

Book Reviews

Bergin, Joseph. *The Rise of Richelieu*. Yale University: Yale University Press, 1991.

The Rise of Richelieu by Dr. Joseph Bergin is perhaps one of the best books on the absolutist cardinal. Bergin brilliantly breaks away from the standard Richelieu scholarship by giving detailed information on Richelieu's family, early career, and his eventual rise to power rather than other scholars who tend to start their books during Richelieu's adulthood in which he already possessed much power. Bergin believes that his descriptive biography of Richelieu will help his readers understand how a man from a weak noble family eventually rose to power and went from the Duke of Richelieu to the political fist of Louis XIII as chief minister.

The book begins by attempting to explain Richelieu's family genealogy to the reader. Bergin mentions that although modern historians and genealogists have compiled more accurate accounts of Richelieu's family there are still some problems with the information. One such problem is Richelieu hired a genealogist to rewrite his family history in order to make himself appear to be an even higher rank of nobility by birth. This introduction informs the reader of Bergin's main point of writing this book, which is to try and provide a more modern and historically accurate narrative of Richelieu's family, early life, and career in order to eliminate the misconceptions of Richelieu and his family.

Bergin discusses Richelieu's father and mother, François de Plessis and Suzanne de La Porte. The two married in order to merge their wealth and would eventually gain more wealth and influence during the French Wars of Religion. During the wars, Bergin explains how François de Plessis strategically put himself into a position to prove his loyalty to King Henri III. His loyalty was proven by staunchly supporting King Henri III when many of his nobles were declaring their allegiance to the Huguenots in southern France. Once the wars were over, François's loyalty was rewarded by a promotion to *Grand Prevot*. This promotion set François's family close to the French monarchy.

After the detailed account of Richelieu's family, Bergin then discusses how Richelieu gained so much power within a very short amount of time. Bergin explains that after finishing his theology studies in 1604, the young Richelieu was in a position to gain power fairly quickly. His family was still regarded as a loyal servant to the monarchy, so in 1608 Richelieu was rewarded by being consecrated as a Bishop of Luçon and in 1614 became a representative to the Estates-General. After this rise to power, Richelieu temporarily lost his power due to the monarchical problems occurring at this time. Marie de Medici and her son Louis XIII were both vying for power, and since Richelieu was promoted by Marie de Medici due to her position as Regent, Richelieu was regarded as being loyal to her which deemed him a threat to the young King. Once Louis XIII exiled his mother, Richelieu was also sent into exile. However, Louis XIII's favorite adviser, Duc de Luynes, died which led to Richelieu being called back into service. Bergin then explains that after this position was attained, Richelieu soon became a cardinal in 1622 due to Richelieu's strong connections with the Catholic Church which furthered his power and influence.

Bergin then discusses how Richelieu used his power to eliminate the King's enemies and helped found absolutism. He explains how Richelieu used his position to effectively eliminate the King's protestant enemies in southern France and used his persuasiveness to compel the king to develop a more powerful monarchy where the King had almost complete control. Bergin mentions that it was Cardinal Richelieu who helped create and progress the absolutist French monarchy which would later become famous under Louis XIV.

Bergin's book uses a wide variety of primary and secondary sources. His primary sources include many manuscripts and printed books from the French archives which were written by Richelieu or by the people that knew him, and his secondary sources mainly included books from other historians who wrote about Richelieu years after his death.

Dr. Bergin's book has excellent organization and flows very well. He has organized the book into different sections on Richelieu's family, early career, time in exile, and finally his rise to chief minister under Louis XIII. Bergin also includes a chronology of French history during the time of Richelieu and Richelieu's family genealogy chart which is very helpful for any reader to understand 17th century France.

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