## Three Estates

The holy orders of ministry, marriage, political leadership for ruling creation (Confession of 1528)

Sometimes called Hierarchies/Institutions/Spheres

Vol 7 p.312 - In this manner the legends of the saintly fathers surpass by far the nonsense and the fables we have admired in the papacy. Of what concern is Antony to us? Contrary to his conscience, since he knew that nothing should be undertaken in life or doctrine apart from God's command, he hid himself in the desert. We know that there are three estates in this life: **the household, the state, and the church.** If all men want to neglect these and pursue their own interests and self-chosen ways, who will be a shepherd of souls? Who will baptize, absolve, and console those who are burdened with sins? Who will administer the government or protect the

common fabric of human society? Who will educate the young or till the ground? Yet these duties, which have been commanded and approved by God, have been scorned and cast aside in the papacy, and the devil has foisted those monstrous acts of the monks upon men with horrible fury.

Household	educate the young or till the ground?
State	administer the government or protect
	the common fabric of human society?
Church	shepherd of souls baptize, absolve, and console those who are burdened with sins?

Accordingly, these things should be mentioned and inculcated often, in order that we may learn that God is not offended but rather pleased by **these estates**, provided that they remain within the limits of His commandments. If you cannot command or teach, you should nevertheless be obedient in a godly manner or learn from others. But in these **three spheres** you should serve God and not be found in the desert with Antony, Hilarion, or Malchus.

These matters should be placed before the youth and the inexperienced above all. They do not yet know what sin, the devil, and the flesh are. The examples of the fathers, the prophets, and the apostles should be shown to them. These men did not despise **the household**, **the state**, **and the church**. Nor did they shrink from the works of farmers and slaves. Nevertheless, they were able to live in faith and God's commandments.

In ordinary life they conducted themselves in such a way that to the eyes of the flesh no difference was apparent between Abraham, Isaac, and the other fathers, who were the friends of God (cf. Is. 41:8), and the heathen rulers who were ignorant of God and

Vocation: In the ordinary life of	Self-chosen
household and state there was no	lives: desert
outward difference in the lives of	living, works-
believers and the lives of heathen.	righteous
Believer's actions flow from trust	monasteries.
in the promise and love for God.	

hated Him. The flesh does not see **the promise and the love of the saints**, just as the papists and the jurists do not see these things. They direct their lives in accordance with a self-chosen norm of sanctity and righteousness.

Vol 22 p.405 - It goes without saying that the devil is not merciful, just, and almighty; for he does not preserve all things; nor does he create the sun and light. But there must be someone who does this. It follows that it is God who creates and preserves all, and that He also protects the three estates in the world—the church, the civil government, and the home. It is He who lets His sun rise over the good and the evil (Matt. 5:45). All other creatures acknowledge that God is gracious and merciful; only man denies this and withholds from Him the honor which all the others accord Him. The crux of the matter is that he who does evil cannot bear the light. Blessed is he who does, for he will be helped.

v. 37 p.363

It would be a good thing if monasteries and religious foundations were kept for the purpose of teaching young people God's Word, the Scriptures, and Christian morals, so that we might train and prepare fine, capable men to become ①bishops, pastors, and other servants of the church, as well as ②competent, learned people for civil government, and ③fine, respectable,

<u>learned women capable of keeping house and rearing children in a Christian way</u>. But as a way of seeking salvation, these institutions are all the devil's doctrine and creed, I Timothy 4:1 ff., etc.

Any act of service used to earn salvation is self-chosen and the devil's institution.

But the holy orders and true religious institutions established by God are these **three:** the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government. All who are engaged in the ①clerical office or ministry of the Word are in a holy, proper, good, and God-pleasing order and-estate, such as those who preach, administer sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons. These are engaged in works which are altogether holy in God's sight.

Again, all ②<u>fathers and mothers</u> who regulate their household wisely and bring up their children to the service of God are engaged in pure holiness, in a holy work and a holy order. Similarly, when children and servants show obedience to their elders and masters, here too is pure holiness, and whoever is thus engaged is a living saint on earth.

Moreover, <sup>③</sup>princes and lords, judges, civil officers, state officials, notaries, male and female

servants and all who serve such persons, and further, all their obedient subjects—all are engaged in pure holiness and leading a holy life before God. For these three religious institutions or orders are found in God's Word and commandment; and whatever is contained in God's Word must be holy, for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it.

Church
Home State

Above **these three institutions and orders** is the common order of **Christian love**, in which one serves not only the three orders, but also serves every needy person in general with all kinds

The three estates are for service toward neighbor.

of benevolent deeds, such as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, forgiving enemies, praying for all men on earth, suffering all kinds of evil on earth, etc. Behold, all of these are called good and holy works. However, none of these orders is a means of salvation. There remains only one way above them all, viz. faith in Jesus Christ.

For to be holy and to be saved are two entirely different things. We are saved through Christ alone; but we become holy both through this faith and through these divine foundations and orders. Even the godless may have much about them that is holy without being saved thereby. For God wishes us to perform such works to his praise and glory. And all who are saved in the faith of Christ surely do these works and maintain these orders.

What was said about the ②estate of marriage, however, should also be applied to widows and unmarried women, for they also belong to the domestic sphere. Now if these orders and divine institutions do not save, what can we say about the effects of the devil's institutions and monasteries, which have sprung up entirely without God's Word, and further, rage and contend against the one and only way of faith?

v.3 p.216-217 - Concerning domestic and civil works I have repeatedly stated that young people must be carefully habituated to take note of the works that have been commanded by God and to distinguish them to the utmost from self-appointed or human works. For unless this is

done—and most carefully at that—the distinction between good and evil is not only eliminated, but we shall cherish things that are most harmful and are truly an abomination before God as the things that are holiest.

...This life is profitably divided into three orders: ① life in the home; ② life in the state; ③ life in the church. To whatever order you belong—whether you are a husband, an officer of the state, or a teacher of the church—look about you, and see **whether you have done full justice to your calling** and there is no need of asking to be pardoned for negligence, dissatisfaction, or impatience. But if you have conducted your affairs in such a manner that there is no need of saying: "Forgive us our trespasses," then by all means go out into the desert, and occupy yourself with those showy and difficult works.

Thus the entire error of the papists lies in the fact that they consider the ordinary duties of this life which are commanded in the Decalog easy for them to perform perfectly. Therefore they ascend from the Decalog to their schemes, as though they were going up to a higher level. They praise the anchorites; but Abraham, who sits at the door and waits for guests—him they do not regard as worth mentioning or being held up as one to imitate.

## **v. 41,** p.176-177

Schools are a sub-set of the Home.

In summary, the schools must be second in importance only to the church, for in them young preachers and pastors are trained, and from them emerge those who replace the ones who die. Next, then, to the school comes the burgher's house, for it supplies the pupils; then the city hall and the castle, which must protect the schools so that they may train children to become pastors, and so that these, in turn, may create churches and children of God (whether they be burghers, princes, or emperors). But God must be over all and nearest to all, to preserve this ring or circle against the devil, and to do everything in all of life's vocations, indeed, in all creatures. Thus Psalm 127 [:1] says that there are only **two temporal governments** on earth, that of the city and

that of the home, "Unless the Lord builds the house; unless the Lord watches over the city." The first government is that of the home, from which the people come; the second is that of the city, meaning the country, the people, princes and lords, which we call the secular government. These embrace everything—children, property, money,

animals, etc. The home must produce, whereas the city must guard, protect, and defend. Then follows the third, **God's own home and city**, that is, the church, which must obtain people from the home and protection and defense from the city.

Two Temporal	Home – produce	
Kingdoms/Governments	City – protect	
One Eternal Kingdom	Church –save	

State/

Home

Church

These are the **three hierarchies ordained by God**, and we need no more; indeed, we have enough and more than enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three. Just look only at ①the home and at the duties it alone imposes: parents and landlords must be obeyed; children and servants must be nourished, trained, ruled, and provided for in a godly spirit. The rule of the home alone would give us enough to do, even if there were nothing else. Then ②the city, that is, the secular government, also gives us enough to do if we show ourselves really obedient, and conversely, if we are to judge, protect, and promote land and people. The devil keeps us busy enough, and with him God gave us the sweat of our brow, thorns and thistles in abundance [Gen. 3:18–19], so that we have more than enough to learn, to live, to do, and to suffer in these two governments. Then there is ③the third rule and government. If the Holy Spirit reigns there, Christ calls it a comforting, sweet, and light burden [Matt. 11:30]; if not, it is not

only a heavy, severe, and terrible task, but also an impossible one, as St. Paul says in Romans 8 [:3], "What the law could not do," and elsewhere, "The letter kills" [II Cor. 3:6].

## Example of the Individual David

v.5 p.267 - But we teach that first of all the person must be looked at, whether it is just and godly, which takes place through the Word he believes. Then, however, it carries out its ministry in the church: teaches, exhorts, prays, learns and hears the Word, bears the cross for the sake of the Word, and is mortified in the flesh. That person is saintly, alive, and well-pleasing to God. It proceeds to other external offices after it has heard the Word, believed, prayed, and discharged its duty in the church. Thus after David has done this, he proceeds to the administration of the kingdom, hears lawsuits, wages war, draws up his army, attacks the enemy, kills, and sheds enemy blood. Properly speaking, these are not duties of the church; they are political. Accordingly, if anyone says: "Then David is not saintly, for he is a soldier and bears the sword," that person judges, too grossly, as the papists do. For who is that man David who sheds blood and wages war? He is a person who has been justified in the church by the Word and faith. But later he has the political administration entrusted to him. Therefore he judges, condemns, justifies, administers the state, punishes the guilty, and wages wars. Nevertheless, he remains a man of faith and a good tree. But that spilling of blood is pleasing to God, although the world, the monks, and all other hypocrites are violently offended, because they look only at the external mask of the works. They do not see the Word, faith, the spirit, and the impulse of God, who governs the person not only in sublime duties but also in those that pertain to the state and the household. For David was called by God to do this, as is stated, "that he should do My whole will," which also orders him to humble the Philistines, the Damascenes, the Amalekites, the Ammonites, etc.

"But what does this mean?" the papists say. "He had to pray, sacrifice, and bring offerings in the temple." Right indeed! He also performs the works of the church in accordance with his place and rank. In the morning he prays, meditates on the Word, believes, sings psalms, and carefully discharges the duties that pertain to the church. Afterwards he also administers political and household affairs, procreates children, takes care of the household, eats, and drinks. Thus David goes along in a godly and saintly manner through all three hierarchies: the church, the state, and the household.

Home

Christian

State

In the same manner our life, too, must be arranged, so that we are found in the rank and station which is pleasing to God according to His Word. Above all, you should believe in the Word, confess it, and be prepared to suffer and die for the Word. Later, whether you are a magistrate or the head of a household, you should serve your calling in your place. Such a life pleases God and is honored by God with many great rewards and successes.

v. 5 p.138 - These, then, are the three hierarchies we often inculcate, namely, **the household, the government, and the priesthood, or the home, the state, and the church.** The home has the daily bread and is a daily realm, as it were. The government has things that are temporal and is more than a daily realm, because it endures throughout all time, excluding eternity. But the priesthood is above the household and the state; it pertains to the church and is heavenly and eternal.