

One of the results of Feudal times was the arbitrary line drawn between the upper and lower classes, or the aristocrats and bourgeoisie as they were called. The nobles were the salt of the land during the emergence from barbarism and seemed to think themselves yet so. But the kings had taken away their powers and left them only the shell of their ancient authority. The government of France was in hands of members of the bourgeoisie who had bought titles from the king. Holders of these bought titles were despised by the nobility. These titles were bought to escape the enormous taxation and numerous disabilities of their class. They could not hold office, or enter the court, nor obtain commissions in the army or navy.

The aristocrats on the other hand spent their enormous revenues in luxury and dissipation with the king at Versailles. They left their estates and neglected their tenants. Their agents whom they left in charge ground down the peasantry to obtain money for their masters' pleasures. The children of the nobles were neglected and allowed to grow up amongst the immorality of the time, with the result that each generation grew more shallow and dissipated than the last. The upper classes gradually lost all belief in religion but still continued to observe its outward forms. The works of Voltaire and Rousseau were eagerly read in their parlors and discussed at their dinners. Little they thought that they criticized so eagerly their own death-warrant.

In the Church the same distinctions were drawn as in the world. The Bishops and Abbots and other dignitaries were all nobles and they received enormous revenues ranging from forty to four hundred thousand livres. The most of these fortunes were spent annually at Paris or Versailles with the rest of the gay crowd around the king. Their cloisters and monasteries were neglected as were the estates of the nobles. Bishops' palaces were used as country houses to give pleasure to the friends of their holders.

On the other hand the curés or parish priests received only a mere pittance from two hundred to five hundred livres annually. They were the real mainstay of the Church and their lives of self denial were devoted to the welfare of their parishes. But the people were more scandalized by the lives of the few bishops than edified by the lives of the many priests.

Nevertheless the Church was the only body in the kingdom that had real liberty. Every five years four delegates, two from the priest-hood and two from the episcopacy from each province