

## Thought for the Day 17 July 2020 from Nigel Greenwood

Luke 20.20-26

Today's reading is the classic passage relating secular to sacred, in which Jesus was being tested by the priests, scribes and elders of the temple – as the chapter is headed 'The Authority of Jesus Questioned'. We are told that they are keeping a close watch on him, sending spies who pretended to be sincere, but hoping to catch Jesus out in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the authority of the governor.

But, of course, Jesus was wise to what they were trying to do – fending off the various attempts to catch him out ! They resorted to flattery: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" – then, knowing the power and domination of the Roman Empire, they tried a direct approach: "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not ?" Again, Jesus saw through their duplicity and told them: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Astonished by his answer, they became silent !

Our Lord's critics had hoped to trap him into sedition – encouraging discontent, even resistance against the established and authority. Again, Jesus saw through the attempts to trap him, giving an answer which could not be challenged !

Much has been written about the phrase (in the traditional version): Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's – surely a metaphor for both the symbolic links and divisions between sacred and secular. It encapsulates the complex relationship between faith, government and society – simplified as 'church and state' or, recognising the boundary and overlap, 'separation of church and state'.

Martin Luther King summed up our responsibility so clearly and powerfully:

*"The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."*

However, for Anglicans, it also relates directly to our status as the 'Established Church' – bringing both responsibilities and opportunities in the life of our nation. It must surely be our calling as we live out the Gospel in all aspects of our daily lives to ensure our voice is heard at all levels and in every sphere of life.

As two former Presidents of the U.S.A. expressed it so clearly .....

*"Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply held religious belief"*

Dwight Eisenhower

*"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports – and let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion."*

George Washington

Here's another take on this passage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z44FUdvMpUU>