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Transfers of Sacredness and the Trifunctional Imagery

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Abstract: Studies on the Indo-European principle of trifunctionality and on the medieval Three Estates imagery provide researchers with precious resources for investigating the ways and means through which social representations become loaded with sacredness, and sacredness progressively transferred from one set of social representations to another. This article focuses on the transformations undergone by the Three Estates religious substratum, first at the time of the birth of Absolutism, and second during and after the French Revolution. In the case of France (and with openings towards other contexts), it shows how trifunctionality has been attributed, alternatively or conjointly, to the bourgeoisie and to the nation. Triune imagery has thus contributed to shape rituals and symbols proper to civil religion in France. Additionally, this contribution draws lessons from our case study for assessing both the resilience and the power of metamorphosis proper to symbolic references once the latter are organized into patterns that nurture a community's cohesiveness by the putting into motion of images, narratives and ritual practices.

Keywords: Absolutism; civil religion; feudalism; French Revolution; sacredness (transfer of); Three Estates; trifunctionality

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1. Introduction

During the last three or four decades of the 20th century, a number of researchers focused their attention on the ways and means through which ancient Indo-European and, later on, European medieval societies were depicting themselves as communities obeying a tripartite division endowed with sacredness. In this period, the work of the French comparative historian Georges Dumézil (1898–1996) on Indo-European mythology (see notably Dumézil 1941, 1974, 1980, 1996) had gained considerable popularity (and sometimes had triggered clear opposition) as well as a following in Anglo-Saxon circles (Ward 1968; Littleton 1973; Puhvel 1987; Lyle 1990; for a dissenting opinion, see Momigliano 1984). Some continuators enriched Dumézil's account of a triad constitutive of the Indo-European peoples' collective imagination by that of a double triad, the first of the two distinguishing and associating sacred, warlike and productive functions, the second one structuring a cycle of ritual seasons, each of them centered on a vital process (birth and death, initiation, marriage) (Lyle 2004). Parallel research on medieval representations by the historian Georges Duby (1919–1996) highlighted the religious roots of the justifications given for the symbolic institution of the "Three Orders/Three Estates [*Trois Ordres*]" (Duby 1980). Although less popular than has been the case in France, this second line of inquiry has also left its mark on the historiography of the Celtic and Germanic worlds (Dubuisson 1975; Oexle 1981; Constable 1995; Vignjević 2019).

The hypothesis of a genealogical continuity between the Indo-European "Three Functions" and the medieval "Three Estates" has been stated from an early stage of the scholarship on trifunctionality (Batany 1963). However, in-depth research into the demise and/or metamorphosis of successive tripartite representations has never fully developed. In this article, I will not deal with the origins but rather with the putative posterity of the medieval "Three Estates" system of representation. The question is of particular significance when discussing the existence and nature of a political or social "unconscious", the religious

archetypes that may be attached to it, and the differences in the structuring of said collective unconscious from one nation or culture to another. I will develop the following hypotheses: (a) in Western Europe, representations of the social order based on a tripartite scheme lasted until at least the First World War, and this scheme went through a phenomenon of secularization or, more precisely, underwent a "transfer of sacredness" (this notion is defined as the start of Part III); (b) in France, the phenomenon largely preceded the French Revolution (which, as we know, abolished the Three Estates); (c) the way in which Absolutism legitimized itself by activating a revamped social imagery contributed to the transfer of sacredness evoked above; and finally (d) social and cultural shifts occurring during the nineteenth century gradually invested the nation and/or the figure of the bourgeois citizen with the dignity previously associated with each of the three functions. While focusing on the French context, I will occasionally broaden the scope of analysis.

The first part of this contribution will briefly examine medieval depictions of the Three Orders and the religiosity associated to it. The second part will trace the operation by which Absolutism used and transformed this ideology; it will then lay out the process by which the absolutist synthesis was both uprooted and rearranged at the time and in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, fostering rituals and symbols mobilized in the building of the nation-state's civil religion. The third part will further examine the ways and means through which national and bourgeois ideologies triggered new social representations organized around tripartite divisions that were remaining loaded with normativity and sacredness. In conclusion I will reflect on the lessons to be drawn from this case study as to the way references and images imbued with sacredness evolve and operate through the continuous shaping and nurturing of social cohesiveness.

2. Feudalism and the Three Orders

Mental patterns depicting and legitimatizing a triune social division can be found under multiple guises. Georges Dumézil has insisted several times on the two following points: it does not constitute a universal human fact, and it is not necessarily found in the concrete organization of societies whose ideology it contributes to shape (see notably Dumézil 1968). The trifunctionality is a mental representation, a form, a structure, "the confluence of thought and language, [and] it remains usually latent, unformulated" (Duby 1980, p. 6). The socio-cultural system of the "Three Estates", which constituted the ideal structure of feudalism (most notably in Northern France, England and Burgundy) and which translated mental representations into social institutions, is thus only a particular case of a wider ideology, varied and diffuse in its modalities and expressions.

2.1. The Religious Substratum of the Doctrine

The medieval doctrine of the Three Orders was explicitly developed from the 8th century onward. The formulation given by Adalbero, bishop of Laon, and Gerard, bishop of Cambrai, in the third decade of the 11th century, is one of its most often quoted illustrations: "Triple then is the house of God which is thought to be one: on Earth, some pray [*orant*], others fight [*pugnant*], still others work (*laborant*]; which three are joined together and may not be torn asunder; so that on the function [*officium*] of each the works [*opera*] of the others rest, each in turn assisting all". (Quoted in Duby 1980, p. 5).

Important is the fact that this statement was enacted by two bishops. Dominique Iogna-Prat has followed the exit of the trifunctional scheme outside the monastic schools where it had originally been revived, notably in Ireland (Dubuisson 1975):

> The bishops corrected the monastic scheme on two points. [First,] they attacked the monks' monopolization of the sacred function [...]: the *oratores* are clerics directed by bishops. [Second,] they give the organization of society a worldlier character, drawing it away from monastic eschatology and bringing back the scheme of the three functional orders on Earth. (Iogna-Prat 1986, p. 118)

Duby has sometimes been criticized for linking in possibly too hasty a fashion the reformulation of the doctrine around the end of the 11th century with socio-political

troubles (Bachrach 1982). In the perspective he develops, affirming the sacredness of the "Three Orders" would have been essentially a way to reassert ecclesiastical and feudal power over a turbulent peasantry. Here, we are less interested in the political context and effect of the doctrine than in its religious and theological rooting. "The trifunctional model drew upon the patristic thought of Augustine, Gregory the Great and, above all, Dionysius the Areopagite".[1] (Spiegel 1982, p. 163; see Duby 1980, pp. 110–11 et al.) The Pseudo-Dionysius is the author of, among other works, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and his system of thought is based on a series of "processions" (προόδοι) from above followed by subsequent ascents from the lower to the higher spheres of knowledge and sainthood.[2] The influence exercised by this author was accrued by the fact that, in the Middle Ages, he was generally conflated with Saint Denis, the bishop and patron saint of Paris. Around 1230, Guillaume de Nangis relates the legend according to which Saint Denis, a.k.a. the Pseudo-Dionysius, brought to France the lily, symbol of the Capetian line (Caldwell 2014, pp. 12–13), the lily being, as we will see, a flower loaded with trifunctional associations. Augustine (notably in his *De libero arbitrio*), Gregory and Pseudo-Dionysius are all preoccupied with the idea of grounding an "order" that would apply to thought process, doctrine and ecclesiastical matters. The transition from a preoccupation with mental order to a focus upon social design was easy to effectuate, even if a close reading of our patristic authors would not warrant the social and ideological constructions with which their names became associated.

As a matter of fact, one may trace the religious roots of the Three Estates ideology to several intellectual and cultural loci different from the ones mentioned by Duby. For instance, Colette Beaune convincingly associates the original meaning of the fleur-de-lis (the lily, symbol of the French monarchy) with Marian devotion, the presence of three lilies on the royal coat of arms pointing toward Mary's three "virgin births" (Immaculate Conception, virginity before the birth of Christ, and preserved virginity after birth) (Beaune 1985, pp. 243–46) (Figure 1).[3]



Figure 1. Variations on the fleur-de-lis motif on the pavement of the Sainte-Chapelle, Paris (© B. Vermander, 2024).

This religious symbolism progressively associates with a tripartite reading. A writing by Guillaume de Digulleville (1295–d. after 1358), a Cistercian monk, specifies the imagery proper to the latter:

> Guillaume de Digulleville sees the barons, guardians of the borders [of the kingdom], on the left of the lily, the prince, comparable to the sword of justice, in the prominent position, the clerics and advisors on the right; the foot of the flower represents the common people that support the whole. The coat of arms of France is thus comparable to the mystical body of the kingdom with its different parts supporting each other to promote justice. (Beaune 1985, p. 256)

Thus, according to this reading of the fleur-de-lis symbolism, barons are the *bellatores*, clerics and advisors the *oratores*, and the common people the *laboratores*. The king overlooks the social body. This interpretation testifies to a more general evolution: Colette Beaune sees

in the ideal of the Nation as it takes shape during the 15th century an affective value that grounds itself on three interconnected sets of assumptions having to do with, respectively "race", religious feeling, and respect for hierarchy (tripartition). We will see that this ideal will perdure.

The alliance between the notions of "nation" and "tripartition" was happening at the end of a series of transformations: originally, the king was the first of the *bellatores*, or (for some political theorists) was situated at the junction of the first two orders; the king was overseeing the Three Estates while being attached in a privileged way to chivalry and assuming at the same time a (limited) sacral function. When feudalism went into crisis, the royal function took its full autonomy. At the same time, the tripartite scheme was confronted with a social division that was not "imaginary" but rather far too real: the growing opposition between rich and poor. The Third Estate (previously the rural *laboratores*) became progressively identified with the urban elite, and the peasantry was thus excluded from the global system of representations through which society was thought and perceived as a consistent, nonconflicting whole (Duby 1980, pp. 206–17).

The Augustinian, Gregorian and Dionysian sources of the "Three Orders" representation were associating a stress on hierarchy with a deep-seated aspiration for harmony. It had taken shape in a context where monasteries (and monastic writers) were inserted into rural communities overseen by local rulers. Even in a context marred by inequalities and violence, the solidarity among classes and estates confronting such challenges as meagre harvests, armed conflicts and epidemics was a lived reality. The reformulation of the doctrine by bishops who were ascertaining their control over these same communities was coming at a time of urban growth and political upheavals that progressively widened the gap between religious ideals and socio-political realities.

2.2. The Development and Apparent Demise of the Three Orders Imaginary

Georges Duby opens Les Trois Ordres ou l'Imaginaire du Féodalisme with an excerpt from the Traité des Ordres published by Charles Loyseau in 1610: "Some are devoted particularly to the service of God; others to the preservation of the State by arms; still others to the task of feeding and maintaining it by peaceful labors. These are our three orders or estates general of France, the Clergy, the Nobility, and the Third Estate". (Quoted in Duby 1980, p. 1). We are presented here with a most explicit formulation of the ideology of the Three Orders. It was perhaps all the clearer because it was expressing an order that was already past. Of course, no society corresponds to a single classificatory criterion. The France of the Ancien Régime was at once of orders [ordres] and of bodies [corps] (both professional and territorial), the corps covering a much more flexible and operational reality than was one's belonging in this or that order. "The Estates General of the Kingdom were no longer held between 1615 and 1789, while the society of corps was largely revitalized by the monarchy's needs for lending" (Cosandey 2005, p. 19). The status (l'état) of an individual resulted from the interplay between the order and the corps to which that person was belonging. The factors which, in the 17th and 18th centuries, contributed to the disorganization of the set of mental images through which the social structure was imagined were numerous: rationalization of the conceptions of power; new impetus gained by (mainly professional) corporations; multiplication of titles, new forms of sociability; all this besides the fact that Absolutism had been equalizing people into "subjects". Cosandey (2005, pp. 26–27) notes that the multiplication of corporations and titles can be read as an indirect reaction against the politico-legal trend towards equalization, experienced as uniformization. And if Charles Loyseau continues to speak of the nobles as those who live "without making a profession or a trade", the feudal imagery and its connection to the Three Orders representation are shaken by "the structuring of the notables that had access to political representation. [Consequently,] in 1614, the royal magistrates, up to the most prestigious, sat in the chamber of the Third Estate, which they dominated. In 1789, they were counted among the nobles" (Descimon 2005, p. 33).

A remarkable text by Saint-Simon distinguishes the Three Estates on purely historical grounds: the Frankish monarchy, he says, was "all military, never despotic" (Saint-Simon 1978, p. 389). The military chiefs were given estates, which they had to delegate to serfs:

> Thus this serf people, who had nothing, began to become owners in part, while in part they continued to possess nothing, and, of these two kinds of serfs, some of whom became owners, and others did not, were composed the people or what has since been called the third estate, and, as today, could be distinguished from then on into bourgeoisie and simple people. These delegations, which were first given to the best inhabitants of the cities, were extended to the best of the countryside. They were soon known as roture, unlike fiefs, and their owners were called "commoners", unlike fief lords, a term that had and still has for a long time only its natural meaning, and that pride has since made it take on a bad meaning. The Church also made its peaceful conquests through the generosity of kings and great lords. The bishops and abbots became them themselves. They had large portions of land; they gave it in fief as the great lords had done, and from this came the great benefits that we still see today, and then the loyalty and military service that they owed to the kings and which was also owed to them by their vassals. Their great temporal state made them consider themselves as other great lords. Having reached this point, the ignorance of the latter made a religion of letting them have the primacy through the union of their priesthood with their fiefs, so that the nobility, which was the only body of the State, let a second one form, which became the first, and both formed another by their bailments, which made many serfs owners, with the other serfs who were not, and which all were the conquered people, became thereafter the third body of state, under the name already said of third state. (Saint-Simon 1978, pp. 390–91)

By making the Three Estates the mere result of historical evolution, Saint-Simon was unconsciously testifying to the exhaustion of the sacral discourse associated to its functioning. For his part, when looking at the demise of the tripartite representation, Duby privileges the apparition of a "fourth function", as Dumézil and Benveniste had already suggested: "Georges Dumézil and Émile Benveniste have dismantled the logico-historical mechanism behind the transition from the tripartite to the quadripartite scheme. The historical trigger is the appearance of a category of craftsmen and/or merchants. Later, it could be the bourgeois or the lawyer. Numerous possibilities for structural play present themselves: the jurist can constitute a fourth order or substitute for the cleric". (Le Goff 1979, p. 1210). The same Jacques Le Goff nevertheless makes an important correction:

> The [tripartite] scheme culminates and ends with the French Revolution. [. . .] It is the joyful entry of the Third Estate that has entrusted its role to the traditional image of the dominated part of the new society, the peasant [. . .]. One sees that, by means of the new egalitarian ideal, reappears the medieval Christian ideology. But this revolutionary utopia quickly drowned under the waves of the revolution and the counter-revolution had no tomorrow. The triumph of the tripartite scheme is also its end. (Le Goff 1979, p. 1204)

The attempt of Absolutism to reorder the tripartite scheme for its own profit (this based on a design and a strategy that we will study in the next Part) will eventually backfire. Le Goff notes the exacerbation of the imagery of the tripartite division at the time of the French Revolution, with pictures of the nobleman, the bishop, and the peasant, the latter exclaiming in some popular vignettes, "J'savois ben qu'jaurions not tour!! [I knew that someday it would be our turn!]" (Figure 2) At the time of the French Revolution, the tripartite scheme was maintained, perhaps even hardened; but its legitimacy and functioning were radically challenged.



Figure 2. Engraving, 1789. "J'savois ben qu'jaurions not tour! [I knew that someday it would be our turn!]" (© Gallica/BNF, Cabinet des Estampes [Public Domain]).

3. Reinterpretations and Posterity of the Three Orders Imagery

3.1. Secularization or Transfer of Sacredness?

The present Part will first attempt to describe the way Absolutism revived the tripartite imagery exactly at the time when its social anchorage was irremediably damaged. It will also show that this revival was akin to a transfer of sacredness. We will then examine through which process the French Revolution reverted the tripartite imagery as fostered by Absolutism—but, as we will see immediately and as will be further illustrated in the next Part, such reversal was triggering a metamorphosis of our scheme rather than its final disappearance.

By "transfer of sacredness", and referring notably to Durkheim and Mauss' line of analysis, I designate the process through which "sacredness"—i.e., the privileged expressions of the ultimate object to which a human group refers to and which grounds it as "society"—migrates from some loci (notions, places, objects) to others in function of the evolution of the cultural, religious and political context that determines the concrete existence of said group. "While the gods, each in their own time, leave the temple and become profane, we see things that are human, but [always] social [in nature]—the fatherland, property, work, the human person—enter one after the other" (Hubert and Mauss, in Mauss 1968, p. 17).

At the time (1899) that this statement was made, Hubert and Mauss' study was opening a whole new field of research. However, their analysis of the process that they had identified was still sketchy. It has now been considerably enriched. Focusing on the period from the middle of the thirteenth century to the very end of the fifteenth, Iogna-Prat (2016) chooses to speak of the Church as an "institutional matrix" of which the city and the state would constitute, in their own way, extensions "capable of fabricating social 'content' that was still Christian" (Iogna-Prat 2016, p. 60). The nascent municipal authorities sacralized the common good through the establishment of a form of "civic religion"[4] (an anachronistic term, but one that provides a valid heuristic tool). This observation leads the author to speak of a "transfer of sacredness" rather than "secularization", a concept fraught with disparate content. If, however, we wish to retain the term, we should note that the institutions of secularization gradually take their shape less by separation than by assimilation of ecclesial sacrality. The city is gradually taking the place of the Church as the reference structure for living together. This observation justifies the fact that ecclesiology and the then-nascent science of urban planning can be studied in continuity. Urban buildings and their descriptions constitute two complementary discursive systems through which the city's capacity to define and engender the social bond can be delivered (Iogna-Prat 2016,

p. 356). The semantically charged urban space will in turn determine both the form and meaning of the ritual spectacle that will unfold there.

These developments are not linear. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, shortly before the absolutist transition took place, at least three ways of conceptualizing the relationship between religion and the social bond can be observed: the first one continues to maintain that social management remains the exclusive domain of the ecclesiastical institution; the second operates a reversal, with the Church aspiring to the construction of an ideal human city, and this ideal having precedence over religious considerations; the third operates through interactions and compromises, articulating the spheres rather than dissociating them. In any case, the relationship between Church and State has become dialectical: "No State without a sacred horizon and without that utopian supply, that capacity for eschatological projection which the Church originally carries; and, conversely, no 'modern' Church without assimilation of sovereign State practices and postures" (Iogna-Prat 2016, p. 459).

3.2. The Absolutist Reinterpretation of the Tripartite Ideology

French Absolutism found its apex in a system that a place, the Palace of Versailles, soon epitomized, with the nobility gathered all year long around the king, and thus compelled to leave the territories in which noble families had settled and that they were directly managing.[5] The setting-up of the system and of its spatial focus came with the enacting of royal rituals loaded with new sacral undertones. The latter give us direct access to the renewed political appropriation of the tripartite scheme.

In 1664, the festival of the *Pleasures of the Enchanted Island* [*Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée*] anchored the new absolutist imaginary in an "enchanted place", Versailles, even before the Court moved there.[6] The argument of the *Plaisirs*, conceived by the Duke of Saint-Aignan, does not restore a mythological narrative in the strict sense of the word; rather, it presents itself as the unfolding of an instituting rite, an unfolding provided by narratives whose performance becomes the matrix of the new mythology. The rite inducts Versailles as the theater of the absolutist representation. The festival is supposed to take place in a ritual space—a theater, an enchanted island (Figure 3). It is a world in reduction, where the grandeur of the representation depends upon the perfection of its mechanisms: "Although it does not have this great extent which is noticed in some other palaces of His Majesty, all things are there so polished, so well understood and so finished that nothing can equal it" (Molière 2010, p. 521). Note that there is a famous island whose topography is organized as a stage, a theater: no less than Thomas More's *Utopia*.

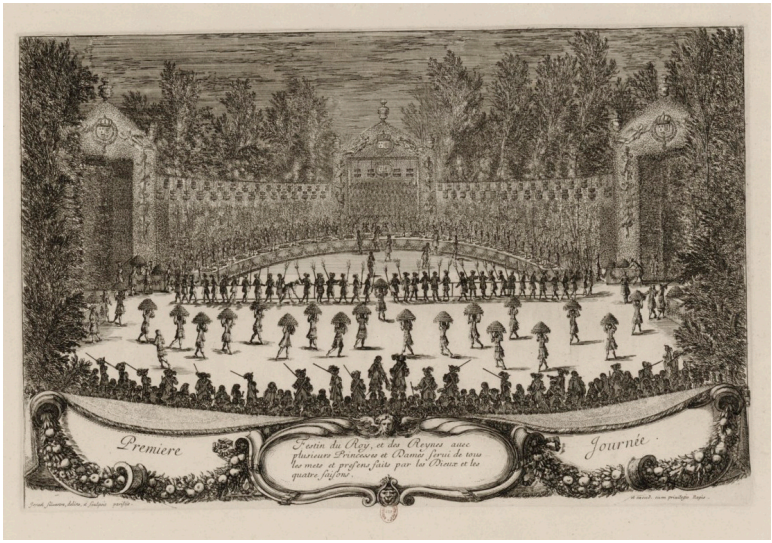


Figure 3. First day of *Les Plaisirs de l'île enchantée*. Engraving by Israël Silvestre, 1664 (© BnF/Gallica [Public Domain]).

If the festival takes place over a week, the first three days, whose design, writes the Relation of the events[7], is borrowed from an episode of Ariosto's *Roland furieux* (*Orlando furioso*), are explicitly presented as a completed totality, which provides the very story of the feast, a story on which the following days can only expand. In the *First Day* of the *Plaisirs*, the day of the Foundation, the three functions are found in a secularized and playful form. The function of legal and religious administration is manifested in the inaugural procession, where the person of the King is surrounded by an almost sacred glow, while Apollo and the Four Ages close the ceremony, celebrating the birth of a new age. To this first function is subordinated the warlike function: procession of the knights and horsing competitions. Finally, the day ends with the ballet of the Seasons, bearers of the earth's produce, followed by the harvesters and grape-pickers; the figure of Pan, addressing the Queen, expresses the voice of the third function:

> Young Divinity, do not be surprised
>
> That we offer to you in this wondrous meal
>
> The best of our sheepfolds.
>
> Our flocks can taste in peace
>
> The grasslands of our meadows:
>
> We owe this happiness to your divine features.
>
> (Molière 2010, p. 533, verses by Benserade[8])

The very absurdity of the speech enables us to better grasp the fusion effected between absolutist and trifunctional ideologies: the social order is not merely the result of a harmonious collaboration among the three functions, each of them supporting the two other; it is rather an outcome of their refocusing on an external instance, the person of the King, the latter assuming at the same time a good part of the first function, according to a division that is common to many systems "Everywhere, except in India [. . .], the king can either be a representative of the first function, jointly or not with the priests and ministers (Iran, Ireland, Scandinavia), or he can transcend the three functions with, however, a particular affinity for the first" (Dumézil 1973, p. 335).

That the king is above all the guarantor—the condition—of good order, is what the text attributed to Perrault insists on several times:

> Heaven itself seemed to favor the designs of His Majesty, since in a season almost always rainy, we were only affected by a little wind, which seemed to have increased only in order to show that the foresight and the power of the King were proof against the greatest inconveniences. High canvasses, wooden buildings, made almost in an instant, and a prodigious number of white wax torches, to make up for more than four thousand candles each day, resisted this wind, which everywhere else would have made these entertainments impossible to complete. [. . .] The King thus made cover with cloths, in so little time that one had reason to be astonished, all this round of a kind of dome to defend against the wind the great number of torches and candles which were to light the theater, whose decoration was very pleasant. (Molière 2010, pp. 521, 536)

The same theme also runs through the following day, that of the performance of the play *La Princesse d' Éliade*, by Molière: the Princess, who prefers hunting to marriage, is guilty of fostering disorder by not assuming the royal function. Molière translates this disorder essentially into scenes of vocal comedy: the hunter is reluctantly awakened by the noise of the preparation of the hunt; amorous laments only attract bears or else they end in argument; and the lovers continuously misunderstand each other. The union of the Princess with Prince Euryale will bring peace back to Ithaca: social divisions and functions are reestablished, the courtiers keep again from expressing their thought, and the shepherdesses can love and dance at leisure. . . Finally, the redemption brought by the absolutist order is inscribed in the *Third Day*: it is devoted to the destruction of Alcina's

Palace and the concomitant liberation of the imprisoned knights—a *fusion* symbolized by the gigantic fireworks: "It seemed as if the sky, the earth and the water were all on fire" (Molière 2010, p. 594)[9].

The lesson to be drawn from the Enchanted Island festival is clear: the royal function is the ground on which society rests; it fosters and gives meaning to the division in estates and functions, and it saves the community by ensuring the fusion of its elements in the very person of the king. Trifunctional ancient sources (renewed in part by the resumption of an ancient language and aesthetic—see below), Christianity and modern absolutist thought are merging here. As in the Eucharistic symbolism, which so strongly models the thought patterns of this period, it is the very act of saying and representing that founds the reality of the operation carried out: "The Eucharistic liturgical formula [. . .], unlike all the others, realizes the metaphor it enunciates" (Marin 1975, p. 362).

The absolutist ritual recreates the trifunctional mythology while at the same time giving it a twist. *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Island* are a *performance*: the show performs the ordering of the three functions and estates around the figure of the king. Rather than locating the king within their architecture, as was the case in former mental patterns, the three functions are recognized to be a product of the social artefact that the king brings about and continuously engineers.

It is also in the spatial structure of the city of Versailles, which Louis XIV organizes around the Palace, that the absolutist-functional ideology is affirmed: the palace and the royal domain are the sacred place of juridical–religious administration; in front of the palace and the Stables that border it, the immense *Place d'Armes* shapes the space dedicated to warlike manifestations; finally, the city itself brings the necessary influx of goods, produced by the *laborantes*, to the royal domain. Seen from this perspective, the structure of the three very large avenues leading to the *Place d'Armes* is loaded with meaning (See Figure 4).

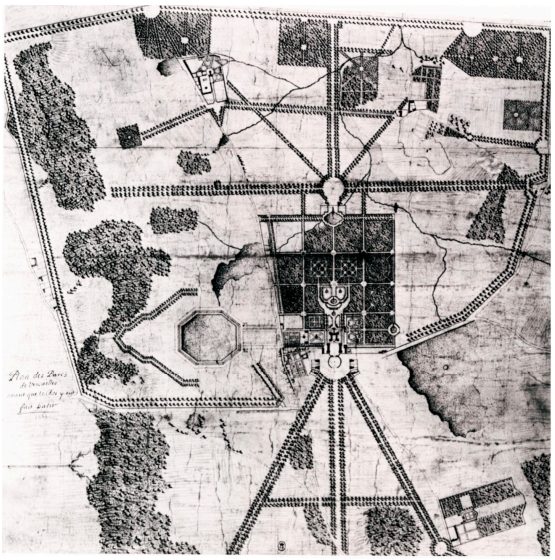


Figure 4. Site plan of Versailles, ca. 1664–1665. Note the three large avenues converging toward the Place d'Armes and the Palace (© BnF, Cabinet des Estampes/Wikimedia Commons).

The origin of the design is to be found in the Roman trident, of which Lewis Mumford gives an indirect but still extremely clear trifunctional description:

> The three great avenues that radiate from the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, the conception of Pope Sixtus V, were designed to make it easy for the pilgrim to find his way to the various churches and holy spots; yet they were conceived in the same undeviating military manner; and it is not by accident that one of them, the Corso, became the principal shopping street of Rome, open to the carriage trade. (Mumford 1961, p. 444)

In other words, the trine scheme of the avenues tends of itself to subdivide its uses according to the sacred, warlike and productive functions.

Through the way it renews the tripartite ideology, the absolutist imagery largely substitutes Christian references with Greek and Roman ones. By doing so, it inscribes itself into a classicist aesthetic, centered upon the overcoming of Chaos and yet keeping alive the potentialities found in a state of creative disorder (on the dialectic between Chaos and Order as manifested in Versailles' design and royal rituals; see Jeanneret 2012). It also makes use of the vast narrative and mythical repertoire offered by the sources of the Indo-European tradition to which it could access. A foundational text may have inspired the design of the *Pleasures of the Enchanted Island* festival, as it speaks of a barren island (and the land on which the Palace was built was generally described as bleak and unfertile) that Apollo's presence transforms into a paradise (let us remember that the Sun King was continuously compared to Apollo).

The Homeric Hymn to Apollo[10] recalls the birth of the solar god in Delos and celebrates the splendor of the sanctuary that the island shelters. The rich islands of the Aegean Sea all pushed back Leto, close to giving birth. Only Delos, the infertile, accepts the proposal made by the fugitive:

> Delos, if you would be willing to be the abode of my dear son Phoibos Apollo, and here to establish for him a great sumptuous temple—since no other will touch you; of that you will not be unmindful, nor, I believe, will you be at all wealthy in cattle and sheep flocks, nor will you bring forth grapes or produce an abundance of produce—if you contain, however, the shrine of far-shooting Apollo, people will all be bringing to you their hecatombs hither, when they gather together; the measureless savor of fat will always rise from the fires—your inhabitants you will be feeding out of those foreigners' hands, for in truth your soil is not fertile. ("The Homeric Hymn to Apollo". Translated by Rodney Merrill, in Pepper 2011, pp. 363–64)

In this text, and in the hymn in its entirety, Georges Dumézil finds the three characteristic functions of the Indo-European worldview: magical and legal function; warlike function; productive function (fertility). The god, from his birth, claims as his own the lyre and the bow, then he declares that he has the faculty to reveal, in the form of oracles, the wills of Zeus his father. Finally, he covers the ground of Delos of a golden cover, prefiguring the influx of wealth which will replace the impossible vegetable cover.

> To the highest function, the administration of the sacred, comes out the oracle; the bow allows a particularly effective form of warlike action; gold guarantees to Delos its future opulence. [. . .] Gold expresses well the unique origin not only of the food but also of the riches which will be those of Delos: external, imported. As promised by Leto, it will compensate the absence of a fat soil. How? Obviously by the influx of the men of everywhere, pilgrims and traders. (Dumézil 1982, pp. 27–29)

As for the lyre, Dumézil sees in it the symbol of what the hymn celebrates immediately after the passage just quoted: the cult, the annual festival of which the lyre accompanies the songs and the dances. The religious function thus receives a double expression: the oracle, word which goes from the gods to the men; and the lyre, which carries their homage to the gods.

3.3. The Reversal of the Absolutist Reinterpretation

Let us now move to the year 1793. The polemic triggered by the daily *Révolutions de Paris* by Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830), himself a Versailles resident, is consequential, especially since this newspaper was a major one. In addition, it was not especially virulent, at least when compared to other publications (Gilchrist and Murray 1971, p. 14).

The National Assembly had already decreed, on 10 August 1792, that the lead and iron contained in the Palace of Versailles would be used to make cannonballs. There had

been talk of having the plow pass through the park, of melting down the bronzes to make cannons. Prudhomme, for his part, proposed to raze the castle. His argumentation was to unfold in two parts: first, the scandal of the foundation of the castle justifies its destruction; second (would he write later), this very destruction must compete with the show, the spectacle that the royal residence had given to its residents. Let us first read attentively Prudhomme's tale of the foundation of Versailles:

> The exact account of the origin of the Palace of Versailles is revolting, and one would hesitate to do justice to this great scandal! In 1627, this superb Versailles was a village where various farmers lived peacefully. A certain Louis XIV, by chance, while hunting, stopped for a moment, an idea of a king passed through his head. "Let these scoundrels be chased away: I want to have a castle made here worthy of me". "But, Sire, the site is barren. To accommodate honorably His Majesty it will be necessary, to make incredible expenses". "I want it, obey; my people will pay; is it not up to the subjects to accommodate their master as he pleases?" And to show himself, so to speak, the rival of God, he added: "As to this church, the parish of Saint Julian, you will make it the *Grand Commun*".[11] (Prudhomme 1793a, p. 667)

This text can be read as a term-by-term inversion of the Homeric Hymn to Apollo:

Celebration of Apollo	A certain Louis XIV
Nobility of its sanctuary	The exact account of the origin of the Palace of Versailles is a source of revolt
Delos, non-fertile rock	A village where different farmers lived peacefully
Leto flees and seeks asylum in Delos	By chance while hunting . . . a king's fantasy passes through his head
It is Delos which asks for the construction of a temple	"Let these scoundrels be chased away: I want a castle worthy of me to be built here".
third function: the temple brings the gold	"It will require incredible expenses. . . - My people will pay".
second function: the bow of Apollo	Caricature of war: hunting
first function: the temple, the oracle and the lyre	And to show himself, so to speak, the rival of God . . .
Cult to the son of Zeus	Sacrilege perpetrated by a rival of God (desecration of a parish church)
A temple is to be built	The Palace must be destroyed

Prudhomme provides his readers with a counter-myth, a tale of the origin that is an inverted hymn. This is made possible by the fact that the narratives of Delos and Versailles correspond to a similar type: the mode of foundation of a universe ordered around a center of representation offers a vision of society in cosmic terms. The theater (temple, palace) allows spectators to admire the ordering of the social/cosmic space that surrounds the central scene. The spectacle that the king gives in his palace speaks of the whole political body in its mysterious unity. There is something sacramental in this performance—as is also the case when the portrait of the king is exhibited, suggesting the union of all the subjects into a political body of which the king is the head (Marin 1981, pp. 221–35, 255).

We now grasp more precisely the meaning of the counter-myth proposed by Prudhomme: far from fostering the harmonious collaboration and fusion of the parts, the monarchical representation triggers dysfunctions. A place where farmers produced wealth (one will note in passing the logical inconsistency required by the successive insistence on the presence of happy farmers and then on the ingratitude of the soil) becomes ruinous for the country; the protective warrior becomes a predatory hunter; the place where God was celebrated is dishonored by a sacrilege (the desecration of the parochial church).

Consequently, continues Prudhomme, it is necessary to proceed to the destruction of the space dedicated to the representation that the monarchic power had given of itself. What needs to be stressed is that this "revolution" is also a "restoration": so as to embody trifunctionality without referring the latter to any monarchic origin, Versailles needs to become again agricultural (one must "pass the plow in the gardens", an expression constantly repeated), military ("the lead and the iron which the castle of Versailles contains will be used to make cannonballs", decree of the Assembly of 10 August 1792) and sacred. This last dimension is strikingly suggested by a subsequent article by Prudhomme:

> Our intention was not to raze the château to the ground so that no trace of it remained; on the contrary, we wanted this vast, superb edifice, abandoned to the just resentment of the sans-culottes, so long crushed by the monsters who inhabited it, to offer for several centuries the spectacle of its ruins through which the plough could pass. If the French Revolution rounds the globe, as we must believe it will, all the republicans of the world will make a point of coming to Versailles as if on pilgrimage. (Prudhomme 1793b, p. 59)

The spectacle offered by these ruins loaded with revolutionary symbolism will ensure the long-term prosperity of the city, continues Prudhomme. Is not the utopia of a world republican pilgrimage to Versailles a return to the Delian model? The destruction of a place of spectacle must be done *spectacularly*. Versailles remains the place where to represent the sacredness attached to social functioning.

When Versailles loses all pretension to being a theater of representation, it is as if it were to return to the chaos from which it supposedly emerged. In 1872, Émile Zola published a short story that describes "la Sarcleuse [The Weeder]" tearing up the weeds from the paving stones of the palace courtyards. If, the storyteller informs us, under King Charles X, the court still came to the palace, "under Louis-Philippe, the grasses hardened: the palace populated by the peaceful ghosts of the Historical Museum began to be no more than a palace of shadows. [. . ..] But there will come a day when the fingers of the Weeders will stiffen again. Then the palace will crumble in a last hiccup of the wind" (Zola 2014, pp. 420–21).

3.4. The Republican Reconstruction of the Tripartite Imaginary

It is time to take up Le Goff's analysis quoted earlier. We remember that he speaks of a revival of the Three Estates imagery just before the dawn of the French Revolution, a revival that he analyzes as "a revolutionary utopia [that] quickly drowned under the waves of the revolution, and the counter-revolution had no tomorrow. The triumph of the tripartite scheme is also its end". As already suggested by our analysis of Prudhomme's counter-myth, we prefer to see in the process triggered by the French Revolution the *transformation* of a mode of representation a transformation that is foundational in the way it endows the very existence of the social fact with renewed sacredness. In addition, while Jacques Le Goff has previously defined each social function (nobles as warriors, clerics as ensuring prayer and advice, peasants as producers of riches) as a "mental categories", and has noted the internal transformations already undergone by the schema with the emergence of the figures of the merchant and the man of law, he then proceeds as if the trifunctional division were a simple *content* that social and political transformations would render obsolete. Now, alerted to the fact by Dumézil and Duby, we already know that the coincidence between the actual social organization in estates and the belief in the necessary collaboration of the three functions is far from being indispensable for the perpetuation of triune representations.

This is verified before the Revolution, with the appearance of the man of law (magistrate, lawyer, notary), who, if he is detached from the Third Estate, does not remain any less subjected to the trifunctional logic, receiving little by little as a privilege the characteristics of the first function: Loyseau, in this same *Treaty of the Orders and the Simple Dignities*, separates the people of justice from the Third and observes that among the Gauls, the druids (their first order, he says) were judges and magistrates. The same connection is made as early as the 15th century by the magistrate Le Breton: "Religion and Justice are things

which are linked so closely together, that they cannot be separated; the same zeal which pushes us to the one guides and leads us as by the hand, gives us heart and strengthens our courage to the other" (Quoted in Kaiser 1982, p. 18). As a matter of fact, Saint-Simon violently denounced the progressive change in the status of the judiciary:

> The entire State is composed of only three orders, as was shown at the beginning of this long but necessary digression. There is no Frenchman who is not a member of one of these three orders, consequently no Frenchman who can be anything other than an ecclesiastic, a nobleman or a member of the Third Estate [. . .]. With this demonstration, how can it be understood that a court of justice which, by its essence, is neither of the first nor of the second order, and which is established only to judge the causes of individuals, can be the first body of the State? (Saint-Simon 1978, p. 486–87)

As we can see, the "functions" are likely to accommodate multiple figures. They institute a structure of social relations whose specific content can be modified in depth. Moreover, despite the death certificate of the tripartite scheme that he signs, Jacques Le Goff leaves the door wide open to other interpretations:

> It is a characteristic of this scheme that it suffers from elastic embodiments especially for the third function. I am convinced that during its secular functioning the whole scheme has undergone an oscillation between a tendency to the exhaustive representation of the society and of each of its three components and a tendency to the restrictive valorization [of one of its components]. (Le Goff 1979, p. 1206)

From the monarchic to the republican system of representation, one can detect a continuity, which was prepared by the internal evolutions of the monarchic spectacle itself.

> The image of the king, the image of his double body, invented during the court festivities, will itself become detached from the private person and will function in an autonomous way. To the "machinist king" succeeded a "machine king" whose unique body merged with the state machine. At the end of the reign, the place of the king becomes an empty box, likely to be occupied by whoever possesses the effective reality of power. (Apostolidès 1981, p. 131)

The expression "machinist" comes from the vocabulary of the theater, and the idea can be found applied to the fact that the king's very presence will guarantee that the hydraulic work accomplished in Marly ensures Versailles' water supply: "Thanks be to God, we realize every day that [the king] is the great and master spring that makes the Machine move" (Marigny, in Molière 2010, p. 1152). One may evoke here the critique of the monarchical spectacle deftly drawn up by Pascal and Nicole (the latter in his *Essais de morale*): Pascal's *Three discourses on the condition of the Great* ultimately make the monarch's portraiture a mere parody of the real presence in the Eucharistic mystery. "The king in his portrait, the absolute monarch, is an empty monument, a cenotaph, a tomb which shelters no body but which is in its emptiness even a royal body" (Marin 1981, p. 290). Port-Royal's critical operation certainly contributed to turning the king from a "machine", a *primum mobile*, into a "machinist", i.e., an impostor. At the same time, the very absence of the royal body arouses nostalgia, magnetizing the desire to find a substitute body.

The public beheading of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 "consummates the rupture between the two bodies: the bourgeoisie takes the place of the sovereign, inscribing his incarnation within the geographical limits of a territory called France" (Apostolidès 1981, p. 13). In other words, "the necessity of ensuring the incarnation of the Sovereign in a representable body assures a sort of logical continuity from one narrative regime to the next. The representation of the king as a state machine was followed by the presentation of abstractions such as Justice, Fraternity, Liberty, and Equality" (Apostolidès 1981, p. 159).

What, then, is the nature of the "sovereign body" now identified with the Third Estate? "Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?" (What Is the Third Estate?), asks Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836). He eventually answers in the fourth part of the pamphlet by saying that *the Third Estate is both an Order associated with the two others and the entirety of the Nation* (Sieyès 2009). This oscillation between the One and the Three will continue to work on republican representations. The work of the political theorist, suggests Claude Lefort, is to identify in any society the internalized principles that ensure both coexistence and differentiation. "A society comes to itself, in an arrangement of these relations [of coexistence] only by instituting the conditions of their intelligibility and by providing to itself, through thousand signs, an approximate self-representation of itself" (Lefort 1986, p. 257)[12].

We can find traces of the evolving tripartite imagery as a new expression of the sacredness now devolved to the nation by following the eventful history of the three colors of the French flag and their inscription on the cockade: "The new cockade could [. . .] legitimately appear as the testimony of a unity found at last, a symbol of alliance and concord. In the meeting of the three colors some exegetes could even celebrate the reconciliation of the three orders, the blue being supposed to represent the Third Estate, the red the Nobility and the white the Clergy". (Girardet 1997, p. 54). What was important, concludes Girardet, is that the flag was neither white nor red: it had to be tri-colored to speak of unity; if designed on a two-color scheme, it would have only spoken of opposition; if unicolor, of tyranny. The same line of analysis is found in Mona Ozouf when she narrates the process that led to the triad "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity": the tension between the three terms magnetized the post-revolutionary reflection. Not before 1848 was this triple motto associated with the tricolor flag. Once stabilized, the terms of the motto were deemed to be "sacramental", as was commonly said at the time, and the expression helped to identify the Maypole with the cross[13] (Ozouf 1997, pp. 4355–88).

3.5. The Tripartite Imaginary and Civil Religion

The tricolor flag; the Cockade; the Republication motto: in these images and symbols, and in others that we are going to discuss in the following Part, the fundamentals of the French civil religion are to be found. The term "civil religion" needs to be used with some caution. Chapter IV.8 of Rousseau's *Social Contract* sets out to define the dogmas that public authorities must impose because they are indispensable to the viability of a nation. Beforehand, Rousseau reduces the models of interaction between political and religious forms to three: the *religion of the priest*, which divides power between clerics and rulers, is to be proscribed, because "anything that breaks social unity is worthless"; the *religion of man* is that of pure Christianity: It is "holy, sublime and true", and at the same time, there is "nothing more contrary to the social spirit", nothing that more detaches the hearts of men from the State. The description of the *religion of the citizen* borrows from that of the Roman religion understood as civil worship. By "making the fatherland the object of citizens' adoration", it combines maximum social utility with a moral harmfulness that leads to its condemnation, because it encourages credulity. What is more, this last model risks harming the people themselves, making them warlike to the point of jeopardizing their security. Against this background, the attempt made by Rousseau to define the essential dogmas of civil religion remains cautious and provisional (Social Contract IV.8, in Rousseau [1762] 2011, pp. 209–22). Rather than on "dogmas", latter-day political theorists will put the stress on the efficiency of rituals and symbols for uniting a nation.

While Rousseau's attempt to sketch out a civil religion limited to as few dogmas as possible can be seen as a stopgap measure, it nevertheless reinforced the idea that every social entity necessarily had a religious dimension. Robert Bellah's famous essay on civil religion in the United States (Bellah 1967) suggested that the worship of a national deity, imagined in the guise of the God of the Old Testament, could be inferred from the grouping of specific symbols and ceremonies (from the banknote to the oath sworn on the Constitution). This line of research proved fruitful. From then on, civil religion was seen as

the system of meaning that a people gives to its common existence through a complex of narratives, values, rites and symbols. Building on Bellah's approach, one may characterize the transfer of sacredness analyzed in this Part as follows: the tripartite imagery has permeated and structured the set of symbols and rituals through which the French civil religion has found its particular expression. Still, the same imagery can endure in nations where feudal/trifunctional representations have been part of the collective unconscious without taking the systematic and pervading character encountered in the case of France.

4. The Bourgeoisie, the Republic and the Three Orders Imaginary

As one could expect, the insertion of the tripartite imagery into the 19th century European national, bourgeois/liberal ideological order went through a process more convoluted than the one sketched above. Besides the complexity attached to different national trajectories, and even when centering solely on the French case, the main source of difficulty and confusion lies in the following tension: on the one hand, the Third Estate as now incarnated by the bourgeoisie *is* the Whole, attributing to itself the characteristics of each of the parts—the bourgeoisie gathers sacral, protective and productive characteristics; on the other hand, it is the Nation that remains somehow divided into three functions, while looking for a symbolic unity that, in the case of France, proceeds from her assumption into a new sovereign figure: the Republic. "Tension" is not "contradiction": the bourgeoisie generally tends to see itself as the privileged expression of the Nation, and thus as the source of legitimacy of the sovereign that the same Nation institutes for preserving its unity. Again, political and ideological trajectories vary from one European country to another. In the present part, I will content myself with three preliminary explorations. The first one will bear upon the figure of the bourgeoisie in the European context around the time of its most achieved expression. The second one, centered upon France, will study how a civic ritual celebrates both the tripartition of the Nation and the unity of its parts around the figure of the Republic. The third part will generalize the lessons gained from the interpretation of said ritual.

4.1. The Bourgeois: An Ideal Type

"What is the Third Estate? Everything [*Tout*]" (Sieyès). Thus, the system of orders and bodies characteristic of the Ancien Régime had to disappear. Another form of sociability was substituted, which was defined by the relationship of individuals to ideas, as the same individuals were deemed to foster a common opinion, a consensus, between the members of a given group (Furet 1978, 22sq). Political power was not any more external to the group; rather, on principle, the shared ability to take decisions based on consensus and reason was the constitutive factor of the group. This transformation was not occurring in abstracto: it was reflecting the ethos and praxis of a social group: the Third Estate which becomes "Everything" is essentially the bourgeoisie of the cities.

This bourgeoisie, which was claiming to embody the nation itself, needed to support its aspirations with an imagery adequate to its purpose. In other words, it had to portray—it had to make tangible and vivid—the political totality it claimed to be. Now, how to constitute one's being into a Whole if not by dividing it in parts? Totality could not be Unicity. The Third Estate as incarnated by urban bourgeoisie could only claim to represent the whole nation by expressing in its own social constitution the system of functions necessary for common existence. To hold his full political legitimacy, the bourgeois had to assume not *one* but *three* social functions.[14] This aspiration will find a distant extension in the ideology of the "central group", which has the vocation, wrote Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in *Démocratie Française*, "by its links of kinship with each of the other categories of society, by its open character which assures wide access, by the modern values of which it is the bearer, to integrate in itself progressively and peacefully the whole of French society" (Giscard d'Estaing 1976, p. 56). And such transfer of legitimacy could not but induce a transfer of sacredness as well.

This phenomenon of a social group claiming to recapitulate the past and thus express the dynamics of national legitimacy was not limited to France; similar expressions of the same transfer could be found in the socio-political history of European capitalism. A late synthesis of the system of representation related to this trend can be found in a work by Werner Sombart (1863–1941), *Der Bourgeois* (translated in English as *The Quintessence of Capitalism*), first published in 1913 (Sombart [1913] 1967). It is a curious work, which certainly offers a fine summary of the sources of the bourgeois mind, but at such a level of reification and totalization that it corresponds quite exactly to the ritual invocations by which a group could celebrate the grandeur of its origin—allowing also an adversary to turn the celebration into an imprecation. Sombart's discourse provides us with a valuable starting point for what we intend to prove: that the matrix of bourgeois mythology, if it leaves the space of the figures of the imaginary free, preferentially uses the trifunctional system as its logical syntax.

In Sombart's work, everything is organized in triads. He distinguishes three primitive forms of the entrepreneur: conqueror, organizer and trader (Sombart [1913] 1967, p. 52); he thus discusses two parallel triads of specifically capitalist undertakings: the freebooter, the landlord and the civil servant (Sombart [1913] 1967, pp. 66–87); and the speculator, the trader and the craftsman (pp. 87–102). Another triad in the presentation of bourgeois virtues: a virtue that could be called religious, and that Sombart himself calls "the Holy Spirit of order", a fighting virtue ("the morality of business"), and a productive virtue (the use of calculation) (Sombart [1913] 1967, pp. 103–24). Sombart distinguishes between peoples of heroes (Romans), peoples of merchants (Etruscans, Frisians, Jews), and non-capitalist peoples (Celts) (Sombart [1913] 1967, pp. 210–21); or else between Catholic, Protestant and Jewish ethics (Sombart [1913] 1967, pp. 236–67). Let us also pay attention to the triplicity of the social conditions that engender bourgeois capitalism: productive conditions (discoveries and techniques), conquering conditions (migrations[15]), and administrative, legal and religious ones (the State—the latter also recapitulating the triad since Sombart distinguishes between religious, military and financial administration) (Sombart [1913] 1967, pp. 241–376). We have here a game of variations with figures distributed in three functions, which merge and take meaning in the archetype of the bourgeois. It should be noted that Norbert Elias, who thinks "with and against Werner Sombart", as Roger Chartier excellently writes (Chartier 1985, VII), distinguishes in a similar way three ways in which the bourgeois of the end of the Ancien Régime aims to rise on the social ladder, thus redrawing the Third Estate on a tripartite division (Elias 1983).

At the same time, the time of publication of Sombart's work—1913—takes for us a symbolic value. The aftermath of WWI witnesses a massive change in political imaginaries due to the amplitude of the social, political, military and international challenges brought by the end of the European order. This is the main reason for which I stop the survey around that time. If the trifunctional imagery remains alive in today's world, then its presence is most probably residual and subterranean—although further studies may still prove me wrong on that point.

4.2. An Ode to the Republic

Some events and moments concur in knotting the threads of the representations which weave the common existence and giving them a sacred character. Urban processions traditionally illustrate the way a city locates itself in a divine and earthly order, the common sense of a shared existence, and the cooperation of orders and functions that contribute to the unity of the whole. Of all these festive events, none in modern Europe has played a more important role than Corpus Christi. Its origins date back to the 13th century, and its development parallels that of communal identities, with towns and cities using its ceremonies as a stage for self-representation (See Figure 5). The choreography that governs it can rightly be seen as perpetuating "a strong and venerable conception of society, according to which its division into three coordinated subsets can alone ensure the smooth

running of a city's vital functions, including its symbolic function, no less vital than any other among men" (Macherel and Steinauer 1989, p. 168).



Figure 5. The Corpus Christi procession in a French city. Folk image, Épinal, 1870 (© Musée de Bretagne [Public Domain]).

Civic sacredness inscribes itself into religious ritual—or it can substitute for it. Olivier Ihl has brilliantly characterized the soul of the republican festival as celebrated in the early days of the French Third Republic:

> Commemorative by nature, the republican festival [. . .] is less concerned with a date, a figure, a beyond-the-world than with a specific mode of gathering. And this in two ways. On the one hand, by making visible what escapes the eye; a belonging that suddenly takes shape in the enclosure of a public square. On the other hand, by assigning to popular jubilation a perfectly invisible framework, the disembodied fiction of a People that replaces the "real presence" of the King or the Emperor. (Ihl 1996, p. 21)

The way Ihl describes it, the procession of the Centenary of the Proclamation of the Republic in 1892, which met with great popular success, reveals something of a trifunctional imaginary: the chariot of the "precursors of the Revolution" (Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Washington) speaks well of a first sacred function; the three following chariots, named according to three warlike hymns, celebrate with brilliance the military function and the preservation of the Republic; finally, the last two floats (ornated with paintings celebrating Industry, Work and Peace) speak of the productive function (Ihl 1996, pp. 297–300). Among the criticisms addressed at that time to the scenography of this celebration, some pointed to the fact that allegorical figures had been privileged, and proposed to replace them by constituted bodies, associations and trade unions—in other words, by a system of tripartition anchored into the concreteness of the social body (Ihl 1996, p. 304).

"The advent of the Republic sanctions a rupture. It replaces the monarchic incorporation by the fiction of a unity without body", writes Olivier Ihl (Ihl 1996, p. 330). And yet, as shown by Ihl's own narrative, this seemingly bodyless unity still requires to be effectuated through a tripartite division. In 1881, the newspaper *L'Artiste* speaks about "the festival of 14th of July, when the State, the Army and the People fraternized in an immense dash of hope and public confidence" (quoted in Ihl 1996, p. 337). Similarly, a painting by

Jean-Charles Cazin, *Souvenir de fête à* Paris (1881) depicts the figures of Courage, Science and Labor "concerting in the illuminated night of the Parisian 14th of July to establish the reign of concord" (ibid.) (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Jean-Charles Cazin: Souvenir de fête à Paris, 1881 (© Musée des Beaux-Arts de la ville de Paris. Wikimedia Commons).

A musical piece and its libretto composed for the celebrations of 1889 provide us with a striking example of the republican transfer of sacrality operated from the religious to the civic realm, at the time when Durkheim starts to theorize similar phenomena, identifying in the contrast between the sacred and the secular the ground of a society's cohesiveness. The composer Augusta Holmès (1847–1903) enjoyed a certain notoriety during a good part of her career (Pasler 2009, pp. 363–64)—her works were frequently performed in the *Concerts Colonne* during the 1890s—although she also suffered from attacks on her musical style, sometimes described as too "masculine" (Pasler 1998). Augusta Holmès benefited from important public support for the realization of her great lyric work, *Triumphal Ode in honor of the centenary of 1789*—sometimes dubbed *Ode to the Republic*. The performances on September 11, 12 and 14, 1889 at the Palais de l'Industrie mobilized 300 musicians and 900 choristers under the direction of Édouard Colonne, and they gathered a total of 22,000 listeners. The set included 7000 square meters of canvas, with "an altar of ancient form in the center of the stage", according to the libretto (Holmès 1889). The libretto was composed by Augusta Holmès herself, as was her custom for all her operatic productions.

"The ceremony begins with long trumpet calls", the libretto announces. Then come choirs of winegrowers and harvesters, carrying the sacred bread and wine, "the flesh and blood of France". Then come soldiers and sailors, the latter singing: "And we sow, ruddy flowers, /The flags with the three colors/In the distant countries where the wave leads us". They are followed by "the workers, the first group preceded by Work, the second by Industry". To the bearers of the Eucharistic food thus succeed the *bellatores*, then the *laboratores*. But the group of workers is also the bearer of a priesthood, a Masonic one:

> With the pickaxe and the trowel,
> With the square and the compass,
> Cement, equalize and level,
> O, companion, do not ever stop!
> Build the Temple of Justice,

Your heart filled with peace and faith.

The order must be fulfilled,

Brother! The future is thine!

(Holmès 1889, p. 21)[16]

The alternation of these three choirs is skillful: the "fourth function" that the peasantry has become now that the urban classes have political precedence is elevated to the level of the first, bringing the substance of a Eucharistic banquet which makes the ones partaking in it commune with the very flesh of the country.

The show does not stop there. The three groups that together make up the Nation are followed by two allegories, that of Art and that of Science. They precede three other choruses which divide in another way a nation that is one and trine: the young people, the young girls, and (gender-neutral) the children: "The titmouse said: It is necessary to live for her!/The sparrow chirped: For her, it is necessary to die! "A funeral march then accompanies the appearance of a veiled woman loaded with chains who moves with slow steps towards the altar. A supplication follows: "You, the just liberator, appear, goddess, appear! [...] O Terrible, O Merciful, O Triumphant, O Proud, O Republic, appear to us!" The goddess proceeds to her epiphany, a spectacle that the libretto details: "She wears an azure peplum, a white tunic and a Phrygian cap encircled by a crown of golden ears. The star shines on her forehead. A scabbarded sword hangs from her belt. With one hand, she leans on the sovereign scepter, with the other, she holds olive branches. The people fall on their knees. The Republic then launches its appeal: "Come to me, you who suffer for justice/Poor, disinherited, martyrs, follow my law!" And here comes the apotheosis: "The mourning figure tears off its chains and veils and appears dressed in the colors of France. A sheaf of wheat incandescent grows and grows at the foot of the altar. All the crowd stretches towards the goddess arms loaded with attributes as to consecrate to her the forces of the Fatherland, with a great cry of supreme enthusiasm" (Holmès 1889, p. 34).

"No performance at the Exhibition was more symbolic of the nation than Holmès's *Ode*". (Pasler 2009, p. 561) (See Figure 7). It is a civic liturgy that Augusta Holmès composes, a liturgy replete with allegories that transfer sacredness from one domain of devotion to another, from the Catholic Church (of which the Virgin is the most exalted representation) to the Republic. If republican thinkers were wary of a cult and a liturgy whose imagery would be too explicitly religious, the artist and organizers in charge of the numerous civic celebrations nonetheless drew liberally from this common fund. It should also be noted that in 1889, some Republicans proposed that, in addition to the five main Catholic feasts, five Republican feasts should be established (Ory 1992, p. 118).

Even though it is a musical work, the *Ode to the Republic* privileges synchrony over diachrony. Nevertheless, the foundation of the Nation is expressed through its division into orders and sexes, a division briefly evoked in the interlude where the Republic has not yet appeared to free the Nation from its chains. The redemption takes place with the appearance of the goddess. One will note a certain degree of duality between the woman in mourning—the Nation, France—and the goddess Republic: there is no total identification between the two, and their final face-to-face evokes rather the meeting of the Earth and the Sky. But one could consider that they compose together an "other Christ", being one in two natures. Such speculation is justified by the constant borrowing, heady as a strong perfume, from Catholic themes, themes that are here redistributed for the celebration of another cult. The *Ode to the Republic* is very close to a Corpus Christi celebration—the civic importance of which I underlined at the beginning of this part—and in open competition with it.



Figure 7. Poster by Georges Clairin, 1989. République française. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité. Fêtes du Centenaire de 1789: Le Triomphe de la République. Ode triomphale: poème et musique par Augusta Holmès (© BnF. Wikimedia Commons).

4.3. Nation, Republic and Tripartition

Insofar as it refers to the founding event of the Revolution, the Republican Idea (*l'Idée républicaine*) undeniably possesses a religious dimension: "France is a people-Christ, the revolution a universal symbolic fact in which the destiny of humanity is at stake. Like the Christian incarnation, it is an irreversible point of reference in time, a radically distinct before and after" (Nicolet 1982, p. 106). To put it another way: "The Republic borrows its words, and perhaps more than its words, from the sacred, even the divine" (Nicolet 1982, p. 498).

But the passage of time and political setbacks were to sift republican principles through the sieve of Reason freed from its eschatological horizon, and, at the same time, allow contrasting conceptions to debate among themselves and identify their common denominators. Ultimately, as outlined by Nicolet, republican ideology proposes a form of common life based on an implicit contract that continuously integrates diverse, even conflicting, traditions and interests into a broad, flexible, evolving synthesis (Nicolet 1982, p. 502).

At the same time, as Nicolet acknowledges, the clarity of the Republican Idea (when seen as "appeased and reasonable") must be measured against the shadowy side of political representations, which he finds amassed in the inchoate image and notion of "Nation" (Nicolet 2003). Nicolet's historiography attempts to retrace the way in which the respective contributions of the Gauls, Romans and Franks (the very definition of these terms loaded with ambiguities) to the French nation were narrated and weighed up. In passing, he notes: "All in all, the Franks became the army" (Nicolet 2003, p. 261). Here we recognize a trifunctional structure: the Gauls as producers, the Franks as warriors, the Romans as legislators. The nation is grounded upon a trifunctional principle which fosters mental images that must always be reconciled with the purity and abstraction of the Republican Idea.

5. Conclusion: Tripartition and the Ground of Common Existence

The present study triggers two series of questions. One has to do with the relevancy of triune social representations in our times. As already stated, I would remain extremely

cautious on this point: the amplitude of the social, political and international upheavals that have followed WWI and WWII make our study an endeavor essentially historical in scope. The second series of questions is larger and more theoretical: are we still witnessing successive transfers of sacredness in the way a local or a national body represents itself, or is the foundation of the social bond no longer "sacred" in any respect? I cannot tackle this last interrogation in its totality, and I will content myself to examine it in the light of the lessons to be drawn from our case study.

Sacredness as a source of social bounding has to do with the act of establishing separations, frontiers, boundaries. Several texts and historical contexts testify to the foundational aspect of the act of establishing clear-cut divisions. In the biblical narrative, the institution of the Sabbath (the separation between the seventh, sacred day and the other ones) proves to be the foundation of a sustainable social order: on the day of the Sabbath, no one should work, not even one's slave, ox or donkey, and, on sabbatical years, debts must be remitted (Ex 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15; Deut 15:1–3 and 12–15). In this way, the establishment of a sacred day and the prohibitions that surround it articulate the mechanisms by which the social bond can endure. For taking another example, and transiting from temporal to spatial divisions, the delineation of the boundaries of the Roman *urbs* ensures the city's durability; the design of the *pomerium*—the sacred boundary separating the city from the territory directly dependent on it—proclaims where the power of tribunes and generals ends, while locating places marked by taboos, such as burial grounds (Grandazzi 2007). The examples could be multiplied. Operating an act of foundation means to outline the contours of a collective body, enabling the latter to exist and subsist.

Still, the act of "dividing" is ambivalent, even perilous. We can make use of competing principles of separation, thereby threatening the constitution of the social body by blurring the lines by which it operates and understands itself, or (the opposite case) the systematic application of a principle of division exclusive of any other confers on the internal and external boundaries of the community a rigidity that eventually weakens them. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah can be read from the second of these angles: for both the governor (Nehemiah) and the Levite (Ezra), the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return of the Babylonian exiles requires strict observance of the social, matrimonial and temporal divisions decreed by the newly proclaimed Law. But this very rigidity provoked divisions and resistance: living in symbiosis with "the people of the land", the community could not bear the autarky induced by an observance with no escape. In such a situation, the community is founded only by being periodically (re)divided: the beginning is always to be repeated (Vermander 2015).

The trifunctional imagery is one of the principles of division that are used for founding the groups referring to them. From this point of view, the trifunctional principle is sacred, and even doubly so, firstly in that it introduces symbolic separations, and secondly in that it refers the ordinary management of the sacred by one of the functions it institutes. At the same time, and rather paradoxically, the difficulty of locating the prince (the ruler, the king) in the schema (should he be identified with one of the orders, seen as overhanging them, or as lying at their bottom, grounding them?) accounts for its flexibility. The scheme's weakness is perhaps the best explanation of its continuity. Its adaptability is such that we can even find in it the roots of the secular conception of power: the constant transformations of the schema allow us to "slide" the representation of power, and thus to rethink the legitimacy of the founding social principle. This could explain the resurgence of the scheme at around the time of the start of the French Revolution: the abolition of the trifunctional principle needed to be decreed (the principle could not simply disappear without acting its disappearance), while a new social design had to draw on the symbolic resources that the old principle was providing to ascertain a new grammar of sovereignty.

In the present case, the question of the "sacred foundation" of the social order and that of its possible declension into a triune structure are closely linked. This also means that, from the moment the question of the foundation of the social order is posed independently of its division into segments, and more specifically into three orders, the trifunctional

schema loses its ultimate relevance. It may continue to manifest itself, but it is no longer foundational. Still, is such a situation akin to the exhaustion of *any* form of social sacredness? The question has to do with the quest, present in all societies, for "a principle of internalization that accounts for a singular mode of differentiating and relating classes, groups or conditions and a singular mode of discriminating the reference points according to which the experience of coexistence is ordered" (Lefort 1986, p. 257). As Lefort goes on to say, the elaboration of a political form (which includes representations of power and of a principle of social division) and the elaboration of a religious form (which refers to what escapes the eyes, to relations with the dead, to an original law) are not easily separable (see also Castoriadis 1975). Indeed, most political systems have been built upon a properly religious substratum.[17] Still, modernity—i.e., the acceptation of humankind's "political condition", theorizes Marcel Gauchet—is essentially understood as a way out of the "religious condition". If we understand the term "religion" to mean the operation by which a human group relates its existence to a ground located outside itself, over which it has no control other than that provided by worship (or, as Gauchet puts it, "humanity's relationship with itself under the sign of dispossession" [Gauchet 2005, p. 14]), politics as a civilizing process progressively specifies and limits the religious sphere by establishing a series of mediations. With the emergence of the State, "religious exteriority materializes in the collective space" (Gauchet 2005, p. 17). Later, with the formation of the modern State ("the State in possession of its concept"), "by separating itself from the religious, the political appears in broad daylight and becomes identifiable in and for itself" (Gauchet 2005, p. 19). "Exiting from religion" amounts for a social group to the fact of understanding itself as a community capable of determining its mode of existence and destiny according to the sole mediations imposed by the rules of political discussion, without any sacred referent constraining its course.

The "grand narrative" outlined by Gauchet has undeniable force. Yet historical and sociological analysis shows that the periods when the "political condition" asserts itself are characterized by the reconstruction, even the exuberance, of the sacred, rather than by its erasure. "Sacredness" is not "religion"—but the fact remains that political communities constantly refer to signs and symbols that they externalize. After all, Durkheim's sensitivity to the sacred/profane division he was encountering in distant societies had much to do with his own historical situation, which he experienced as an age of transition between the French Revolution and a new age, still largely undetermined. The considerations on the religious character of all popular celebrations found in Les *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* pave the way for those that follow on the future of civil religion. The day will come, Durkheim writes, "when our societies will once again experience hours of creative agitation, during which new ideals will arise, new formulas will emerge that will serve, for a time, as a guide for mankind", this before such hours of exuberance will be relived through civil festivals loaded with sacred fervor (Durkheim 1912, p. 611).

> In every case where there is a social group, an imaginary core of identity references is put in place, and their symbolic manipulation is the very lifeblood of the group. The group pursues the only tangible reality nestled in all these representations: its existence, a wager on eternity. This is the tangible face of the imaginary core of identity. (Tcherkézoff 2016, p. 349)

The study of the ever-evolving expressions of the tripartite division is a way to remind ourselves of the resilience of our "imaginary core of identity references", and of the "symbolic manipulations" thanks to which we live together by continuously putting into motion images, narratives and ritual practices. Even when a set of figures and references seems to have disappeared from social discourse and practices, these same figures and references still operate from the underground through the avatars and stories to which their continuous remodeling gave shape.

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Notes

1 Dionysius the Areopagite; also called Pseudo-Dionysius.

2 See also Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*, in which the ascent of the soul from the sensible to the intelligible and then to the rays of inaccessible light is preconditioned on the procession of the Divine names that God's Providence gives us. The unfolding of specificities and divisions precedes their assumption into the One.

3 Caldwell (2014) consideralby enriches and sometimes slighlty corrects Beaune's narrative, confirming at the same time the main line of the latter's analysis.

4 Here, I speak of "civic religion" and not of "civil religion" for, during the period covered by this subpart, public rituals and representations were directed towards the territory of the city, and notably of the Italian city-state, rather than to the whole of a still elusive nation (for which I keep the term of "civil religion", associated with the institutions of the nation-state in contemporary parlance). Similarly, later on I will speak of the "civic importance" of the Corpus Christi celebration, as the latter was (and is sometimes still) taking place in an urban/local context.

5 The developments on Versailles found in 3.2 and 3.3 have found a first expression in (Vermander 2018). I have reworked and slightly revised the thesis developed in this book.

6 The royal feasts of 1664, 1668 and 1674 are to be read as inaugurations of the Absolutist order and of its theater, Versailles. Their magnificence will remain unparalleled.

7 In (Molière 2010, p. 522). This narrative, published in the autumn of 1664, is attributed to Charles Perrault and contains both the description of the festival and the text of Molière's comedy.

8 "Jeune Divinité, ne vous étonnez pas/Lorsque nous vous offrons en ce fameux repas/L'élite de nos bergeries. /Si nos troupeaux goûtent en paix/Les herbages de nos prairies/Nous devons ce bonheur à vos divins attraits".

9 See also the analysis of the festivities in (Jeanneret 2012, pp. 149–53).

10 Short epic poem sometimes attributed to Cynethos of Chios (VI^{e} century BC).

11 Grand Commun: a building very close to the Palace to accommodate the servants and secondary officers.

12 "Une société n'advient à soi, dans un agencement de ces rapports, qu'en instituant les conditions de leur intelligibilité et qu'en se donnant à travers mille signes quasi-représentation d'elle-même".

13 The French Revolution triggered a partial identification between the Maypole and "Trees of Freedom", especially in 1848.

14 Extended bourgeois families enjoying firm social standing generally like to stress the fact that one finds among them entrepreneurs, military officers and clerics (or sometimes lawyers, invested with a sacral aura), thus perpetuating a trifunctional imagery. Among other ritual occurrences, wedding allocutions underline how a family network may increase its aura. The following one, pronounced in Versailles in 1936, provides us with an anecdotic illustration of the fact: "Your two families have hitherto been of the medical and of the judiciary professions; you bring them the prestige of the sword which they were still lacking". (Quoted in Lévy-Vroelant 1988, p. 105).

15 "From the 16th century onwards migrations of this sort may be distinguished under three heads: (i) Jewish migrations, (2) the migration of persecuted Christians, more especially of Protestants, and (3) the colonizing movement, particularly the settlement in America". (Sombart [1913] 1967, p. 294)

16 "Avec la pioche et la truelle, /Avec l'équerre et le compas, /Cimente, égalise et nivelle, /Compagnon, ne t'arrête pas! /Construis le Temple de justice, /Le cœur tranquille et plein de foi. /Il faut que l'ordre s'accomplisse, /Frère! l'Avenir est à toi!"

17 "No state was ever founded without religion as its foundation". (Rousseau, Du Contrat Social, IV.8, [Rousseau [1762] 2011, p. 214]).

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