 Absolutism 

As the Middle Ages ended, a new form of government emerged in which all power

and authority was held in the hands of a monarch. Absolutism, or absolute rule, was

based on the “divine right of kings.” This was the belief that a monarch’s right to rule

came from God, so the monarch need answer only to God for any decisions made.

The fact that Europe was in a constant state of crisis during the 16th and 17th centuries

also led to the increased power of the monarch. People needed law, order, and

stability, so it seemed logical to them that one strong ruler could provide the peace

they so desired.

The best example of an absolute monarch was Louis XIV of France. When he took

the throne in 1661, France had been in the throes of turmoil, battling religious wars

and economic problems. The nation’s two previous rulers had gradually strengthened

the **crown** by crushing revolts and stripping away the rights and privileges of the

noble class. When Louis took the throne at age twenty-three, his intentions were clear

as he said to his ministers, “It is now time that I govern myself. You will assist me

with your counsels when I ask for them. I request and order you to seal no orders

except by my command. I order you not to sign anything, not even a passport without

my command; to render account to me personally each day and to favor no one.”

King Louis XIV was also known to say, “L’etat, c’est moi” or “I am the state.”

Throughout his years of rule, he weakened the status and power of any possible

competition, including the Catholic Church and the nobility, while strengthening the

government. He awarded government jobs to people of the middle and professional

classes, both to take power from the nobles and gain loyalty from his workers. He

restructured the military and provided better leadership and care to soldiers to gain

their loyalty as well. In short, he worked to ensure that everything in France revolved

around him; earning his nickname - the “Sun King.”

1. Which definition of “crown” **BEST FITS** its use in the second paragraph?

A. a headpiece of royalty

B. the top of the head

C. an artificial tooth

D. the monarchy

2. Which of these groups held the most power before the Age of Absolutism?

A. priests C. merchants

B. kings D. soldiers

3. Which sentence **BEST** states the main idea of the passage?

A. Louis XIV made sure the army was loyal to him to stay in power.

B. Wars, crises, and strong rulers led to increased power of monarchs.

C. The Sun King was extremely powerful in France in the 1600’s.

D. In order for the king to be strong, the nobility had to be very weak.