RENDER UNTO CAESAR...

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Two senior clergy were invited on to the Today programme to have a public row about the tax, banks and leadership. I'm far from convinced that they did the right thing in accepting.
Category: Politics

If my life has a soundtrack, it is not the seventies rock, I grew up on, nor the Celtic folk I listen to today, it's the sports, the papers, Thought for Today and the rest of the Today Programme on BBC Radio Four. Apart from when we lived in Africa, the Today programme has been the accompaniment toÂ my breakfast for all of my life. I used to time when to leave for school by the weather forecast just before eight am.

That being said, I have something of a love-hate relationship with Today. It seems to have adopted a rather unpleasant macho approach to interviewing, which is more about conflict and point-scoring than it is about eliciting information. A particular bug-bear of mine is the common scenario, where they invite two speakers of different points of view to debate something and then basically stoke up a fight between them. To be honest, I don't want to listen to a blazing row over my morning cuppa.

I was particularly bothered this morning when the two protagonists were CofE clergy who were brought in to talk about tax and leadership in the wake of the HSBC scandal and Lord Green's involvement in it.

This is an important issue. A major bank apparently helping defraud the Revenue of significant amounts of cash is comment-worthy. The fact that the man who was leading the bank at the time is now advising the CofE on leadership is a cause for concern.

However, the ensuing discussion was far from edifying. Giles Fraser took a predictably left wing approach and Richard Turnbull came from the right. They made their points passionately and argued for all the world like any Labour and Tory politician. Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with Christians holding views from various points across the spectrum and for arguing their case. But I do have a huge problem, with two senior clergy-people allowing themselves to be brought into a breakfast time dog-fight on the airwaves. Do your arguing in private gentlemen!

The banks and tax and all that are important things; but not that important.

We have a better and more important message to proclaim than the merits or otherwise of the tax-system. It should not have been above the wit of two such talented and clever blokes to have come to a common position which demonstrated the love of God and self-sacrifice of Christ; a message our society desperately needs to hear. Rather than falling into the Today programme trap of division and discord, they should have sought the Christian virtues of unity and humility. When we do this it is not only a powerful demonstration of the message of Christ, it also really messes with the Today Programme's agenda!