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Applications of the three-estate doctrine: Swedish local sermons and the social order, 1790–1820

Joonas Tammela

Historiography has emphasized the significance of the Age of Revolution as a critical period for the shifts – caused by the different forms of Enlightenment – in ideas concerning the structure of society, as well as the rights and duties of the individual.¹ These phenomena were also prominent in the macro-level Swedish political discourses that took place in many forums. For example, among the political elite there appeared – increasingly from the latter half of the eighteenth century, and especially after the events of 1809 when Sweden was forced to cede Finland to Russia – descriptions of the state that proceeded from the perspectives of individuals. This gradual shift meant that societal rights and responsibilities belonged to individuals instead of to the political Estates. This trend challenged the older ideal of society which was based on the ideals of stability and collectivism.² On the basis of studies of the debates about patriotism in the newspapers, it has likewise been argued that there was an active discursive struggle about the level of corporatism in Swedish society after the events of 1809.³ Indeed, those events are seen as a watershed in political discourses about the structure of society and the political role of the people in both Sweden and Finland.

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- 1 I refer to the period between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century as the Age of Revolution owing to the events and many changes at various levels in societies, with greater or lesser intersections for the Enlightenment; see Pasi Ihalainen and Karin Sennelfelt, 'General introduction', in Pasi Ihalainen and others (eds), *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1749–1820* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1–13.
 - 2 Martin Melkersson, *Staten, ordningen och friheten: En studie av den styrande elitens syn på statens roll mellan stormaktstiden och 1800-talet* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1997), pp. 213–19, 223–24.
 - 3 Henrik Edgren, *Publicitet för medborgsmannavett: Det nationellt svenska i Stockholmstidningar 1810–1831* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005), pp. 310–12.

The use of concepts at the *Riksdag* indicates that Sweden took a step towards recognizing the individual civil liberties of the people while Finland emphasized the more conservative privileges of the Estate corporations.⁴

The changing perceptions of the structure of society have also been regarded as influencing the expressions of traditional Lutheran views on the body politic. The Lutheran interpretation of the doctrine of the three estates viewed the structure of the worldly society from the perspective of Christian teaching.⁵ The three-estate doctrine outlined the relationship of obedience between the people in different spheres of societal coexistence and human life. The system consisted of clergymen and listeners (*Ecclesia*), authorities and subjects (*Politia*), and fathers and children (*Oeconomia*). Each of these estates had a function to maintain religious practice in society. The notion of the three estates was a core doctrine of the official early modern Lutheran formulations of society. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the system was presented in the Lutheran Household Code (*hustavla/huoneentaulu*) in the official catechisms.⁶ Catechisms were a key tool for teaching the Christian doctrines and the basics of literacy. They were, in principle, among the most crucial texts for the common horizon of understanding in the eighteenth century, both for the educated clergymen and for the non-educated masses. Every member of society was made to at least try to internalize the doctrines of the catechism by reading and listening.⁷

4 Pasi Ihalainen and Anders Sundin, 'Continuity and change in the language of politics at the Swedish Diet, 1769–1810', in Pasi Ihalainen and others (eds), *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 169–92 (pp. 169–70, 192).

5 For clarity's sake, 'Estates' (with a capital 'E') refers to the representatives gathering at the Swedish *Riksdag*, whereas 'estates' is used for the relationship between *Ecclesia*, *Politia* and *Oeconomia* in Lutheran social teaching.

6 Hilding Pleijel, *Hustavlans värld: Kyrkligt folkliv i äldre tiders Sverige* (Stockholm: Verbum, 1970), pp. 32–44.

7 See, for example, Esko M. Laine and Tuija Laine, 'Kirkollinen kansanopetus', in Jussi Hanska and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen (eds), *Huoneentaulun maailma: Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa keskiajalta 1860-luvulle* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2010), pp. 258–306 (pp. 259–61, 285–6); Egil Johansson, 'Den kyrkliga lästraditionen i Sverige – en konturteckning', in Mauno Jokipii and Ilkka Nummela (eds), *Läskunnighet och folkbildning före folkskoleväsendet, XVIII: Nordiska historikermötet i Jyväskylä 1981*.

In the Swedish realm, the three-estate doctrine was not the same as the four political Estates with their particular societal privileges. Every member of society – regardless of his or her status in the political Estates – formed part of all three estates. This doctrinal system merely reflected the patriarchal obedience between the different parts of the established hierarchies. Still, when speaking about the three-estate doctrine there was no separation between the spheres of state and religion as such. There were various styles to reconcile the structuring of society rooted in Lutheran doctrine and the political Estates in theological and political discussions. Therefore, the increasing critique of the division between the political Estates and their privileges during the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth also affected the discursive strategies for legitimizing the three-estate system.⁸

Even in early studies, the change of society has been seen as a cohesive force in reducing the role of the three-estate system in the official Lutheran teaching material in the early nineteenth century. In the Swedish catechism reform in 1809, the structure of the Household Code no longer relied so much on the three estates. Instead, the new strategy appeared to attach importance to the more general patriarchal relations. It has been suggested that the doctrine of the three estates was not regarded as being up to date, as society had changed a great deal during the eighteenth century and the influence of natural law had overtaken the hierarchical construction of the worldly society.⁹ In the Finnish part of the realm, the older

Mötesrapport (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 1981), pp. 193–224; Tuija Laine, *Aapisen ja katekismuksen tavaamisesta itsenäiseen lukemiseen: Rahvaan lukukulttuurin kehitys varhaismodernina aikana* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2017).

8 Carola Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa: Kontextuella närläsningar av Anders Chydenius budordspredikningar 1781–82* (Turku: Åbo Akademi, 2009), pp. 209–11; Carl-E. Normann (ed.), *Cleri comitalis cirkulär 1723–1772* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelse, 1952), pp. 22–4, 28–34; Pleijel, *Hustavlans värld*, pp. 40–1; Sten Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700–1865: Studier rörande det svenska ståndssamhällets upplösning* (Lund: Gleerup, 1949), pp. 247–69. On the conflicts regarding divisions between the political Estates, see also Kaarlo Wirilander, *Herrskapsfolk: Ståndspersoner i Finland 1721–1870*, trans. Eva Stenius (Stockholm: Nordiska museet, 1982 [1974]).

9 See, for example, Pleijel, *Hustavlans värld*, pp. 44–50. See also Daniel Lindmark, *Uppfostran, undervisning, upplysning: Linjer i svensk folkundervisning före folkskolan* (Umeå: Umeå University, 1995), pp. 24–5, 161–4,

form of catechism remained even after 1809 as an official version. During the eighteenth century, however, the use of alternative forms of catechisms was constantly increasing.¹⁰

Despite these reforms, studies by Daniel Lindmark and Joachim Östlund have argued that at the turn of the nineteenth century, the importance of patriarchal relations – adhering to the structure of the three-estate doctrine – was in fact momentarily strengthened, both in the local control of literacy skills and in the rhetoric of the authorities.¹¹ Having studied Swedish Church protocols, Lindmark suggests that the changing perceptions and the strengthening of the three-estate system should not necessarily be read as a paradoxical act from the clergy's viewpoint. Still, he points out that there were variations in teaching strategies between the dioceses at the turn of the nineteenth century, and that these variations call for further research.¹² It seems that the Age of Revolution marked – in principle – a time of change even for the official Lutheran definitions concerning the order of society. Therefore, it would be relevant to study how these shifts in macro-level political discourses and ideas of the Swedish realm affected Lutheran teaching about the structures of society *in practice*.

Several studies have argued that Lutheran teaching on the three estates had a huge impact during the early modern era. Swedish church historian Hilding Pleijel in particular is known for his studies on the role of the three-estate system in Swedish Lutheranism. He has described the three estates as a fundamental part of the teaching on Christian doctrine – in which sermons played an important

191; Jakob Christensson, *Lyckoriket: Studier i svensk upplysning* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1996), pp. 371, 387. It has been argued that three-estate doctrine as such was less frequently used even in Danish sermons during the 1810s, see Michael Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt set fra prædikestolen: danske præsters deltagelse i den offentlige opinionsdannelse vedrørende samfundsordenen og statsmagten 1750–1848, belyst ved trykte prædikener: en politisk-idéhistorisk undersøgelse* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 1997), pp. 118–19.

10 Laine, *Aapisen ja katekismuksen*, pp. 121–36; Laine and Laine, 'Kirkollinen kansanopetus', pp. 274–5.

11 Lindmark, *Uppfostran, undervisning, upplysning*, pp. 159, 182–92, 211–14; Joachim Östlund, *Lyckolandet: Maktens legitimering i officiell retorik från stormaktstid till demokratins genombrott* (Lund: Sekel, 2007), pp. 172, 206.

12 Lindmark, *Uppfostran, undervisning, upplysning*, pp. 184–5, 213–14.

part – during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the ecclesiastical authorities.¹³

Sermons as an instrument in local political cultures

This chapter asks how relations between the members of society emerged in sermon manuscripts written by local clergymen in the Swedish realm from 1790 to 1820.¹⁴ Since the 1990s, a growing number of scholars have studied the early modern sermon as a source for broad intellectual changes in European societies.¹⁵ Not least in Scandinavia, a wide range of historians have studied the role of sermons in the dissemination of political values, ideals and opinions in the eighteenth century.¹⁶ However, research on sermons has mainly focused on printed materials, for example the state sermons held at the *Riksdag* and the model sermons.¹⁷ Ordinary Sunday sermons held weekly in local parishes are strikingly absent in studies evaluating continuity and change in the political preaching of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Still, it has been pointed out that local clergymen generally explained the issues of their time on the basis of the circumstances in their local

13 Pleijel, *Hustavlans värld*, pp. 23, 36–40. Pleijel's interpretations of the three-estate doctrine as a strong basis for the early modern folk mentalities and the thinking of the masses have subsequently been criticized and reconsidered; see, for example, Peter Aronsson, 'Hustavlans värld: folklig mentalitet eller överhetens utopi?', in Christer Ahlberger and Göran Malmstedt (eds), *Västsvensk frombet* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 1993), pp. 11–42 (pp. 11–14, 35–6).

14 Lindmark's observation concerning the small number of studies on the teaching practices of the three-estate doctrine is valid even today; see Lindmark, *Uppfostran, undervisning, upplysning*, p. 152.

15 See, for example, Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter McCullough and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

16 See, for instance, Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*; Pasi Ihalainen, *Protestant Nations Redefined: Changing Perceptions of National Identity in the Rhetoric of the English, Dutch and Swedish Public Churches, 1685–1772* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Øystein Lydik Idsø Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen: Preikestolen som politisk instrument i Norge 1720–1814* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2014).

17 On these sermon genres, see Ihalainen, *Protestant*, pp. 70–3, 79–84; Nordbäck, *Lyksalighetens källa*, pp. 25–7.

communities.¹⁸ This would imply that local sermons are not to be considered as mere ‘photocopies’ of the printed sermon material. Nor should they be understood as direct manifestations of the edicts and declarations issued by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities.

The study presented in this chapter is based on handwritten sermon manuscripts from six clergymen representing seven different parishes in the Swedish realm, and later Sweden and Finland, between 1790 and 1820. There were clear differences between the parishes regarding both local circumstances and geographical location. In Sweden proper, I study the sermons of Anders Hasselgren (1772–1832) in Offerdal, Nils Quiding Jönsson (1773–1824) in Caroli parish in Malmö and Anders Widberg (1752–1825), who served first in the poorhouse of Gothenburg and later in Okome. In Finland, the sermons are those by Karl Fredrik Bergh (1763–1844) in Suonenjoki, Lars Mathesius (1760–1830) in Jakobstad and Erik Levan (1746–1837) in Rauma. The language of the sermons was Swedish in five parishes, and in two parishes the main preaching language was Finnish.¹⁹ The analysis concentrates especially on the national Intercession Days and on pericopes of the liturgical year that invited explanations of social relations.²⁰

These manuscripts are rather unusual sources. For a long time, they have been preserved in clerical families. To begin with, not all clergymen wrote down their sermons. Furthermore, old manuscripts were not always kept. It is therefore pure chance that has determined

18 See, for example, Edvard Leufvén, *Upplysningstidens predikan, I: Frihetstiden* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelse, 1926), p. 90. For parallel arguments on the local varieties in recent Norwegian studies, see Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 25, 97–8, 430; Thomas Ewen Daltveit Slettebø, *In Memory of Divine Providence: A Study of Centennial Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century Denmark–Norway (1717–1760)* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2016), pp. 11, 189, 476.

19 On the studied clergymen, parishes and sermon material, see Joonas Tammela, ‘Yhteiskunnan rakentuminen ruotsalaisen ja suomalaisen paikallispapiston saarnoissa noin 1790–1820’ (thesis, forthcoming in 2023).

20 One should not forget the relevance of the prayer-day declarations issued by worldly authorities that specified the overall themes of sermons; see, for example, Östlund, *Lyckolandet*. On the other hand, it seems that the prayer-day sermons of local clergymen were even more individually written than ordinary Sunday sermons if viewed from the use of collections of sermons; see Niklas Antonsson and Joonas Tammela, ‘Postillor och predikanten: en undersökning av Erik Levans (1746–1837) användning av predikollitteratur’, *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 106:2 (2021), 215–48 (243).

which clergymen's manuscripts have survived. The preserved sermon material in Swedish and Finnish archives is mainly from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. One explanation for this time limit might be the spread of the synthetic sermon structure among Swedish clergymen during the eighteenth century.²¹ It was common to re-use old manuscripts – even ones that were decades old – many times over the years.²² During the late eighteenth century, most of the older manuscripts of predecessors were perhaps no longer usable. Even the manuscripts that form part of my study represent the synthetic structure of sermons, though there are sometimes slight differences in the outlines of sermons. Handling styles and viewpoints regarding the gospel text of the day varied.²³

In the present chapter, the sermons are studied as speech acts performed in temporal, intellectual and social contexts pertaining to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in local communities.²⁴ Since the early twentieth century, the concept of 'the Swedish Enlightenment sermon' has been used somewhat flexibly, from the loose interpretation of various kinds of German homiletic influences on the overall structure of the sermon to the strict interpretation that there were no clear forms of Enlightenment sermons in eighteenth-century Sweden.²⁵ My intention is not to define 'the level of Enlightenment' for local sermons. Instead, I use the Enlightenment concept as an analytical tool; here it constitutes a designation for currents within the Age of Revolution with a potential for broad political, social and intellectual shifts. Indeed, recent

21 Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa*, p. 142.

22 In this chapter, references to the manuscripts also contain information regarding their later uses. If, for instance, a manuscript was used in 1796 and re-used in 1804 and 1817, the reference will be in the form 1796/1804/1817. See also Antonsson and Tammela, 'Postillor och predikanten', 247.

23 Tammela, 'Yhteiskunnan rakentuminen ruotsalaisen'. The corpus of this study is based on the roughly nine thousand sermon manuscripts gathered and inventoried by the writer in different Swedish and Finnish official archives.

24 See, for instance, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 82–7, 107–11, 132–4.

25 On older and more recent interpretations of the Enlightenment sermon in Scandinavia, and more broadly in Western Europe, see, for instance, Pasi Ihlainen, 'The Enlightenment sermon: towards practical religion and a sacred national community', in Joris van Eijnatten (ed.), *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 219–60.

studies have argued that the Nordic eighteenth-century sermon had many intersections with the overall shifts in society;²⁶ likewise, political identities had an overall impact on sermons during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Therefore, the temporal relationship between ‘the Enlightenment’ and ‘the local sermon’, as I understand it, amounts to their having been simultaneous phenomena. The clergy took a stand on the different currents of the Age of Revolution in one way or another.

From the 1980s onwards, Swedish and Finnish studies have paid increasing attention to the central role of clergymen in early modern local political cultures. The roles of local clergymen as channels of communication, as leaders of local governments and as intermediaries between locals and the different levels of secular and ecclesiastical governments have been emphasized. My perspective on the *implemented policies* at the local level is based on the interpretation, put forward by Peter Aronsson, that local policy-making was highly dependent on the socio-economic circumstances of local communities. This means that clergymen had to apply their interests according to local conditions in order to achieve their goals.²⁷ Therefore, I regard sermons as a part of the process of political activity conducted by local clergymen, and also as a form of interaction between clergymen and their local communities. The way clergymen applied the structures of the societal order in their proclamations was not mechanical political propaganda by the state, but a strategy of negotiation between the clerical authorities and their audience.²⁸

26 See for example Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa*, pp. 315–16; Michael Bregnsbo and Pasi Ihalainen, ‘Gradual reconsiderations of Lutheran conceptions of politics’, in Pasi Ihalainen and others (eds), *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1749–1820* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 107–19 (p. 119); Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 442–3.

27 Peter Aronsson, *Bönder gör politik: Det lokala självstyret som social arena i tre smålandssocknar, 1680–1850* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1992), pp. 300–5, 309–10. For studies about the role of clergymen in eighteenth-century local political cultures, see also, for example, Martin Linde, *I fädrens spår? Bönder och överhet i Dalarna under 1700-talet* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2009); Ella Viitaniemi, *Yksimielisyydestä yhteiseen sopimiseen: Paikallisyhteisön poliittinen kulttuuri ja Kokemäen kirkon rakennusprosessi 1730–1786* (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2016).

28 About the simplistic interpretations of clergymen as one-eyed political tools of the government, see Laine and Laine, ‘Kirkollinen kansanopetus’, p. 300.

Social relations in the local sermon

The Lutheran Household Code was widely used in the sermons studied for this chapter. To be sure, the three-estate doctrine was often only implicitly described in the local sermons, as the explicitly societal themes were not always the main purpose of the sermons – not even on national Intercession Days. Still, it was not uncommon for clergymen to describe the three-estates system clearly to their audiences at the turn of the nineteenth century. For example, in a sermon held in 1798, Bergh pointed to the wholeness of society as well as the distinct hierarchical orders when he blessed the inhabitants of the realm by saying, ‘God bless both the authorities and the subjects, clergymen and listeners, men and women, parents and children, old and young people, God bless every subject in this parish as well as in the whole of Sweden and Finland.’²⁹ In turn, Widberg illustrated the duty to perform good deeds in 1803 by telling his listeners about the orders of ruler, clergyman, parent and master, and the obedience owed to them by their respective subordinates.³⁰ Outlining the structures of society, this exhortation clearly reflects the role of the three-estate system. Parallel examples can be found in the output of other clergymen.

Despite the reconsiderations of the official function of the three-estate doctrine that took place in Sweden at the turn of the nineteenth century, it is easy to observe that these doubts about the relevance of the three-estate system did not have any further implications for the use of the system in local sermons. In varying forms, the three-estate system was frequently used in sermon materials throughout the period from the 1790s to the end of the 1810s in order to outline the structure of society. In 1811, for example, Jönsson warned every order of society about arrogance and voluptuousness. Parents had to fulfil their duties concerning their children, household and work. Jönsson analysed how the authorities, the men of manual labour and the members of the clergy each had to work diligently on their own tasks – instead of succumbing to the various kinds of temptations that were associated with the

29 Helsinki, Kansallisarkisto (KH), Kaarle Fr. Berghin arkisto (KFBA), v.1: Concio Sacra Die poenit: 4ta, 1798.

30 Riksarkivet, Gothenburg (RG), Göteborgs Stifts arkiv – predikosamlingar mm (GSA), v.52: 3. Store Bönedagen, 1803.

different estates.³¹ Correspondingly, Mathesius urged his listeners in 1818 to pray separately for the authorities, the clergy and parents to be able to fulfil their respective tasks for the good of the coexistence of human beings.³²

Members of society had their own positions and tasks, all of which served the good of the whole. The turbulent Age of Revolution did not invalidate the relevance of the doctrine of the three estates in sermon material, as has been suggested – drawing on different materials – by Lindmark. In line with the interpretations of Lindmark and Östlund, one may ask whether it might have been more important to point to conventional societal ideals during times of change in political cultures. With the material I have used, there is no possibility of making comparisons regarding the relative significance of the three-estate system over a long time period. It is, nevertheless, reasonable to suggest that the nature of sermons as expressions of conservative political theory, as well as the role of the clergy as defenders of the prevailing social order, laid emphasis on conventional ways of describing the basic structures of society.³³ The external pressure to redefine the very contents of sermons only took effect gradually and over a much longer period of time.

Conventional use of Lutheran political language was much to the fore when local clergymen explained the social order to their listeners during the Age of Revolution. But another essential feature was that local clergymen formulated models of official Lutheran conceptions of the social order depending on their audience and local circumstances. They adapted their proclamations and addressed them directly to their parishioners. Local circumstances had effects on the expressions of societal structures in each parish that I have studied. This can be traced even in socio-economically homogeneous local communities. The parish of Suonenjoki in Eastern Finland is an example of a very agrarian local community. Effectively, it consisted solely of a variety of peasants with minor social and economic differences. With no persons belonging

31 Malmö stadsarkiv (MSA), Nils Quiding Jönssons predikosamling (NQJP), H.M.P. 2: S: eft 3tondedagen, 1811/1819. On the hierarchy within the household in eighteenth-century Norwegian sermons, compare Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 340–2.

32 KH, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran arkisto (SKHS), C v.96a: Högmässan 4:de Böndagen, 1818. On the continuity of the three-estate doctrine through the re-use of local sermons, see RG, GSA v.53: Michaëlis dag 1800/1814/1815/1824.

33 See Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, ‘Gradual reconsiderations’, p. 107.

to the higher orders – besides the vice pastor Bergh – and no significant towns nearby, social or professional diversity was slight indeed. Any differences between members of the local community mainly consisted in their different positions inside households.³⁴

This state of things had effects on society as a whole, as described by Bergh. In 1796, he stressed the Christian way of life. This meant that everyone had to live, in compliance with Lutheran teaching, within the framework of their own earthly vocation (Swedish *kallelse*, Finnish *kutsumus*) in society.³⁵ Bergh emphasized the three estates by analysing the tasks of authorities, priests, parents and elderly people – and, on the other hand, the tasks of subjects and churchgoers. In addition to this, he formulated the structure of the social orders by emphasizing the sinfulness of every higher and lower member of society, which meant ‘the Estate of the Authorities and the Estate of the Peasants’.³⁶ This is an illustrative example of how the roles of different Estates and professions were actually softened and instead traditional patriarchal relations were seen as having greater relevance. The duties of listeners in the sphere of an agrarian community, as subjects of the ruler and as members of peasant households, were emphasized.

A socio-economically homogeneous local community did not mean that the varying professions and tasks in society were always excluded from sermons. The parish of Offerdal in northern Sweden was, just like the parish of Suonenjoki, an agrarian community almost entirely made up of moderately subsisting peasant households. The locals engaged in different forms of agriculture in fields and forests.³⁷ Adjunct pastor Hasselgren nevertheless illustrated the social diversity inside the community by explaining the structure of the

34 Jari Ropponen, *Suonenjoen historia: Pitäjien takamaasta mansikkakaupungiksi* (Suonenjoki: Suonenjoen kaupunki, 1993), pp. 126–9, 137. See also Kaarlo Wirilander, *Savon historia*, III: *Savo kaskisavujen kautena. 1721–1870* (Kuopio: Savon säätiö, 1960), pp. 78–87, 94–112. On the vaccination practices employed by Bergh in Suonenjoki parish, see the chapter by Esko M. Laine in this volume.

35 On the connection between the three estates and the Lutheran idea of vocations, see for example Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*, pp. 104–5.

36 KH, KFBA, v.1: *Concio Sacra Die poenit*: 2da, 1796; Bergh quoted Matthew 5:16 and Philipians 2:15.

37 Holger Wichman, ‘Befolkning och bebyggelse’, in Holger Wichman (ed.), *Jämtlands och Härjedalens historia*, IV: 1720–1880 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1962), pp. 63–99 (pp. 73–7); Sven Olofsson, *Till ömsesidig nytta: Entreprenörer, framgång och sociala relationer i centrala Jämtland ca 1810–1850* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2011), pp. 61, 88, 113.

body politic (*samhällskropp*) and the importance of diligent work by even the most insignificant, lowly and poor member of the community for the common good. Hasselgren analysed the different tasks and orders within society by stressing, on a general level, three categories: the officials (*ämbetsmän*), the townspeople and the farmers.³⁸

But the area of Offerdal had a special feature that significantly coloured everyday life in the area. It was the lively trading route which ran between the Province of Jämtland and the relatively nearby, and large, trading centres of Trondheim and Levanger in Norway. The locals were therefore in close contact with diversified trading markets.³⁹ This aspect was emphasized in sermons delivered in Offerdal, for example when Hasselgren stressed the significance of the work and virtue of an individual for the common good of society – a phenomenon characteristic of Swedish sermons in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁰ Hasselgren warned his audience that lack of a common good caused a society to suffer. Among other varieties of unworthy conduct, such as reluctance to pay taxes, a state of emergency would arise in the nation if the subjects were extortionists in the trading of goods. Conversely, God bestowed well-being on the people if they themselves took care of the common good. In his sermon, Hasselgren also legitimized the idea of societal duties by telling his listeners that giving for the common good did not mean that a subject would suffer scarcity himself. God gave the people what he saw they needed in their earthly life.⁴¹ Owing to the lively trading markets and relatively moderate living standards among the inhabitants of the parish, the sermon was directed at the listeners. The functions of society were formulated so as to be applicable to the everyday lives of locals.

38 Riksarkivet, Östersund (RÖ), Olof Nordenströms samling (ONS), v.3: 23. S. e. Tref, 1799/1803. And vice versa, the agricultural professions were not necessarily invisible in urban parishes; compare RG, GSA v.52: 4. Store Bönedag, 1794.

39 Holger Wichman, 'Handeln', in Wichman, *Jämtlands och Härjedalens historia*, IV, pp. 197–237 (pp. 213–18); Olofsson, *Till ömsesidig nytta*, pp. 73–88. On the more limited trading business in Suonenjoki, compare Ropponen, *Suonenjoen historia*, pp. 130, 135–7.

40 Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, 'Gradual reconsiderations', pp. 116–17; Ihalainen, *Protestant*, pp. 484, 596; Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa*, pp. 77, 101.

41 RÖ, ONS, v.3: 23. S. e. Tref, 1799/1803.

The doctrine of the three estates and social diversity

Proclamations concerning social structures were not identical in every parish, which means that the social nuances of parishioners had an effect on the discourses presented in sermons. The phenomenon may be analysed especially by studying urban parishes, where there was at least a degree of diversity on the part of Estates and professions. For instance, the marine towns of Jakobstad and Rauma were connected to the Baltic Sea trade. The trading business of Jakobstad especially, closely connected to the lively Ostrobothnian markets, increased throughout the late eighteenth century, full staple rights permitting even more comprehensive foreign trade. In Rauma the rather limited maritime trade also increased during the late eighteenth century, albeit more moderately. In Jakobstad the marine traffic, together with the limited small industry and the tradesmen and craftsmen of a small town, did make for socio-economic diversity in the parish, even though most of the locals engaged in various forms of agriculture and labouring occupations. By way of comparison, the local community of Rauma – besides embodying a large peasant population with relatively limited means – consisted of the occupations and vocations of a rather small maritime town.⁴²

Even so, it emerges from the sermon material that such local diversities were much more clearly outlined by the chaplain Mathesius in Jakobstad. In his New Year sermon in 1792, Mathesius hoped that ‘not only the nobleman and the child of fortune in his palace but also the poor man in his humble hut’ could give praise to God for their adequate living conditions. Mathesius reminded his listeners of the honest fear of God, and of their responsibility to advance the common good. He also emphasized, in parallel with the eighteenth-century Swedish tendency to describe the nation as a collective economic actor, that ‘the collective fear of God is like a flood which gives bliss and wealth to the land with the help of trades and skills, as well as many other earthly blessings from God’. Mathesius also

42 Alma Söderhjelm, *Jakobstads historia*, II: *Andra perioden – daningens tid 1721–1808* (Helsinki: Akademiska Bokhandeln, 1909), pp. 213–35, 249–65; Pentti Virrankoski, *Pohjanlahden ja Suomenselän kansaa: Kahdeksan vuosisataa Keski-Pohjanmaan historiaa* (Kokkola: Keski-Pohjanmaa-säätiö, 1997), pp. 95–104; Ulla Koskinen and others (eds), *Uudistuva maakunta: Satakunnan historia*, VI: *1750–1869* (Pori: Satakunnan museo, 2014), pp. 166–9, 427–9.

uttered itemized blessings both for the different groups listed in the Household Code and for the different orders of society.⁴³ Elsewhere, Mathesius similarly warned his listeners about negligence in their lives as Christians, reminding them of the requirement to be diligent in one's own occupation and tasks, whether socially significant or not. Therefore, everyone in every order – rulers, judges, soldiers, clergymen, merchants, craftsmen and peasants – had to work conscientiously.⁴⁴ The wide social spectrum is a notable feature on the part of the society in question.

In the sermons of Pastor Levan in Rauma, social diversities were less prominent; he placed greater emphasis on more general patriarchal relations and differences in wealth.⁴⁵ For example, in 1802 Levan emphasized the idea of hierarchies as 'the lottery of life' in general terms only. God determined the different external circumstances of human beings. One was placed as a king and one as a servant, one was rich and the other poor, and a man had nothing to say about this.⁴⁶ In Levan's sermons, the diversity in occupations caused by the maritime trade was occasionally outlined, alongside agriculture, when he spoke about the vital Providence of God in fulfilling the everyday tasks of a man.⁴⁷ Levan pointed out that people had set positions in society. Even if local circumstances had a considerable impact on the wording of the sermons, not all clergymen placed so much explicit emphasis on the structures of worldly society in their sermons. Levan's sermons also remind us not to make too sharp social divisions between the early modern towns and rural areas.

To return to the sermons of Mathesius, the evident differences between the occupations within society did not mean that Mathesius sought to break up the model of the three estates. In 1793 he

43 KH, SKHS, C v.96a: Nyårs Dagen, 1792. On Sweden as a collective economic actor in eighteenth-century state sermons, see Ihalaïnen, *Protestant*, p. 596.

44 KH, SKHS, C v.96a: 4:de Sönd: efter Påsk, 1796/1804/1817. On interpretations of continuities in discourses on the diligent work in Swedish Lutheran political cultures, see Christensson, *Lyckoriket*, pp. 378–9.

45 Both Bregnsbo and Viken have viewed the Danish-Norwegian discourses of wealth differences in society as an application of the three-estate system; see Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*, pp. 125–41; Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 301–5.

46 KH, SKHS, C v.86: Novi anni, 1802; Levan quoted Proverbs 16:33 and Jeremiah 10:23.

47 KH, SKHS, C v.86: Öfver 4. Böned. Otesangs Texten, 1791; KH, SKHS C v.86: Novi anni, 1802.

explained the context of the gospel text for the day to his listeners. The Epistle to the Colossians ‘provided guidance for the sections [*classer*] of people who belonged to the Household Hierarchy [*hushållsstånd*]’. Mathesius emphasized the way of life that led to temporal and eternal bliss, which required that ‘people should obey God’s orders in general matters of Christian life, but also in private matters, the nature of which would vary from one estate to another in worldly society’. This meant that ‘the king and the subject, the clergyman and his listener, the parent and child, the master and servant, they all draw from the Word of God those special instructions by which they must live’. Mathesius explained that if the people obeyed the commandments of God in general and private matters, the blessing of God would flourish – in both towns and countryside – in the form of peace, health, good harvests and trade with a good profit. Everyone would enjoy the worldly blessings and there would be no poverty.⁴⁸ According to Mathesius, it was the duty of every person to live according to the demands of their own respective worldly calling. Only then would the realm flourish. Even though Mathesius drew more attention to occupational varieties than, for example, Bergh in Suonenjoki, the three-estate doctrine was at least an equally important basis for life as a member of society.

The parish of Caroli in Malmö consisted of citizens of an urban area. In Caroli, the social diversity of the parishioners was somewhat wider than in most of the other parishes mentioned in this study, with persons from all walks of life. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Malmö was among the largest cities in the realm. Trading connections with the rest of Sweden and abroad were lively, albeit not on as large a scale as in Gothenburg.⁴⁹ The townscape was also coloured – besides people from the lower orders – by different kinds of officials, as well as by the various bourgeois professions.⁵⁰ The context of the sermons delivered in Malmö was an urban one,

48 KH, SKHS, C v.96a: Högmässan 2:dra Bönedagen, 1793; Mathesius referred to Colossians 4:2. On the varying societal uses of ‘sections’ in Danish sermons, see Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*, pp. 133–41.

49 On trading business in Jönsson’s sermons, see, for example, MSA, NQJP: H:M:Pr. 4: Bönedagen, 1814.

50 Olle Helander, ‘Stadens historia 1719–1820’, in Oscar Bjurling (ed.), *Malmö stads historia*, II (Malmö: Malmö stad, 1977), pp. 351–537. For more recent interpretations regarding the relations and dynamics between the different social groups in Malmö, see also Lars Edgren, *Stadens sociala ordning: Stånd och klass i Malmö under sjuttonhundratalet* (Lund: Lund University, 2021).

and the differences between listeners in respect of social status were evident. Indeed, the sermons of Pastor Nils Quiding Jönsson frequently and clearly emphasized the diversity that characterized the social structure of his audience.

In 1810, for example, Jönsson stressed the idea of different vocations, or callings, for the members of society. He stated that ‘the king, the officials of the administration with their different spheres of operation, the judges, the clergymen, the soldiers, the burghers, the farmers, the crofters and the day-labourers all have their own vocations in worldly society’. In some vocations there were wider and in some narrower possibilities to advance the common good, and the work of some was not as prominent as the work of others in society as a whole. But ‘even the most insignificant person on his small plot of land [was] still an irreplaceable link in the great chain of producing the common good that was built by the Almighty’. The duties of some required more perseverance, skills and talents than those of others. However, God looked only at how faithfully everyone had fulfilled their own duties and their God-given vocation.⁵¹ Despite the diversity of occupations, Jönsson frequently emphasized the interconnectedness that characterized the functions of the different estates. He thus ascribed importance to the Household Code. The Easter sermon that he used many times during his time in Malmö is a good example of this phenomenon.⁵² Social diversity was expressed in such a way that every occupation, and each of the estates, was closely connected to the totality of society and the common good.

Conflicts concerning the privileges of the different Estates and occupations were common at the macro-level of political discourses during the early nineteenth century. They were also expressed in local sermons delivered by Jönsson. He often treated these conflicts in terms of the nature of vocations. For example, Jönsson emphasized that a man from the lower orders should not be envious of a man belonging to the higher orders. A man from the lower orders often yearned for ‘the might and honour’ of the man from the higher orders, being dissatisfied with the limited opportunities afforded by

51 MSA, NQJP: H.M.P. 2. S. eft: Påsk, 1810/1822. The responsibility of both high and low members of society for the well-being of that society was frequently brought up during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; see the examples from Denmark in Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*, pp. 129–31.

52 MSA, NQJP: Annandag Påsk, 1804/1806/1808/1815.

his own calling in society. Poor men and labourers often coveted 'the abundance, comfort and possibilities of the rich to enjoy life'. Jönsson argued that this kind of yearning was wrong. The all-wise God had created both the rich and the poor to live together. It was natural that some constantly had to work hard in their respective occupational sphere, while others had the possibility to rest and enjoy themselves at leisure. Jönsson therefore urged his listeners to be content with their lot in the world, regardless of whether it entailed material abundance or scarcity.⁵³ Jönsson legitimized the prevailing social structures in his sermons by emphasizing the differences with regard to the external conditions of human beings as being the work of God. People of lower orders were thus required to focus on the duties pertaining to their restricted forms of work and accept their more modest livelihood.

Jönsson also handled the conflicts that arose from social diversity by emphasizing virtuous behaviour in different kinds of occupation. For example, he reminded people from the higher orders of their responsibilities.⁵⁴ Jönsson stated that the social hierarchy did not erase the duty to love everyone. A man was not allowed to be proud of his high social status and reputation. Beauty, wealth and nobility (*höghet*) were only temporary. A wealthy person 'should not avoid ... contacts with the poor, workmen or day-labourers, because they possessed less in the way of worldly goods than he'. The social position of a person from the higher orders allowed his good deeds to gain better and wider visibility than the deeds of an insignificant person; but the latter might still be a much more virtuous human being. Indeed, Jönsson said that 'there is often more virtue and merit beneath the frieze shirt or rags of the beggar than beneath the ribbons and stars of honour'. In spite of that, Jönsson emphasized the reciprocal obligations of the higher and lower orders in their coexistence.⁵⁵ With such speeches, Jönsson reminded persons from the higher orders that they must behave virtuously instead of simply

53 MSA, NQJP: H.M.P. 2. S. eft: Påsk, 1810/1822; Jönsson quoted Philemon 4:12. On the church as a meeting place for the different orders of society in Malmö, see Edgren, *Stadens*, pp. 136–40.

54 On a parallel phenomenon in Norwegian sermons at the turn of the nineteenth century, compare Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 301–3.

55 MSA, NQJP: Afts: p. 3. S. eft Trettonded, 1806/1808. On external badges of honour for people of the higher orders, see also MSA NQJP: H.M.P. 26. p. Tr, 1807/1816. For a parallel discourse in Danish sermons, compare Bregnsbo, *Samfundsorden og statsmagt*, pp. 145–6.

relying on their position in society, stressing that external signs of honour should not eliminate interaction between the higher and lower orders.⁵⁶ But that did not reduce the role played by patriarchal relations in the interaction between the different estates.

Anders Widberg and the changing contexts of local sermons

The sermons of Anders Widberg provide an interesting perspective on the nuances of local preaching about structures in society. During the period covered in this chapter, Widberg served in two parishes which were rather different with regard to the socio-economic circumstances of the local communities and of parishioners. From 1789 to 1798 his audience consisted of the members of the poorhouse of Gothenburg, whose social standards were obviously relatively low. At the start of the nineteenth century, Gothenburg was the second-biggest city of the realm. The large-scale maritime trade was an important part of city life, besides the many different urban occupations in the context of a large eighteenth-century Nordic town or city. This made for a lively social townscape, with plenty of social diversity.⁵⁷ The poorhouse was, therefore, not a cross-section of the average inhabitants of the city, even though socio-historical studies have suggested that the low-income proportion of the population was quite large in Gothenburg.⁵⁸

As one might have expected, Widberg frequently emphasized the theme of material wealth when talking about the different circumstances in which people found themselves. He pointed out how both rich and poor were equally significant in the eyes of God.⁵⁹ Sometimes Widberg even paid direct attention to the special character of the poorhouse parish in his sermons. In 1793 he declared that every member of society, ‘from the lowest inhabitant of the poorhouse to the highest official’, was obliged to live according to Christian virtues,

56 On the external symbolic value of honour in eighteenth-century political culture, see also Martin Tunefalk, *Äreminnen: Personmedaljer och social status i Sverige cirka 1650–1900* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015), pp. 35–6, 141–5, 278–81.

57 Bertil Andersson, *Göteborgs historia*, II: *Näringsliv och samhällsutveckling. Från fästningsstad till handelsstad 1619–1820* (Stockholm: Nerenius & Santérus, 1996), pp. 143–5, 362–3, 390–4. It is nevertheless noteworthy that people in Gothenburg used to attend services in other churches than their own; see Andersson, *Göteborgs historia*, p. 128.

58 Andersson, *Göteborgs historia*, pp. 341–7.

59 See, for example RG, GSA, v.52: 3: Store Bönedag, 1794.

thereby promoting the common good by living in harmony, unity and neighbourly love. Besides this general Christian behaviour, they had to promote the common weal in their worldly pursuits according to their particular orders and occupations. Widberg stated that because the inmates of the poorhouse were ‘neither of benefit nor harm to the common affairs’, he would not bother to present a detailed analysis of how all members of society should advance the good of the realm by fulfilling the responsibilities of their respective worldly vocations.⁶⁰ The socio-economic circumstances of parishioners did not release them from the obligation to work for the common good in general ways by living according to the virtues of Christian coexistence. Even so, their position in the body politic was somewhat indefinable. This sermon forms a concrete illustration of the fact that the functions of the hierarchical society were not always easy to apply in a manner that would fit the social realities of the local community.

In 1798 Anders Widberg left his position as preacher at the poorhouse in Gothenburg in order to serve as pastor of the agrarian parish of Okome. The local context for his sermons changed radically as a result of the move. Okome was a peasant-dominated community in south-western Sweden, with rather slight differences when it came to the occupations of parishioners. The Okome area was relatively wooded and was therefore not among the most profitable and developed agricultural communities in south-western Sweden. The socio-economic circumstances of locals were fairly homogeneous.⁶¹ When compared to the poorhouse of Gothenburg, the audience in Okome had a much more clearly defined place in the structure of society; and when addressing them, Widberg was notably explicit about relations and mutual duties within the household as well as within the agrarian local community. For example, in 1801 he emphasized the reciprocal duties of the clergyman and his listeners, parents and children and the master and mistress of the house in relation to their servants. He even stated that ‘the people of the

60 RG, GSA, v.52: 1. Store Bönedag, 1793. For expressions of harmony in national-prayer-day declarations, see Östlund, *Lyckolandet*, p. 76.

61 Pablo Wiking-Faria, *Freden, friköpen och järnplogarna: Drivkrafter och förändringsprocesser under den agrara revolutionen i Halland 1700–1900* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2009), pp. 51–61, 319–22; Carl Malmström, ‘Landskapsbildens förändringar i Halland under de senaste 300 åren’, in Jerker Rosén and others (eds), *Hallands historia, II: Från freden i Brömsebro till våra dagar* (Halmstad: Hallands läns landsting, 1959), pp. 589–616 (pp. 595–605).

higher and lower orders, rich and poor, men and women, farmhand and maid, as well as the learned and the simple-minded' were equally responsible for their actions.⁶² As we can see, the application of the three-estates system was much more straightforward in the social circumstances of a standard agrarian community.

In Okome, Widberg more frequently emphasized – and targeted – the conventional theme of misuse of wealth. In 1814, however, he named pride and arrogance as sins common to all kinds of people. They were the sins 'not only of rich, learned and prominent people, but also of disadvantaged, simple-minded and poor people'. Even if the poor did not have much opportunity to display great external splendour, they could still 'swell with inner pride' and demonstrate their splendour in minor things. Widberg went on to say that this kind of sin was not only characteristic of towns but also of the countryside, and that a disadvantaged person might be even more arrogant than a member of the higher orders of society.⁶³ Widberg pointed out that not even members of the peasant population were safe from the temptations of swaggering and boasting, although they were far from prosperous. The obligation to be frugal and reasonable was a virtue that should be shared by everyone, regardless of rank in the community.

Moreover, the sermons delivered by Widberg demonstrate that alongside the strong continuities, the post-1809 changes in the political system had at least some effects on local sermons. Earlier studies have demonstrated that during the Gustavian era, even in state sermons, the political role of the subjects was described as being quite passive.⁶⁴ These kinds of expressions were also familiar in local sermons, as these merely emphasized that the ultimate duty of a subject was to obey. All kinds of political decision-making or legislative work were outside the sphere of an individual subject.

62 RG, GSA, v.52: 2. St: Bönedagen, 1801.

63 RG, GSA, v.52: 1. Store Bönedagen, 1814. For the general discourses on luxury and pride in the sermons that Widberg delivered in Gothenburg, compare, for example, RG, GSA, v.52: 4. Store Bönedag, 1794. Compare Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa*, p. 233.

64 Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, 'Gradual reconsiderations', p. 112. In Denmark–Norway, the idea of the political participation of subjects was constantly seen as unprofitable in sermons during the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, even if the discourses on the duties of authorities and citizens were not stable; see Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, 'Gradual reconsiderations', pp. 111, 114–15, 117–19; Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 439–43.

Subjects should not even consider whether the laws were good or bad. There was no doubt that those tasks belonged to the authorities.⁶⁵

In studies of state sermons, however, it has been argued that the societal changes in Sweden in 1809 had a clear effect on discourses during the 1810s. Citizens were described as being increasingly active in political participation. In Finland the traditionally restrained language of politically passive subjects under the Russian emperor remained after 1809. In the national prayer-day declarations, there were no signs of any conspicuous changes in discourse during the 1810s.⁶⁶ The study of Finnish local sermons indicates that the subjects, both before and after the events of 1809, were regarded as politically passive and faithful in fulfilling the orders of the authorities, with no expressions of popular sovereignty in any sense. In Sweden, too, expressions of that kind were extremely rare in local sermons. Nevertheless, during the 1810s there are hints of a reconsidered role for the country's subjects, a phenomenon that mirrors the overall discursive shift of the early nineteenth century.

Widberg continually emphasized the idea of unquestioning obedience of orders given by the authorities.⁶⁷ Besides, the 1810s saw him begin to emphasize the political activity of a subject. In 1816, in fact, Widberg used worldly freedom as a point of comparison in relation to the spiritual freedom of a man. Widberg explained to his listeners that it was an enormous God-given worldly blessing that the people were not subjugated under foreign rule but 'under their own authorities, whose reign was not based on their own will and desire but afforded space for the public to participate in the decisions of important councils and in the making of beneficial laws'. According to Widberg, it meant that 'every inhabitant of the land distributed in the different Estates, had the possibility to think about what should be done and permitted, and to undertake a thorough and confidential consideration before the matter came under the executive power of the authorities'. By contrast, it was an enormous misfortune and a matter for lamentation if the people had to be 'under the slavery imposed by a foreign ruler and forced

65 KH, SKHS C v. 96a: Nyårs Dagen, 1792; RÖ, ONS v.3: 23. S. e. Tref, 1799/1803.

66 Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, 'Gradual reconsiderations', pp. 115–17; Östlund, *Lyckolandet*, pp. 177–8.

67 Compare RG, GSA, v.49: 23. Sönd: eft: Trinit, 1799/1811.

to obey the laws and habits of foreign rule, and to do everything they were told to do, whether it was for good or for ruin'.⁶⁸

This sermon accentuates the changing attitudes to popular sovereignty and the functions of the state.⁶⁹ Instead of passivity, the political activity of subjects in society was expressed very clearly. Society was nevertheless corporate, as can be seen in the strong emphasis on the political Estates.⁷⁰ Widberg's sermon cannot be said to have promoted the increasing trend towards individualism and the decreasing function of the state as such; local sermons were merely following the overall changes in societal values. Even so, Widberg's statements do reflect how the changes in political cultures that took place during the Age of Revolution also affected the proclamations made by local clergymen.

Conclusion

This study of sermons delivered in seven different kinds of local parishes in the Swedish realm at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century demonstrates the impact of and the remarkable continuity in discourses defending the idea of a corporate state system. Everyone was declared to have their own fixed position in the structure of society. This order was described as having been set by God. Instead of the individual benefit, the common good was seen as the fundamental idea for maintaining obedience.⁷¹ The early modern ideas of a stable and hierarchical society – based on doctrines that were especially clearly presented in the Lutheran Household Code – permeated the sermons given by local clergymen in different parts of the realm and in different kinds of local communities. A good example of continuity is also the re-use of the same manuscripts many times over the years. For example, Mathesius and Widberg used manuscripts they had written at the turn of the nineteenth century – manuscripts that dealt with the social order – over twenty years later.

68 RG, GSA, v.53: Joh: Döpar: Dag, 1816.

69 It is reasonable to argue that the observable shifts in the language of sermons reflect the overall change in political language that had already happened earlier in other political forums; see Ihalainen, *Protestant*, pp. 12–14.

70 The role of the Estates was also legitimized in contemporary state sermons; see Bregnsbo and Ihalainen, 'Gradual reconsiderations', p. 116.

71 On the individual benefit, compare the ideas expressed in the sermons of Anders Chydenius; see Nordbäck, *Lycksalighetens källa*, p. 210.

Explicit references to the three estates were frequent when the social order was formulated in local sermons during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In several sermons, however, we can see that at the same time the argumentation merely invoked general patriarchal relations in society. This absence of specifications reflects how either hierarchical or patriarchal relations in society were widely emphasized at the same time, with no need to highlight just one of them. Therefore, this study refines Lindmark's interpretation regarding the absence of a conflict between these models. Both structures had their respective function in explaining the social order and in discouraging listeners from any kind of social unrest.

However, the circumstances of local communities led to differences in the presentation of the social order. As earlier studies have pointed out, formulations and concepts were used in a conventional manner when describing society.⁷² Still, the varying local contexts frequently impart different implications to seemingly standard expressions. There are evident variations in the topics of discourse. In the socio-economically homogeneous agrarian parishes, the differences in wealth or household relations were often more important issues than the social hierarchy. In fact, the nuances in respect of social diversities or different occupations even paled, as we can see especially in the case of agrarian Suonenjoki, or were expressed as an abstract theme, as in the case of the poorhouse of Gothenburg. Even the sources of livelihood in different kinds of local communities affected teaching about society in different ways, as can be seen, for example, in Offerdal and maritime towns. But in the sermons of every clergyman the common good was a goal for instruction about the social order, irrespective of local applications. Even in the towns of Jakobstad and – especially – Malmö, where social diversity and differences with regard to members and orders of society were especially evident, the idea of a societal system was solidly based on harmonious, unbroken and God-given vocations, or callings.

Major political, social and intellectual shifts during the Age of Revolution brought wide-ranging changes to the respective context and external circumstances of sermons, but the changes in the overall discourses of local clergymen were actually relatively modest.

72 On the weight of conventions in Norwegian eighteenth-century sermons, see Viken, *Frygte Gud og ære Kongen*, pp. 428–30, 442–6; Slettebø, *In Memory of Divine Providence*, pp. 476–7, 486–7. See also Ihalainen, *Protestant*, pp. 70–1.

In Swedish and Finnish sermons during the Age of Revolution, the teaching of Lutheran societal doctrines was firmly based on the idea of stability and on the fixed duties of different orders of society. Clergymen liked to follow the inherited, conventional discursive patterns. But as we see in the example of Widberg, reconsiderations of the political role of the individual did take place in 1810s Sweden. The function of the political Estates was not questioned; indeed, it was emphasized in that the political activity of a subject inside their respective Estate was brought up in sermons. Notably, ideas about popular sovereignty found their way into local sermons in the 1810s. This underscores the dynamism inherent in Nordic sermons with respect to adherence to trends in contemporary political language, as well as to intellectual changes, as earlier studies have suggested.

The present chapter has shown that the ideas contained within the three-estate doctrine were applied locally, and that the various modes of application display both similarities and divergences. Even though the basic idea of the corporate society might have been much the same for different members of the clergy, and we can detect a wide range of conventions in their discourse, there were a number of ways in which that basic idea could be expressed before listeners. The local clergymen thus adapted the Lutheran doctrine according to local, social and temporal circumstances. Consequently, even the teaching of the core doctrines of Lutheranism was not beyond the impact of circumstances in different parishes and local communities. The local adaptations in the teaching of social relations reflect that local sermons were a vivid and active arena of political culture during the Age of Revolution. This realization engenders a significant perspective on the nature of relations between Lutheranism and the state, a perspective which incorporates local reactions to the currents of the Age of Revolution in the Nordic countries.

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