More.

Likewise, Louis XIV, in a mark of true genius, was wise enough to

appoint someone wiser than himself to run the government. He had many, and

oddly, most of their names have been erased from history. Jean Baptise Colbert,

advisor to Louis in his formative years as a monarch, later wrote in prison, ?

The man was a fool, but would not surround himself with other fools? (Olivier

178).

In their personal lives, the monarchs had a great number of similarities.

Both Henry VIII and Louis XIV were fond of women, drink, and debate.

Henry is perhaps most famous for his six wives, and the bloody ends that

most of them came to. Out of six, only two were not banished, publicly executed,

or otherwise humiliated. A quick rundown: Katharine Aragon of Spain, Henry?s

first bride. She was banished from royal view and stripped of her title after

she failed to produce sons and Henry fell in love with a young lady in waiting

named Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn: was executed for adultery and charges of

witchcraft. Jane Seymour: recorded in history as the only wife Henry truly

loved. Died a few weeks after giving birth to Henry?s much wanted son. Anne of

Cleves: Princess of Germany who was not beautiful in Henry?s eyes, and was sent

away. Catherine Howard: Commoner executed for adultery. Catherine Parr:

Outlived Henry.

Henry jousted in many tournaments until a leg injury prevented this type

of activity. He also grew quite ill and obese in later life, but never lost his

love of sports and other athletic activities.

Louis XIV liked to watch the tournaments more than he liked to actually

participate in them. But his libidinous habits did not differ much from those

of his neighbor across the Channel. He was married to Queen Marie Therese, but

reportedly had at least ten other mistresses at one time. He had three children

by his wife, but supposedly twelve other illegitimate children by his mistresses.

It was, in fact, some of these personal habits that led to the downfalls

of the monarchs.

Henry VIII, who had been the great ?Defender of the Faith? in his

earlier years, was in a bit of a dilemma. He no longer wanted to be married to

his aging wife, devoutly Catholic Katharine of Aragon. He was in love with a

young lady named Anne Boleyn. Any Catholic knows that divorce is frowned upon.

But in order to marry Anne, Henry needed this divorce. He broke from the

Catholic church, and, with the help of Thomas Cromwell, another top advisor,

created the Church of England. Unfortunately, to wipe out all cells of

opposition, Henry was forced to destroy many who did not support this break with

the Church.

Another thing contributing to Henry?s downfall was his illness. Legend

has it that Anne Boleyn?s spirit took revenge on the one who had ordered her

execution. It is more likely, according tomany modern historians, that Henry

had a virus much like that which his father died of. He suffered a painful end:

constantly coughing up blood, and crippled by a flaring leg injury. For the

last few years of his life, he was unable to govern his country well, and power

fled from England.

Louis XIV had a very different problem. His difficulty was simply that

he spent more than France could afford. Not only had the building of Versailles

severely disabled the Treasury, his extravagant spending on his various

mistresses and illegitimate children got out of hand. He was to the point, by

the end of his reign, of setting up a well-appointed and furnished estate for

each of these families. Not only that, but the Spanish War of Succession

severely crippled the treasury, and Louis never could truly raised the taxes

enough to cover his love of these ?little wars? and women.

Louis was known in Europe for being the longest reigning king in all of

modern history. He kept court at his various palaces and fought in his wars for

almost 72 years. After his cheif advisor Jean Baptiste Colbert died in 1685,

the reign of the Sun King became less glorified. He forced the noble families

to stay at court at Versailles, creating the problem of absentee landlords for

the commoners, who lived in relative poverty compared to the great splendour of

Versailles. Louis died gradually of disease, and after his reign, political

influence in France declined greatly for a number of years. However, France

remembers him in a much better way than history admires Henry the VIII.

Both monarchs suffered troubled lives, and still managed to accomplish

great things for England and France. Henry VIII raised scientific awareness and

appreciation for art that had previously been absent from England. Louis XIV

added a new dimension to the arts such as the world had never seen. His reign

was known as ranking above all others in art and literature, as well as dancing.

And yet, even today they are remembered for the most part their failings, Henry

for his matrimonial troubles and Louis for his economic extravagances. It might

do better to weigh the pros and cons of history instead of blind judgment on the

basis of few facts when thinking of Henry VIII and Louis XIV.