Depictions of the Three Orders and Estates around the Year 1500

Depictions of the Three Orders and Estates around the Year 1500:

Triplex Status Mundi

By

Tomislav Vignjević

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Depictions of the Three Orders and Estates around the Year 1500:
Triplex Status Mundi

By Tomislav Vignjević

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3323-9
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3323-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

We live at a time when we still continue to speak of the first, second and third worlds, about the middle, upper and lower classes, or about first, second and third-rate things. The triad structure is still rooted in our way of thinking, just like the division of society and the world into stratifications, positions and classes. Obviously contemporaneity has also brought with it a new awareness of the past and the meaning that we attach to it continues to gain precedence. The question of how the present time depends on the representational patterns of the past – their active influence on contemporaneity – is of course very complex and can not be defined in brief terms.

The view of the past is always constitutively defined with the interest of the interpreter. "An observer of the past (i.e. a historian) is not forced to simply repeat what has already been done in a manner that is determined by the object. Each subsequent commentator [....] brings with him a multitude of concurrent interests that interact with the historical features of what he is observing."[1] Of course, in the interaction between the contemporary interpreter and the past, one of the key points of consideration is precisely the objectivity of the historical fact. Aaron Gurewich has written that contemporaneity authorizes the research of the past to restore the past, grants value to cultures that no longer exist, revives their ideas and emotions, although we must also be aware that the total and complete reconstruction of their spiritual world is an ideal, a research utopia. And in this sense, all historical reconstruction is only contemporary construction.[2]

Our interest in social division and stratification and their actuality in our time also pose questions about the former forms of these divisions, and it seems that the dependence on the basic models of social division has survived the many acquisitions of modernity and its emancipatory activities. An analysis of past mental patterns tells us much about their actual or potential foundation, their functioning in describing, concealing and distorting the image of actual affairs and their part in the formation of the ideas that constitute reality.

---

[1] Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking. Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 14.

[2] Aaron Gurewich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9.

This book is dedicated to the cultural model, which defined European society for centuries. What is surprising is the simplicity and efficiency with which it shaped the mental ideas of the time, and the fact that its existence extended into the period in which it acted as an anachronistic but nevertheless widespread remnant of the past. The mental pattern of the three orders of society found its reflection in pictorial representations, and precisely these, as well as their mass appearance in the 15th and 16th centuries, represent the starting point of this book. At the same time, its goal is to explain how they defined or mirrored social reality and how the ideas of the society or certain groups of the time were realised through them, at a time when they were already anachronistic.

The subject of the three orders and the division of society in the Middle Ages and at the transition into the new century has already been dealt with thoroughly by historiography. In addition to Georges Duby's core book, Ottavia Niccoli, Giles Constable and Otto Gerhard Oexle devoted much attention to this subject in articles or books, and have already explained many facts and mental structures to do with the fundamental questions on the three orders and the division of society. The matter, however, is quite different within the history of art. Here, only a brief discussion by Wolfgang Kemp typically entitled *Du aber arbeite* dating from 1974 is available, which is devoted to this issue in its entirety. All other articles deal with the topic only in part, explaining this or that artwork, or addressing purely formal questions. Thus, we are faced by a plethora of depictions that have not been dealt with in a systematic manner, whose abundance already points to the importance of the division of society into orders, estates and other groups during the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. The depictions of the division of society were, of course, closely linked to the social situation of society at the threshold of the Early Modern Period, with its ideological ideas and visions of its own structures. The idea of a period of crisis within European history seems to offer itself of its own accord in the description of this period, within which new discoveries, the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy, the rise of the townspeople, and much social unrest and resistance, all contributed to the extremely dynamic and multilateral but also contradictory nature of this transitional period. Therefore many very diverse and contradictory mental ideas and ideologies tied to different systems are clearly reflected in the depictions of the estates and orders. The presentation or revival of the ideology of the trifunctional scheme of the three orders can be found in texts and depictions, while at the same time also depictions that visualised the social divisions in the given period more precisely and appropriately. The significance of the estates, orders and other forms of social division and segmentation did not become

any less topical with the obsolescence of medieval hierarchical ideas, given that society continued to divide and stratify. Some researchers of this period point out that the estates only gained and consolidated the character of solid division and grouping into estates, orders and other forms of social systems of exclusion and division (professional, for example) with the Early Modern Period.

Pictorial depictions therefore testify to some kind of competition, variety and mutual opposition of the different ideological systems, mental ideas and visions of social division. The manifold nature of the subject quite clearly presents us with a diversified, sometimes contradictory, and above all, highly variable and dynamic competition of various visual schemes, which were used by the painters and their advisers to visualise the social structures and system of the time. We often find archaic images of the three orders in these depictions that appeared in the European mindset for the first time in the 9th century. This trifunctional scheme most often completely excludes the burgher and provides a vision of social division, which still fully corresponds with the feudal pattern of division into those that pray, those that protect, and those that labour.

At the same time, there are also other depictions that mark the burgher with an unacceptably more pronounced role, or contain elements of criticism in their interpretation, even calling into question the justifiability and validity of social hierarchy. The diversity and variety of these depictions is an unequivocal indication of the various ways in which society and its structures were seen, to which much reflection was devoted during the 15th and 16th centuries. It is precisely this fact that is a fundamental feature of the visualisation of social division, since almost no such depictions can be found in the Early and the High Middle Ages. They make an extremely rare appearance, which can be attributed to the obvious and unproblematic acceptance of the feudal order that only began to lose its control and significance in the Late Middle Ages. A clear indicator and result of these frictions, along with the introduction of a new monetary system, are also the many town and peasant uprisings that testify to the conflictive nature of the social relations among the estates and orders at the end of the Middle Ages. The fact is that the art of the time most clearly reflects the basic characteristics of the transitional period, such as social mobility, diversity of interests, mutual struggles for rights and privileges that belonged to each individual estate or order, social uprisings and the codification of affiliation to the various estates. Numerous depictions of social division and the orders provide us with indisputable proof of the topicality of social division and stratification in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Their variance, the different models of social segmentation that they visualise and the contradictory notions of the division of the estates, reveal the ways in which individual systems responded to the social challenges and the changes of that time. The scheme of the three orders therefore preserves a conservative view of the role and significance of the orders. It tries to prove to the viewer that the role of the third estate is merely to labour, whereas the dominance of the clergy and the nobility is completely indisputable. The towns people are usually excluded from this triad, and it is precisely its absence that tells us much about the role in which the first two estates tried to keep it. It is included in the *laboratores* order, which is mostly presented with the images of farmers performing work in the field, clearly showing the tasks, duties and rights of the third order into which the burghers are also subsumed. *Triplex status mundi*, the title of this book, is taken from the title of the frescoes in the Ptuj parish church in Slovenia, dating from the end of the 15th century. It represents the triple position, the three estates or orders of the world, and this image also proves that the trifunctional idea of the division of society was truly present in many parts of Europe at around 1500. It is about the variety and the plentitude of iconographic types, ideologies and divisions in the visualisations of the three orders that is main concern of this book.

THE DEFINITIONS OF THE ESTATES IN SOCIETY

The society of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period tended towards an explicit hierarchy in the way it saw its own segmentation and structure. The notion of dividing society into estates permeates every, political or theological, reflection on society in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. The division into individual estates, orders and groups determined every aspect of the role and position of the individual in society. "The words *estate* and *order,* almost synonymous, designate a great variety of social realities…[important] is the conviction that every one of these groupings represents a divine institution."[3] With the placement into a certain estate, every person was granted a solid position in the divine order. During this period, people were not perceived as individuals but more as members of a community that surpassed the individual. The placement into any particular estate therefore fundamentally defined one's social role.

The society of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period understood itself as a society of estates, in which every individual became a member of an estate through birth or privilege. On the basis of this affiliation, he had certain requirements and life opportunities that were the "monopoly" of each individual estate.[4] Each estate was differentiated "through its participation in political rule, how it founded its material life and its specific prestige (honour)."[5] This arrangement understood itself as a system of social harmony and the equalisation of the interests of the individual estates, but it was actually nothing more than a system of social inequality that concealed growing social conflicts.[6]

Very eloquent is the story of the German word *Stand*, which stems from the verb *stehen* (stand), and denotes the act, place and mode of standing It is formed by analogy from the Latin word *status* (from *stare*), which

---

[3] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 57.

[4] Richard van Dülmen, *Entstehung des frühneuzeitlichen Europa. 1550-1648* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1982), 102.

[5] Jürgen Kocka, *Stand – Klasse – Organisation. Strukturen sozialer Ungleichkeit in Deutschland von späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert in Aufriß*, in *Klassen in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, 1979), 138.

[6] van Dülmen, *Entstehung*, 103.

corresponds to the German *stat*. From the 14th century, *stant* appears in the sense of status, rank, but also refers to a number of other meanings, such as "arrangement", "country", "empire": *stant* (estate) and *stat* (country or state) are not always used specifically. The two meanings only gained distinction in the Modern Period. The words *stant* and *stat* correspond to the semantic definition of the words *status*, *conditio*, *dignitas*, *genus* and, above all, *ordo.* The usage of the word *stant* in the Late Middle Ages corresponds to the term *orden*, *ordenunge* as well as *wesen*.[7]

The fundamental idea of the estates was indicated in the works of the scholars of the 9th and 10th centuries, who divided society into three estates: *oratores, bellatores* and *laboratores*. This basic scheme, which, however, was not the only or most widespread, was differentiated in the 12th century, when an active group of the burghers established itself, ranging from rich traders to craftsmen, masters, etc.

It is probably no coincidence that in the late 13th century, that is, during the period in which new forms of representation of the people appeared in the form of the estates, new political notions and ideas also formed. Following a clear and fairly justified division of political ideas and theories in the Middle Ages developed by Walter Ullmann,[8] political representation and perception of the social legitimacy of authority in the Middle Ages are essentially divided into two basic concepts.

The first and more influential is the theocratic, whose entire validation and justification of authority is exercised through the existence of God, who appointed all the rulers in the world, and these embodied his power and authority. Already St Augustine wrote that God provided humanity with laws through the mediation of the kings, and Thomas Aquinas expressed the same idea with the notion that power "descends" from God. Ullmann called this dominant theory the "descending thesis of authority" since all authority is received "from above", that is, from God.

Opposite to this was the original thesis, which was already known by the Germanic peoples, but the theocratic doctrine completely supplanted it in the first centuries of Christianity. According to this, the people are obliged to legitimise authority and authority is founded on the broadest strata of the

---

[7] Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Stand, Klasse*, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, 6. vol. (Stuttgart: Clett-Cotta Verlag, 1990), 156.

[8] Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970); cf. also Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550. An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1980), 135-37.

community in the form of a pyramid. Since authority stemmed from the people, it was precisely the community that conferred authority and power.

According to Ullmann, the history of political ideas in the Middle Ages is primarily the history of conflicts between these two governing theories. The "rising" scheme soon disappeared, and it is probably not a coincidence that it reappeared at the end of the 13th century, that is, exactly at the time when political estates were being formed and political bodies were taking shape, which at least partially expressed the will of the people and endorsed the decisions of royal authority.

Medieval society was divided into orders, which is otherwise a very common form of social stratification. Such a society consists of a hierarchy of levels that do differ among themselves not only by the success and prosperity of its members, and their role in production, but also by the importance, prestige and honour attributed to them by society and which can lack a connection to any production of goods. Each society of estates is based on a consensus, a tacit agreement that places one social group at the top of the social hierarchy.

Such a system can function for a very long time, irrespective of the conditions that caused it to occur. Its existence also depends on the interest of all in preserving the social order; on the fear of the dangers caused by the change in regulation; on the habit that makes it difficult to imagine any other social order; on the connection that is gradually formed between the social order and an integrated system of ideas and beliefs that rationally justify the system; and on the efforts of the ruling group to try to preserve the circumstances that defined the emergence of a certain type of social stratification. Social groups are ranked by their proximity or their distance from the social functions and lifestyle of the dominant group, as well as the quality of services that they offer to that group.[9]

In political thought, the organicistic definition of social community prevailed, according to which Christian society was defined as *corpus mysticum*; it was conceived as a human body with a head and limbs and divided into individual segments. The state is similar to an organism and its members are its organs. The organic whole of the political body, as was most clearly expressed by John of Salisbury (ca. 1115–1180) in the work *Policraticus*, the most important theoretical tract on the state before the discovery of Aristotle's *Politics* in the second half of the 13th century, requires the cooperation and complementarity of all the estates from which

[9] Roland Mousnier, *Les hiérarchies sociales de 1450 à nos jours* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), 19-20.

it is composed. [10] Any disagreement and struggle between the two – according to the medieval thinkers – threatened the whole world order.[11] The Middle Ages took on the organic definition of society as a body from the antiquity, and in many of the texts which elaborated on this system, different parts of the body (the head – usually the king, the soul – the clergy,...) held very different meanings, simply depending on the author's point of view. The legs were always equated with the labouring estate as for example in the treaties (1057) by Humbert of Silva Candida, a monk from Lorraine, who became a cardinal and was one of the main representatives of the Gregorian reform. His text links the organicistic theory with the trifunctional division of society: "The clerics' order is the first in the body, just like the eyes are the first in the head. The Church was the one the Lord spoke about when he said, "He who touches you, touches the pupil of my eye (Zechariah, 2.12)." The secular authority is like the chest and arm, whose power is used to obey the Church and defend it. Regarding the masses that resemble the lower extremities and limbs of the body, we can say that they are subordinate to the church and the secular authorities but are at the same time also absolutely necessary to this authority."[12] The principle of social inequality was derived from this organic definition of society, which was reflected in a hierarchically progressive social structure, and the principle of mutual interdependence between the ruling and those being ruled over. The organic definition of society was useful for a wide variety of purposes. Both the royal and the Church side used it in the argumentation of the entire medieval dispute over the superiority of *regnum* or *sacerdotium*.[13] The principle of the necessary participation of all individual segments was supposed to be applied in the superior whole of the state. The definition of the social order was based on Augustine's definition of *ordo*: »Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua loca tribuens dispositio.« (*De civitate dei*, 19, 13).

In this organic definition of society, the legs (farmers and craftsmen), are indispensable for the functioning of society, yet physical work in the

[10] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[11] Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Das Weltbild des mittelalterlichen Menschen* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag , 1986), 62.
[12] Jacques Le Goff, "Head or Heart? The Political Use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages", in *Fragments for the History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher (New York. Zone Books, 1989), 16-17.
[13] Tilman Struve, „Bedeutung und Funktion des Organismusvergleichs in den mittelalterlichen Theorien von Staat und Gesellschaft", in *Soziale Ordnungen im Selbstverständnis des Mittelalters*, ed. Albert Zimmermann (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter Verlag, 1979), 152

Middle Ages, despite the emphasised value attributed to it by St Benedict, is most often defined as downgraded and attributed to the servant's nature. This mentality was clearly expressed by Ratherius of Verona, who wrote in the mid-10th century: "Labor vero magis servituti quam libertati videtur congruere" ("it seems that work belongs more to servitude (slavery) rather than to freedom"). Therefore, the word *servi* was used in the Middle Ages to mark all those who performed physical work. The negative evaluation of human work, especially physical, emphasized the dual meaning of the word *labor* – work and suffering.[14] Similarly, the general division of those that were free and not free – *potentes* and *paupers* – into two large groups was also widespread. The rulers were therefore given the reign over the multitude of people that were not free.

The disagreement between the individual parts of society or the body was described as very harmful and dangerous. It should be noted, however, that social struggles and uprisings in the Early and High Middle Ages did not generally contradict the meaning and functioning of the social order and did not attempt to change the principle of the structure of the society as a whole. They only tried to correct the boundaries between the estates, change the distribution of privilege in individual parts, and deprive the neighbouring estate of certain social or political rights. The struggle of the estates did not in any way attempt to undermine the entire segmentation of the estates.

The society of estates was metaphysically founded. The central notion for understanding the society of the estates – estate or *ordo* – was a metaphysical term. Medieval reflection on the estates or the appropriate organisation of society was the reflection on order in general, about the world as a whole, about how its diversity makes up a formed whole, the cosmos. Reflection on the estates is therefore rooted in metaphysics and stems from the assumption that the world is given by God and that it is a successful arrangement of a whole, whose individual parts differ in their mutual relations only by level and are therefore unequal. That is precisely why the parts are congenially combined into a harmony of the whole. The fundamental principle of this world is therefore harmony within inequality. St Augustine described this segmentation concisely in the work *De libero arbitrio* (*On Free Choice)*: "…, ordinem creaturarum a summa usque ad infimam gradibus iustis ita decurrere…"[15]

---

[14] Tilman Struve, „*Pedes rei publicae.* Die dienende Stände im Verständnis des Mittelalters," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 236, no. 1 (Feb. 1983): 5.

[15] St. Augustine: *De libero arbitrio*, III, IX, 24; cf. Otto Gerhard Oexle, „Die funktionale Dreiteilung als Deutungsschema der sozialen Wirklichkeit in der ständischen

The division into estates can already be found in Plato's *The Republic* (415 a-d, 434 b-c), where the three estates, even though fraternally connected, are strictly separated into the group of rulers, whose blood is mixed with gold, the group of protectors, or soldiers, with silver in their blood, and the estate of craftsmen and farmers, whose blood contains iron. Each of these three estates has a task to perform. The first two estates are wise and brave, whereas the third estate, which maintains the first two groups, is industrious. However, Plato's *Republic* was not known in the Middle Ages and his ideas were spread only with Calcidius' translation of *Timaeus*, which influenced many thinkers.[16]

Georges Dumézil's [17] trifunctional hypothesis of social classes, that is, the division of the entire society into three orders, which differ in their fundamentals and complement each other according to the function they perform, was according to his theory regarded as the basic ideology of the Indo-European peoples. Some researchers contradict the theory of Dumézil, claiming that the trifunctional scheme is typical for all peoples that achieve a certain development of civilization at a lower level. Other researchers, such as Arnaldo Momigliano, completely reject the idea of the Indo-European origin of trifunctional division, believing that it is a Christian division based on triplicity – the Holy Trinity, division into three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa) and the division of time into the past, the present and the future. Momigliano claims that there is no original Indo-European mentality. According to him, the religions of the Indo-European world are not linked by a common mentality (trifunctional or any other).

There are, however, some Latin, Scandinavian and Celtic texts in which the gods or society are occasionally divided into three groups that are in one way or another connected to the clergy, war and manufacture. Yet, many other documents pertaining to each Indo-European group have been preserved, where there is no indication of trifunctional division. Momigliano contests the existence of any trifunction in Rome, he wonders whether these divisions in some other Indo-European societies are not determined by the situation in the societies themselves and not by an original Indo-European mentality. Feudal society better meets the requirements of Dumézil's trifunction than Roman society, but this is

---

Gesellschaft des Mittelalters," in *Ständische Gesellschaft und soziale Mobilität*, ed. Wienfried Schulze, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), 20-22.

[16] Giles Constable, "The Orders of Society," in Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 289.

[17] Georges Dumézil, *L'Idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens,* (Brussels: Collection Latomus, 1958).

probably due to the combination of Christianity with feudalism. According to Momigliano's opinion, the Middle Ages are trifunctional because they are Christian.[18]

In any case, Gaius Julius Caesar wrote in the work *Commentaries on the Gallic War* (*De bello Gallico*, VI, 13-15) that only three groups of inhabitants exist in Gaul: ". Throughout all Gaul there are two orders of those men who are of any rank and dignity; for the commonality is held almost in the condition of slaves, and dares to undertake nothing of itself, and is admitted to no deliberation. ...] But of these two orders, one is that of the Druids, the other that of the knights. The former are engaged in things sacred, conduct the public and the private sacrifices, and interpret all matters of religion. [...] The Druids do not go to war, nor pay tribute together with the rest; they have an exemption from military service and a dispensation in all matters. [...] The other order is that of the knights. These, when there is occasion and any war occurs, are all engaged in war."[19]

A new fundamental division of society emerged with Christianity, one that separated it into two large groups – the clerics and the laymen. Its spiritual and religious justification rested on the maxim of the *New Testament* "No man who is warring for [in the service of] God should be involved in secular matters."[20] and another citation based on the metaphor *militiae:* according to Paul the Apostle, those who serve the *militia Christi* are to be maintained by others (1 Cor 9,7; 2 Cor 11.8).

The notion of the clergy originally related to all Christians at the end of the 1st century, when the author of the first letter of Clement emphasised the duties of each member of the community in his estate, evoking the old military significance of the order (*ordo*) and at the same time Paul's idea of the *militia*, by which the writer placed the layman or *plebs* opposite the priests and deacons.[21] Similarly, Tertullian separated the *ordo ecclesiae* from the *plebs* in *De monogamia*. Gratian then gave this division its standard form in the 12th century in his *Decretum Gratiani:* "Duo sunt genera Christianorum. Est autem genus unum, quod mancipatum diuino

---

[18] Arnaldo Momigliano, "Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilisation", *History and Theory*, 23,(1983): 312-330.

[19] Cf. Ottavia Niccoli, *I sacerdoti, i guerrieri, i contadini. Storia di un'immagine della società*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 10.

[20] "Nemo militans Deo implicit se negotiis saecularibus" (2 Tim 2,4)

[21] Otto Gerhard Oexle, "*Tria genera hominum.* Zur Geschichte eines Deutungsschemas der sozialen Wirklichkeit in Antike und Mittelater," in *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter*, Festschrift für Josef Fleckenstein zu seinem 65. Geburtstag, ed. Lutz Fenske, Werner Rüsner, Thomas Zotz (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1984), 484.

offitio, et deditum contemplationi et orationi […] ut sunt clerici, et Deo deuoti […] Aliud uero est genus Christianorum, ut sunt laici."[22]

The allocation of the *privilegium immunitatis* and *privilegium fori* was of great importance for the creation of the clerical estate, by which the state defined the political, legal and economic privileges of clerics in the 4th century. It was precisely this transfer of state rights to the clergy that from then on formed the core of all the political privileges of the estates in the West, making the clergy an example for all the privileged estates. When monasticism came about at the beginning of the 4th century, this scheme was subject to change and a different segmentation took place. Even though monasticism was a lay movement, it did not want to be part of either of the two groups already in existence. A new scheme was therefore needed to position this new movement into society. After the Origen's *Exegesis* in Chapter 14 of Ezekiel's book, Augustine's social allegory was essential for the emergence of the scheme of three types of people – *tria genera hominum* – that is, the estate of clerics, laymen and monks. In his explanation of Psalm 36, Augustine considered division into just and unjust. These two categories (*genera*), *probi* in *reprobi*, are found in every form of life and in every estate (priests, laymen and monks).[23]

This scheme spread rapidly in the 5th century. Pope Saint Gregory the Great was particularly influential in its definition. In the *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* of 593, he wrote: "[...] "[…] tres (sunt) fidelium ordines: […] alius est ordo praedicantium, alius continentium, atque alius bonorum coniugum."[24] Even in the 12th century, in an anonymous commentary on the *High Song,* the definition of a society refers to this scheme: "Tres ordines sunt in Ecclesia: Noe, Job, Daniel. Noe doctores, Job conjugati, Daniel contemplativi."[25]

However, the history of the formation of the estates in the West with a tripartite scheme of clerics, laymen and monks was far from complete. The *tres ordines ecclesiae* or *tria genera hominum* were used in very different contexts in the 12th century. Before that, however, at least from the end of the 9th century, a second, trifunctional division of society stood by the side, which was much more influential and widespread, and which took into account new social divisions and social change. The clerics and monks joined into one ecclesiastic order of those who were consecrated and those who withdrew into solitude and followed the order. At the same time, the secular order divided into soldiers and labourers, which created the basis for

[22] Oexle, "Tria genera," 485.
[23] Oexle, "Tria genera," 488-89.
[24] Oexle, "Tria genera," 491.
[25] Oexle, "Tria genera," 491.

the second and third estate, as well as for the many professional groups of the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, which gradually gave rise to the class society of the modern era.

However, the general division into three estates of a given region remained. A typical example is the English Parliament, where the townspeople and the rural nobility were also admitted to the central parliamentary assembly from the late 13th century. The development in France was somewhat different, mainly because of the power of the monarchy, but also because the provincial estates were active in the countryside. The first meeting of the general estates (*états généraux*), the clergy, the nobility and the third estate, convened by King Philip the Fair in Paris in 1302, was held, in the same way as the subsequent sessions, mainly with the intention of obtaining the support for the monarchy during the crisis. At the beginning of the 14th century, this was a dispute with Pope Boniface. The sessions were carefully overseen by the royal *conseil d'état*, the concept of rule with the legitimacy and support of the three estates was only in its infancy.

Representative institutions before 1789 were not infrequent, since they were formed and operated throughout the West. In the majority of European countries, the 14th and 15th centuries represent the period when representative estates flourished. At that time, European parliaments were thought to be representative of the entire population, and usually included those whose name meant something in the politics of the time. The representatives of the clergy spoke on behalf of all clerics who were then a large group. Towns did often not only represent the townspeople, but also the surrounding residents. In some places, the population from the suburban rural area took part in the elections of their representatives. The nobles, in their role as territorial lords, usually represented the entire, mostly agrarian population of the time. Regardless of the composition of parliament, the nobles were an essential element of its activities.[26] The estates, as a representative institution, differed from the standard trifunctional division of society in an important fact, namely that the third estate had the right to a share of authority in the sessions, whereas the predominant thought about the third order was that their job was to work and maintain the other two orders.

All authors who have written about the social order of the time talk about hierarchy and division of the classes. The large classes were made up of orders that were downwardly divided into estates. The orders and the estates

[26] A. R. Myers, *Parliament and Estates in Europe to 1789* (London: Thames&Hudson, 1975), 26.

were accepted through a quiet consensus. The order was often hereditary and determined the individual's lifestyle, dictating his social functions.[27]

[27] Roland Mousnier, "Les concepts d' «ordres«, d' «états«, de »fidélité«, et de »monarchie absolue« en France de la fin du XVe siècle à la fin du XVIIIe," *Revue historique*, 247, (1972), 295.

THE THREE ORDERS

The scheme of the three orders (*tres ordines*) divides the entire society into three large groups: the *oratores*, therefore those who pray or the clergy, the *bellatores* (also the *pugnatores*) or warriors, and the *laboratores* (or the *agricultores*), therefore those that labour or the peasants. These three orders are closely interconnected and interdependent: the clergy care for the salvation of the soldiers' souls since they release them from the sins obtained in combat, as well as the *laboratores*, therefore the workers (at the time when this ideological division emerged, these were almost solely peasants). The *bellatores* battle and protect the other two orders, while *the laboratores* work and maintain the ranks of the clerics and soldiers.

In as early as the first half of the 9th century, Haymo, a monk in St Germain of Auxerre, mentioned the three orders in his commentary on the *Apocalypse* in verse 3.14. Here, the trifunctionality is defined in Latin as *tribus amabilis domino*. Haymo defined this triad as the three orders, known from the Jewish and Roman people. In church, these became the three "ways of life, three forms of living: clerical, military and agricultural."[28] He found the model for the formation of a trifunctional scheme in the Roman and Jewish societies: "Naturally from the three orders that might have existed among the Jewish people, just like with the Romans, the senators, the soldiers and the peasants, so the Church also consists of the same three types. Of the priests, soldiers and farmers, who are named as the three obliging ones."[29] Haymo, probably devised this division from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, which speaks of the division of Roman society into senators, soldiers and people *(plebs*), and follows the example of the division of the Roman republican society into senatores, equites, plebs in doing so.[30]

---

[28] Georges Duby, *The Three Orders. Feudal Society Imagined*.(Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), 108-9.

[29] "A tribus scilicet ordinibus, qui forsitan erant in populo Judaeorum, sicut apud Romanos, in senatoribus, militibus et agricultoribus, ita et Ecclesia eisdem tribus modis partitur. In sacerdotibus, militibus et agricultoribus, quae amabilis dicitur" Dominique Iogna-Prat, "Le "baptême" du schéma des trois ordres fonctionels: l'apport de l'Ecole d'Auxerre dans la seconde moitié du IXe siècle," *Annales*, 41, (1988), 108.

[30] Iogna-Prat, "Le "bâpteme," 108.

His disciple Heiric of Auxerre wrote in the text *On teaching the holy brothers* in Chapter XVIII of his *Vita sancti Germani*, produced in the second half of the 9th century (ca. 875) that, in addition to the *belligerantes* and *agricolantes*, there must be a *tertius ordo* of men freed of outside duties. In his address to the monks, Heiric said that they should bear the conditions of war and labour instead of others, while the monks must pray and serve God.[31] "Some battle, others cultivate the soil; you are the third order, you are the ones that God has taken into his own domain, within which, since you are relieved of outside concerns, you go even further to fulfil the tasks of his service. Others bear the difficult conditions of war and labour for you, while you, who are bound to serving Him, follow Him with the perseverance of your prayers and your service." The speech is therefore about a single order (*ordo*) of monks, distinguished by the special nature of its position.[32]

Further influential records of this trifunctional division are found in England at the end of the 9th century. In the commentary to Chapter 17 of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* [*Consolation of Philosophy*], King Alfred the Great, who supposedly also translated it, wrote that a king must have a well "populated land; he must have men of prayer, men of war, men of labor ["sceol habban gebedmen and fyrdmen and weorcmen"]; this is his tool [tolan]. "For this tool, for these three supports to the community," he must have land that gives him arms, food and clothing. "Without this, he cannot maintain the tools and without these tools he cannot do any of the things he is responsible for doing".[33]

Around the year 1000, Aelfric, the English reformer of monasticism and grammar as well as the Abbot of Eynsham, defined the trifunctional scheme three times. Firstly, in a brief explanation, which was added to the sermon of the Maccabees, in which he wrote: "In this world there are three orders, the *laboratores*, *oratores*, *bellatores*." The *laboratores* are "those who by their labor provide our means of subsistence", the *oratores*, "those who intercede for us with God", and the *bellatores,* "those who protect our cities and defend our soil against the invading army. In truth, the peasant must work to feed us, the soldier must do battle with our enemies, and the servant of God pray for us and do spiritual battle with the invisible enemies"[34] In

[31] "Alia belligerantibus, agricolantibus allis, tertius ordo estis quos in partem priuate sortis allegit, quanto rebus extrincesis uacios, tanto suae seruitutis functionibus occupandos. Utque alii uobis duras conditiones subeunt uel militiae uel laboris, itidem uos illis obnoxii persistitis ut eos orationem et officii instantia prosequamini." Constable, "The Orders," 278.
[32] Iogna-Prat, "Le "bâpteme," 106-7.
[33] Duby, *The Three*, 100.
[34] Duby, *The Three*, 130.

the Anglo-Saxon texts, he used the terms *gebedmen* for those that prayed, *woercmen* for the workers and *wigmen* for the warriors.[35]

In the third letter to Bishop Wulfstan (ca. 1003–9), he speaks of the danger of carrying weapons for the priests fighting the Danes, for there are three orders in God's Church, an order of labourers (or land workers) who produce food for us, an order of warriors who defend our homeland against attackers with weapons, and the order of the orators – that is, priests, monks and bishops – that is chosen as the spiritual army and must pray for us.[36]

Aelfric mentions the three orders for the third time in 1005–1006 in a letter addressed to Prince Sigeweard, which warns that the leaders are those who must preserve the world. "When there is too much wickedness in mankind, the counsellors must through wise deliberation seek to know which of the legs of the throne has been broken and repair it at once. The throne stands on three supports, these are the *laboratores, bellatores, oratores*." "*Laboratores*: they are the ones who secure for us the means of subsistence. Ploughmen and husbandmen are devoted exclusively to that task. *Oratores*: they are the ones who intercede for us with God… *Bellatores*: they are the ones who guard...."[37]

The trifunctional figure is mentioned shortly after 1000 also by Wulfstan, the Bishop of London and Worcester, and later the Archbishop of York. In the work *Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical*, he writes about the different social groups, morality and the responsibilities of the leaders. "Every legitimate royal throne rests on three pillars: the first is called *Oratores*, the second *Laboratores* and the third *Bellatores.* The *Oratores* are the intercessors who are to serve God and pray for all people day and night. The *Laboratores* are the workers who need to provide for the entire population to live. The *Bellatores* are the warriors who must fight with weapons to defend the land. On these three pillars, every royal throne should stand by law. And if one of them becomes weak, then the throne wavers

---

[35] Constable, "The Orders," 280.

[36] The entire passage reads as follows: "*Suscipio non latere almitatem tuam tres ordines fore in ecclesia Dei: laboratores, bellatores, oratores. Ordo laboratorum adquirunt nobis victum, et ordo bellatorum debet armis patriam nostram ab incursibus hostium defendere, et ordo oratorum, id sunt clerici et monachi et episcopi, qui electi sunt ad spiritalem militiam, debent orare pro omnibus et servitiis seu officiis Dei semper insistere et fidem catholicam predicare et sancta charismata dare fidelibus. Et omnis qui ad istam militiam ordinatur, et si antea secularia arma habuit debet ea deponere tempore ordinationis et assumere spiritalia arma....et belare viriliter contra spiritalia nequitia*". Marguerite-Marie Dubois, *Aelfric, sermonnaire, docteur et grammairien* (Paris: Droz, 1943), 212.

[37] Duby, *The Three*, 104.

immediately, and if one of them breaks, then the throne falls, and that harms the people in everything."[38] The transition from the dualist division of society of the clerics and the laymen into the trifunctional scheme is illustrated by the double division of society in *Liber apologeticus* by Abbo of Fleury (ca. 945–1004), where he divided the order of the laymen into *agricolae* and *agonistae*, whereas the clerics are broken down into deacons, priests and bishops.[39]

In northern France, this scheme was introduced at around 1020, in the two very influential texts by two bishops who both studied at Reims. Gerard served as bishop of Cambrai from 1012, where he was appointed by Emperor Henry II. In the introduction to the speech found in Chapter 52 of the book *Gesta episcopum Cameracensium* [*Acts of the Bishops of Cambrai]*, he mentions the trifunctional image of society in 1025.

In this passage, Gerard claims that there is an indelible line in human society that separates a special category, an "order" (*ordo*), whose members are intended to perform certain works for the benefit of all. In his seeing, all beings, both on earth and in heaven, are placed in different orders under one single ruler – Christ. His will is exercised by the authority in two ways: through the mediation of the priests, who pray for us, and the reign of the kings. The king as an example of the sovereign rules over both domains and is at the helm of the spiritual and secular *militiae*. He fulfils both functions – *orare* and *pugnare*. However, the third function of sustenance is implicit. A little later, Gerard's biographer cites his words: "He has proven that the human race has been divided into three orders, the worshippers, the land workers and the warriors, from the very beginning, and presented clear evidence that each is a matter of mutual concern to one side and the other."

The tree functions supplement each other and are complementary. The *oratores*, who live in sacrificial inaction required by their service, are protected by the warriors, whereas the land workers provide food for the body through labour. The peasants are defended by the warriors, whereas the priests ask God for his forgiveness on their behalf through prayer. The warriors wash the sins that they commit in warfare through the intercession of the priests and are maintained by the peasants through labour and the merchants through taxes.[40]

It is very important that this is a hierarchical image of society, which is founded on God's order or on Christ, who presides over the three orders or hierarchies like in New Jerusalem. In the hierarchical segmentation of

---

[38] Karl Jost, *The "Institutes" of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical. Ein Werk Erzbischofs Wulfstans von York* (Bern: Francke, 1959), 55-7.
[39] Struve, „Pedes", 12.
[40] Duby, *The Three*, 31-35.

society at that time, writers most often relied on the extremely important work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, an anonymous writer of the 6th century from the East, on the writings of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in which he described the world of angels, divided into three hierarchies, each with three choirs. In the writings of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, however, he described the Church on Earth, which imitates the celestial world with its orders: the triple hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons, who execute the mercy of salvation, stands opposite the three distinct groups of those receiving it, namely the monks, the members of the community and the imperfect.

The constant and all-encompassing pervasion of subordination and superiority connects all the levels of this celestial-earthly world. Each level in the hierarchy claims its part in the whole and admittance to the otherworldly God by receiving the fundamental from the superior level and passing it onto the lower hierarchy. This spiritual progression mirrors the whole human order, including the social and political, which can also be found in the microcosm of the soul. This hierarchy is a theocracy that encompasses the whole of the universe, the whole of man in his inner life and his interpersonal connections.[41]

Gerard of Cambrai mentions the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and especially Pope Gregory the Great, who himself respectfully referred to this "old, honourable father" in his writings. A hierarchical order based on obedience can also be recognised in his writings, as well as the typical synthesis of the neoplatonists Dionysius the Areopagite and St Augustine. First direct knowledge of both of Areopagite's essays was not experienced by the West until the 9th century, after emperor Louis the Pious received the gift of the documents from Constantinople in 827. He donated these to the monastery of St Denis near Paris, where they were translated, and the papal seal was imitated, supposedly proving that their author was Saint Dionysius the Bishop of Paris.

The second text from the north of France that introduces the scheme of the three functions dates from the beginning of the 11th century and is the work of Gerard's cousin, also the prominent bishop Adalberon, whose definition of trifunctionality is included in a poem addressing the King Robert of France (*Carmen ad Robertum Regem*), produced before 1031, when both the king and the bishop, who had served in Laon from 977, died. In verse 296 of the poem, which is divided into four parts, Adalberon refers directly to Gerard's work. The trifunctional scheme is found in the second

[41] Wilhelm Maurer, *Luthers Lehre von den drei Hierarchien und ihr mittelalterlicher Hintergrund*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Kl., vol. 4, Munich, 1970.

part, which speaks of the timelessness of the celestial order. Here Adalberon argues that inequality was created through divine precaution and the ruler's task is to maintain the differences between the people.

The most important thing for priests is that they are "pure and exempt from servitude". Priests must be free and must avoid depravity and physical activity. Those who are not in the ecclesiastical *ordo* are divided into the nobility, which is free and idle, and the slaves, who are subordinate and partake in *labor*, suffering and work. The first command, the second obey. These two statuses are earthly and determined by birth. "Triple is the house of God, which is thought to be one: on Earth some pray, others fight, still others work; which three are joined together and may not be torn asunder."[42]

In Adalberon's text, the influence of Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite can also be felt, since it invites the ruler in the second part of his poem to turn his gaze towards the sky to see how that which is being ruined on earth should be repaired and to follow the example of New Jerusalem. The "diversity of the orders" that are "subordinate to others because of the distribution of power" is prevalent. It claims that inequality appeared as divine precaution and that it is the king's duty to maintain this inequality and difference. But one of the basic characteristics of medieval thoughts on society can be noticed very quickly in these texts: the society is unequal and hierarchical in its foundations, even though this fact is tied to the idea of the necessity of cooperation, mutual assistance and complementarity within the whole. At the heart of Adalberon's interest is not so much the different status of the separate groups, even though he does not deny this. More important is their action, which creates their value and importance for the other two groups.[43]

The time in which these records were produced was determined by the disintegration of the Carolingian Empire, which came apart due to the division and external pressures of the Norman, Arab and Hungarian invasions. The regionalisation and dissolution of royal power also had a great impact on social history. The high clergy was militarised and the problem of defending the unarmed people appeared, which was also expressed in the reflection of the social situation.[44] Furthermore, Adalberon's vision of the dialectics between servitude and authority was

---

[42] "Tripartita Dei domus est, que credentur una./ Nunc orat, alii pugnant, aliique laborant./ Quae tria sunt simul et scissuram non patiuntur./ Unius offitio sic stant operata duorum, ..." Duby, *The Three*, 51.

[43] Otto Gerhard Oexle, „Die Funktionale Dreiteilung von "Gesellschaft" bei Adalbero von Laon. Deutungsschemata der sozialen Wirklichkeit im frühen Mittelalter," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 12, (1978), 31-2.

[44] Oexle, „Die Funktionale Dreiteilung", 37-8.

also far-reaching. The master (*dominus*) cannot exist without a servant (*servus*), and therefore the kings and bishops are merely the servants of their servants.[45] These writings are characteristic of the fact that they appeared as feudalism arose when the knights were sharply separated from the peasants, and when a new manorial system was established. One of the tasks of this scheme was therefore to consolidate the division of society into three social classes in thought and ideology. From the Carolingian period, the *milites* were increasingly distinct from the *rustici*.

The mere use of both terms *milites* and *rustici*, which was increasingly common, shows the growing differentiation of the two classes, which were soon codified by the formation and consolidation of the two estates; the two labels do not merely represent profession, but also the two estates. This development takes place in parallel with the displacement of the rural population from military service. For example, in the Carolingian age, the prohibition of carrying weapons was not yet known, while the Imperial *Reichslandsfriede* of 1152 states that the *rusticus* should not carry arms (*vel lanceam vel gladium*).[46] At the same time, the old divisions of *liberi* and *servi* retreat in the face of the opposition between the *milites* and *rustici,* and from the end of the 11th century, the serfs were no longer involved in warfare.[47] Thus, the consolidation of the trifunctional scheme of the orders coincides with the separation of the knight from the peasant. Both groups appeared at the same time and defined each other mutually by the appropriation of different functions.

As Georges Duby wrote, the trifunctional scheme is largely a tool to justify inequality, "both on earth and in the heavens". Most significantly, however, the scheme of the three orders clearly determines the position of a particular order in the system of social privileges, rights and duties. The lines between the separate orders are unreconcilable and each *ordo* has a specific function. It was extremely important for the emergence of this scheme of social division that the heresies and religious movements appeared for the first time at the beginning of the 11th century in the West, which questioned the functions and tasks of the clergy. Gerard of Cambrai was implicated in the 1025 trial of the heretics from the sect that appeared in Arras in 1024, claiming that the clergy was superfluous. His first mention

[45] Otto Gerhard Oexle, „Die "Wirklichkeit" und das "Wissen". Ein Blick auf das sozialgeschichtliche Oeuvre von Georges Duby,*" Historische Zeitschrift*, 232, (1981), 84.
[46] Josef Fleckenstein, Zur Frage der Abgränzung von Bauer und Ritter, in *Wort und Begriff "Bauer"*, ed. Reinhard Wenskus e.a., Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Kl., Abh. 89, 1975, 246-7.
[47] Struve, "Pedes", 17.

of the three orders, their functions and the indelible boundaries that exist between them are found precisely in his *Speech Against the Heretics* that he held at the trial of the Arras sect.

The central position of the heretics was that people are responsible for their own salvation only to themselves and that they can gain or lose it only through their own actions. It seems that they did not only deny the necessity of the mediating role of the clergy, but they also questioned the relevance and thus the ability of the priests to actually receive salvation. After Gerard questioned the heretics, they had to confess that, among other things, Church members were the intercessors to salvation, they had to validate their faith as a requirement of communion for salvation, the legitimacy of marriage, etc.[48]

Gerard's definition of the third function as a solely agrarian order (*agricultores*) was already then a simplification of the actual facts. Gerard automatically defined the third order as agricultural, but in fact, the towns, particularly in Flanders, went through a renaissance during this time. Somehow from the beginning of the 11th century, the townspeople began to gain independence and resist the established order, which later became a constancy within European history. The first battlegrounds were precisely the diocesan towns. Despite the fact that many bishops cared for public prosperity in exemplary ways, the townspeople were often in dispute with their administrators. But the more the bishops were aware of their duties, the more they defended their rule in the face of the demands of the subordinates, so that they could continue to hold them firmly in their self-imposed and patriarchal yoke.

It is undoubtedly also important that the Church authority, to which Bishop Gerard also belonged of course, found it difficult to accept trade, and did therefore not trust it and did not comply with the demands of the merchants. Much contradiction, conflict and alienation emerged from this misunderstanding, leading to open clashes at the beginning of the 11th century.

According to Giles Constable, this scheme of the three orders is in the light of the many different schemes and theories found in the works of other writers, essentially an attempt to find a formulation that partly suits the society in which these writers lived, but is not validated in it, or in any of the previous formulations. It was one of many ways of dividing society in the Middle Ages and perhaps not the most important one. In fact, it almost disappeared for more than 150 years and reappeared only at the end of the 12th and the 13th century, when it became *locus communis* also in popular

[48] R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 13-4.

literature and forming the theoretical foundation of the representative institutions of the new monarchies.[49]

The trifunctional figure was then often repeated, adapted and reused, or its influence can at least be noted in various texts. In such a way, the Cistercian monk and author from the 12th century, Alcher of Clairvaux, defined in his treaty *De spiritu et anima* the soul as being the dwelling and house of God. Starting from the tripartite division of the soul into *intelligentia*, *memoria* and *appetitus*, as already taught by Boethius and supported by the Latin translation of Plato's *Timaeus*, he founded the triple division of the citizens in the City of God, which also imitates Plato's division. The highest mental powers correspond to the counsellors (*consiliarii*) that lead to God. The middle range of capability, that is, the memoriae, correspond to the knights (*milites*) that use the weapons of righteousness against evil passions. The lower function corresponds to the craftsmen, or those who work with their hands and create everything that is necessary for the body.[50]

For Aedmer, who died around 1124 and who was a pupil of Anselm of Canterbury, the farm was the best metaphor for the trifunctional scheme. On the farm, sheep produce milk and wool, oxen plough and dogs protect from wolves. The same is true in human society: the knights protect the other two orders, the farmers feed others and themselves, the priests and monks pray for all and also provide the wool of warm divine love.[51]

In the essay *De Statu Ecclesiae*, which appeared between 1110 and 1139, Gilbert of Limerick described the pyramidal arrangement of society: ""…superiores in pyramide, oratores intellige: et quia quidam ex eis coniugati sunt, ideo viros et foeminas novinavimus. Sinistrales vero in pyramide aratores sunt, tam viri quam foemine. Dextrales quoque bellatores certe bellare; sed tamen his coniugatae sunt atque subserviunt, qui orant et arant et pugnant...".[52]

At the beginning of the 12th century, Honorius Augustodunensis described the church hierarchy and compared it to the organs of the head in the work *Elucidarium*, where the hands were the protectors of the church and the legs the peasants ("Manus, Ecclesiae defensores. Pedes, sunt agricolae.").[53] During the 12th century, the subject of the three orders also often appears in the French language in the works of the writers of that time. This is how Stephen de Fougères, bishop of Rennes, notes it down in the

[49] Constable, "Orders", 288.
[50] Maurer, *Luthers Lehre*, 64.
[51] Maurer, *Luthers Lehre*, 66.
[52] Niccoli, *I sacerdoti*, 25.
[53] Struve, "Pedes", 27.

Livre des Manières, which was produced around 1175, in the verse that links the chapter on the knights and the chapter on the peasants: "The priests must pray for all; the knights must, without hesitation, provide defence and honour, and the farmers must cultivate the earth."[54]

Another French author, Reclus de Molliens (probably named Barthélémy), who was active at about the same time in Picardy, described man's vices and the five human senses in his work *Miserere*. When he speaks of greed, he raises the question of those who work to earn their bread: "The work of the priest is to pray to God; the knight's work is justice;/ the workers provided them with the bread. / One works, the second prays, the third defends;/ in the field, in the town, in the church/ they help each other with their professions,/ all three, in a well-established order."[55]

In the next verse, he talks about a trader who also deserves his bread, but not the juggler or jester, who is excluded from this scheme of orders and also from society as a whole. So, the "three orders" are actually "four", which is not the last time in the history of this scheme, and is sometimes also visualised in art. No author writes that there are "four orders" or "four estates"; however, the traders are often also added to the three established orders. This is partly the result of *Carmen de ternarii numeri excellentia*, as the poem attributed to St Ambrose is entitled. The number three signifies, in addition to divine perfection, also a number that can not be divided. The division of society into three parts is in a way a symbol of its necessary unity. Even though some writers cite a fourth order, only three are enumerated since the conviction that every true balance has odd parity prevailed. Alan of Lille (Alanus ab Insulis, + 1203), who drew from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite, compared the world with the city in two *Sermones*, in which the wise men rule, the soldiers protect and the people obey.[56] This division clearly shows influence of Plato's thought.

---

[54] "Li clerc deivent por toz orer;/ Li chevalier sanz demorer/ Deivent defendre et ennorer/ Et li paisant laborer." Jean Batany, "Le vocabulaire des catégories sociales chez quelques moralistes français vers 1200," in *Ordres et classes, colloque d'histoire sociale*, ed. Daniel Roche, Ernest Labrouste (Paris, The Hague: Mouton 1973), 69.

[55] "Clers ki por clerc a droit se vent,/ Chevaliers ki se dete rent/Et hom qui fait labour manier,/ Chil goustent le pain proprement,/ Chil troi venront a sauvement./ Labours de clerc est Dieu priier/ Et justiche de chevalier;/ Pain lor truevent li laborier./ Chil paist, chil prie et chil deffent./ Au camp, a le vile, au moustier/ S'entraident de lor mestier/ Chil troi par bel ordenement." Batany, "Le vocabulaire", 70-1.

[56] D. E. Luscombe, "Conceptions of Hierarchy Before the Thirteenth Century," in *Soziale Ordnungen im Selbstverständnis des Mittelalters*, ed. Albert Zimmermann, (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1979), 13.