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Some time back 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 out of sync. After all there have been saintly Kings and queens throughout history. 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 secular leaders in **power struggles** with the Catholic Church as it was to do with religious questions *per se*. Having said that we know the monasteries owned huge tracks of land in this country. The **break with Rome** led to their dissolution - about 800 of them. But there was a great outcry among ordinary people against their closure by the monarch at the time.

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 especially in Africa. The Church bemoans the fact that western State Aid is unjustly made conditional on the acceptance of their anti-birth policy. **The Church in Africa**, for instance, which is very much pro-family and pro-life is encouraging its people not to be swayed by these tempting UN cash offers.

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 human nature.

The laws of God and the laws of Caesar often clash. Our cardinal said recently the church's stand on important moral issues is often **counter cultural**. The scriptures warn us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world round us'.

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. If that's not the case it's never too late to change one's mind-set.