

Render unto Caesar and Render unto God

Matthew 22:15-22 12:31-32

I Corinthians 15: 48-49

Revelations 20:4-6

A great French Sociologist names Emile Durkheim studied the religions of the world and concluded that: "The major religion of any culture is worship of the culture." Every religion tends to worship the "way we do things!" Political leaders have a vested interest in making themselves seem to be the representative of the gods and their will becomes the divine will in people's minds. Four hundred years ago, Sir Francis Bacon wrote a paper called "Idols of the mind." He suggested that we worship the mental images of our society. The Romans were a good example of cultural religion. They believed that Rome was the eternal city and the eternal empire. They built their road and bridges to last forever. In Rome there was a building called the Pantheon where all of the gods of the ancient world paid homage to the goddess Vesta who was the goddess of Rome. The emperor was seen as an extension of the gods and was considered divine. The closest example is the Roman Catholic Church which is an exact copy of the Roman government. The pope is a human being who becomes the "Vicar of Christ" and when he speaks out of the Church on faith and morals, it is the inerrant Word of God. That causes them to ignore a lot of pronouncements by popes during the Dark Ages and the Renaissance.

The opponents of Jesus wanted to trick him into saying that people should not pay taxes to Rome so they could charge him with being against Rome. When they asked Jesus whether people should pay taxes to Rome, he said; "Show me a coin." They showed him a coin with the image of Caesar. Like our coins, it could have been a past emperor like Augustus. It would say, "The divine Augustus Caesar." The Jewish Temple would not accept coins that said the emperor was divine. Money had to be exchanged for Temple money which did not have the emperor's face or call him divine. Of course the priest exchanged the Temple money back into Roman coins at a tidy profit.

Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and render unto God the things that belong to God." Ministers often forget the latter part of this scripture. The apostle Paul repeatedly said that a Christian was being transformed into the image of Christ. There was no question in the early Church that Christians were to be transformed into the image of God and not into the image of the Roman state or into the image of Caesar.

During the second and third century, Christians saw the worship of the Roman State and worship of the Emperor as a denial of The Holy Spirit. A person might be forgiven of murder, but denying the Lordship of the Holy Spirit was unforgivable. Burning incense to Caesar was a denial of the Lordship of God through Christ and was unforgivable. By the first century, the Roman Empire went from the Scottish boarder, across the Arctic Circle to Moscow, Russia and down including Eastern Europe, to the Sahara desert. The Roman Army was the Roman Civil Service and the Corps of Engineers building roads, bridges, sewers etc. In the early Third Century, a Roman soldier wrote to a bishop that he had joined the Roman Army some ten years before but now wanted to become a Christian. The bishop responded that he should move into a job that did not require killing people and when his enlistment was up in another ten years and he could stop worshipping the State and the Emperor then he could join the Church.

About the year 150 A.D. A letter appeared explaining the Christians. It is known as the "Letter to Diogenes." Here are some quotes from it.

"Christians are indistinguishable from other people by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law."

Jesus said that no one could serve two masters, you cannot serve God and mammon. "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and the rest of life will fall into place." Obey every law that conscience allows you to obey, oppose injustice and unjust laws. Honor the elected officials but never let them become God! The worship of the Emperor of Japan, the worship of Adolph Hitler and the Communists are chilling examples of why Christians must never deify human institutions. It denies the Holy Spirit and creates the Anti-Christ.