



THE CANNY REPLY

(MATTHEW 22:15-21)

Jesus' quarrels with the religious authorities continue, this time involving the Pharisees and the Herodians, supporters of the puppet rulers of the Romans.

They put Jesus on the spot with a question about paying what was basically a poll tax. Jesus cannot give a straight answer without seriously offending someone: "Yes" will get him into trouble with his fellow countrypeople of strong nationalist feelings; the Roman administrators are certain to take a dim view if he replies "No". Jesus knows that their challenge is motivated by malice, and he calls them "hypocrites". He points out that the coin by which the tax must be paid belongs to Caesar anyway, so it ought to be returned to its owner: this allows him to avoid offending the Romans without (necessarily) falling foul of the Palestinian zealots. He then changes the tone by reminding his audience of their duties towards God, thereby bringing the confrontation to an end. His opponents realise that Jesus has outwitted them and leave the scene. ■

REFLECT

Discussions often take place about the relationship which should exist between the bodies we usually call Church and State, and this text is pressed into service to separate the two. Thus, people can argue the Church should keep out of politics, that it should confine its activities to spiritual matters and leave politicians to run the country.

When we consider those situations where the Church has, effectively, become part of the government, or at least a close collaborator, we could conclude that there is something to be said for this argument. The history of the twentieth century testifies to the Church being allied to repressive dictatorships and suffering from a lack of credibility as

a result. But while the "official Church" may have been in large part involved in this way, there were bishops, priests and religious who saw that Gospel values, the teaching of Jesus, compelled them to become involved in what were political issues. Liberation theology arose, based on the book of Exodus, which presents a God who abhors slavery of any kind; and on the prophets, whose target was the political and spiritual leaders of the nation, for failing in their duty and responsibilities.

A Church which confines itself to "spiritual" matters soon becomes a Church of the sacristy, largely irrelevant to the wider community. The mission of Jesus' disciples is to preach the Gospel,

SAY
I can make a difference.



DO

What pressing issues are there in your local or national community? Find a way to help to resolve them.

LEARN

The Herodians were supporters of the puppet rulers of the Romans, the house of Herod.

The Herodian kings were not of the line of King David, and therefore not regarded with any great respect by the local population.

The poll (census) tax had to be paid in a Roman coin which bore the image of the emperor: this was a further insult to Jewish sensibilities.

which involves promoting human values such as dignity, respect, proper wages and so on. How this is done is another matter: we find Christians in every political movement, with different opinions on how these principles should be established, and attempts to found explicitly Christian parties have run into all sorts of human problems. Perhaps the parable of the leaven in the dough is appropriate in this context, where Christians, motivated by the teachings of Jesus, involve themselves in the life of their local and national community and thus, simultaneously, "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God". ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

To you I call; for you will surely heed me,
O God;
turn your ear to me; hear my words.
Guard me as the apple of your eye;
in the shadow of your wings protect me.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
grant that we may always conform our will
to yours
and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 45:1.4-6

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.
Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whom he has taken by his right hand
to subdue nations before him
and strip the loins of kings,
to force gateways before him
that their gates be closed no more:
It is for the sake of my servant Jacob,
of Israel my chosen one,
that I have called you by your name,
conferring a title though you do not know
me.
I am the Lord, unrivalled;
there is no other God besides me.
Though you do not know me, I arm you
that men may know from the rising to the
setting of the sun
that, apart from me, all is nothing.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 95

Response:
Give the Lord glory and power.
1. O sing a new song to the Lord,
sing to the Lord all the earth.
Tell among the nations his glory
and his wonders among all the peoples.
(R.)

- 2. The Lord is great and worthy of praise,
to be feared above all gods;
the gods of the heathens are naught.
It was the Lord who made the heavens.
(R.)
- 3. Give the Lord, you families of peoples,
give the Lord glory and power,
give the Lord the glory of his name.
Bring an offering and enter his courts. (R.)
- 4. Worship the Lord in his temple.
O earth, tremble before him.
Proclaim to the nations: "God is king."
He will judge the peoples in fairness. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the
Thessalonians.
From Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the
Church in Thessalonika which is in God the
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; wishing you
grace and peace from God the Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ.
We always mention you in our prayers
and thank God for you all, and constantly
remember before God our Father how you
have shown your faith in action, worked for
love and persevered through hope, in our
Lord Jesus Christ.
We know, brothers, that God loves you and
that you have been chosen, because when
we brought the Good News to you, it came to
you not only as words, but as power and as
the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Your word is truth, O Lord,
consecrate us in the truth.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Matthew 22:15-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.
The Pharisees went away to work out
between them how to trap Jesus in what he
said. And they sent their disciples to him,
together with the Herodians, to say, "Master,
we know that you are an honest man and
teach the way of God in an honest way, and
that you are not afraid of anyone, because
a man's rank means nothing to you. Tell us
your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay
taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus was aware
of their malice and replied, "You hypocrites!
Why do you set this trap for me? Let me
see the money you pay the tax with." They
handed him a denarius and he said, "Whose
head is this? Whose name?" "Caesar's" they
replied. He then said to them, "Very well, give
back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and
to God what belongs to God."
The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,

born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Grant us, Lord, we pray,
a sincere respect for your gifts,
that, through the purifying action of your
grace,
we may be cleansed by the very mysteries we
serve.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Behold, the eyes of the Lord
are on those who fear him,
who hope in his merciful love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, O Lord, we pray,
that, benefiting from participation in heavenly
things,
we may be helped by what you give in this
present age
and prepared for the gifts that are eternal.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish
to be perfect, we have nothing more to do
than to perform the ordinary duties of the
day well. A short road to perfection—short,
not because easy, but because pertinent
and intelligible. There are no short ways to
perfection, but there are sure ones.

St John Henry Newman