



This pronouncement of Jesus has been interpreted differently down through the course of Christian history. The answer should not be understood cynically and in line with those who thought that no allegiance at all belongs to the ruling power, or, on the other hand, that a civil power has the right to demand total submission of its subjects. No state can claim to itself divine powers of absolute authority. All are subject to the higher demands of truth and justice and the inviolable dignity of the person centered in God. The reasonable interpretation would be that Caesar has his own legitimate but limited sphere, and even that he holds it under God and is responsible to God for its proper governance. So, it does not mean that the state itself has to profess Christianity. It means that the state must be what it is and perform the proper functions of a state in maintaining law and order, and promoting the welfare of its citizens.

Now the question is, what is Caesar's and what is not God's? Is there anything in the world that is not of God? Even Caesar and his kingdom, his rights, power and possessions belong only to God. If a coin engraved with the image and inscription of the emperor, belongs to him. Then let us not forget, we have been "stamped" with God's image and likeness, "God created man in his own image...male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). Every human person created in the image and likeness of God belongs to him and him only. We rightfully belong not to ourselves, but to God who created us and redeemed us in the precious blood of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. God's image is not on a coin, but in us, and it means that we owe all that we are to him. We should become what we are; if we are made after the image of God, who is Christ, we ought to bring the image of Christ to fullness within ourselves.

As long as we live in this world, we belong not only to God's kingdom but to a human kingdom as well. God placed us in a family, and our family in a society. By birth we are citizens of the country and by baptism we are citizens of God's kingdom. It's God's will that we be faithful citizens of God's kingdom and the country where we live. Therefore, Jesus makes a clear distinction between civil authority and religious authority. He underlines the importance of fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities to God and the country. We fulfill our duties to the country by obeying the lawful authorities, paying all lawful taxes and contributing our share for the welfare of all. We are called also to pray for the lawful authorities that they may discharge their duty according to God's will, and fulfill all the laws which have the common good in view. We are equally and more responsible to fulfill our duties to God our creator, by being faithful to his sacrificial love and sacraments of the Church, and proclaiming the Gospel and living it in action. We are called to be the faithful stewards of our time, talent and treasure and share them with the Church for the mission of God on this earth. Where both civil authority and religious authority are in harmony there will be no conflict but peace. Wherever there is immoral or unjust behavior against people's dignity and rights, then there has to be conflict. And when the state oversteps the mark and puts itself in the place of God, Christians are in the last resort absolved from obedience. In such a conflict we have to remember what St. Thomas More said, "I die the king's faithful servant, but God's first."