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Some time ago I read about a certain vicar who spent a short spell in prison because he refused to pay the council tax. He reckoned that the rises in this tax have been so numerous that it constituted an unjust burden for a very large segment of the population.

However, it would be unfair to cast **Caesar** (the State), in the mould of being **forever anti-God** as if the two were permanently at loggerheads. After all there have been many saintly Kings and queens throughout history, not least in this country. Having said that, the relationship between Church and State throughout history has been **mostly fractious**.

I believe that the upheavals of the **16th century Reformation**, for instance, were as much to do with monarchs and other ruling classes in **power struggles** with the Catholic Church as it was to do with religious questions *per se*. At that time the monasteries were indeed powerful owing huge tracks of land in this country. The **break with Rome** in this country led to their dissolution - at least 900 of them. Having said that there was a great outcry among ordinary people against their closure.

Sometimes the relationship between Church and State has been openly hostile as in the last century when **communism**, tried, but failed, to silence the church and stamp out its influence from public life. Closer to our day I notice where the **Planned Parenthood** group within the United Nations are not at all happy with the Catholic Church's criticism of their population control programmes which it regards as morally objectionable. Unfortunately western State aid for these poorer nations is often withheld if they don't comply. **The Church in Africa**, for instance, which is very much pro-family, is encouraging its people not to be swayed by these tempting UN offers.

Some say you should never mix religion and politics. I notice at present there is a big furore going on in the United States because a notable catholic woman judge who is anti-abortion has been nominated to its Supreme Court.

Surely our faith should inform the stance we take on certain social and moral issues affecting us and the next generation. We need to be careful that we don't render to Caesar what belongs to God. The re-definition of marriage some years ago by most governments in Europe is a case in point. It shows disregard for God's Will which is inscribed in our very nature.

The laws of God and the laws of Caesar often clash. Our cardinal said recently the church's stand on things is often counter cultural. We uphold the church's proud tradition especially when we render to God what is rightfully his in all areas of public and private life. Perhaps the harsh reality of the corona virus pandemic offers us all an opportunity in the relative seclusion of our homes to reflect more deeply on areas in our present day culture where our allegiance to God has taken second place to that of Caesar. But are we prepared to do something about it?

A state or country is only as Christian as the individuals within it. If we do our bit in keeping Caesar from encroaching on God's domain then we're headed in the right direction.