

Do the letters AMDG mean anything to you? From being 11 years and 4 months old until the time when I wrote with a keypad rather than pen and ink (much later than you might think) I wrote those letters at the head of the piece I was writing: AMDG. In my school books it was the first thing you wrote in the margin on the left hand side with the date beneath. Later it would be a superscription to whatever essay I was presenting: AMDG – *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* = To the greater glory of God. The sure sign of a Jesuit child. And I was educated by the Jesuits, or by institutions they had founded, (not all my teachers were 'Js'), from age 11 to beyond ordination at 25. Firstly at St Michael's Grammar School in Leeds and then at the Gregorian University, Rome. It leaves its mark.

The letters represent the motto, represent the whole point and purpose of the Order, and indeed of our whole lives. We exist to give glory to God, and nothing else. Which is not to say we should spend our earthly lives practising on the harp and dressed in white; but we should do all that we do for God's glory and not for our own benefit.

The rationale behind writing those four letters on the top of the page is exactly the same which, in days gone by, told us to recite "*The Morning Offering*" as we opened our eyes to greet a new day. The prayer expressed our hope that all we did that day was done for God; and the idea was that, while through the course of the day we might forget all about God, caught up in the business of life, nevertheless, we had in advance committed all our efforts to God. Clever people those Jesuits.

Paul expresses the same idea in today's passage from his first letter to the Corinthians. He says, "Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God."

He is ending a section of that letter which has been concerned with the issue of eating meat offered to idols in the temples. It is not an issue that much concerns us. But it was a hot topic of contention in the first century. Every town had a temple or a number of temples to various gods and some dedicated to the Roman Emperor as well as the gods. Temples were places where sacrifices were offered. After the priests had had their 'cut' the meat was available in the market place for the public to buy. Meat was otherwise not too readily available. Hence the question: Should a Christian buy such meat? On the one hand it had been offered to nothing but the air as the 'gods' did not exist; on the other it looked as if you accepted the existence of these gods if you bought and consumed it. Moreover temples were places with restaurants where business people gathered to get to know each other and do deals and eat the meat on offer. And temples were places where trade guilds associated, under the patronage of a god, and if you were a goldsmith or leather worker, that was your trade union, and membership mattered if you were to get anywhere. So did you join in and say it was all nonsense that god-stuff? or did you say: no, I will not be seen to be

part of that idiocy and contaminate myself and give the wrong idea to other people?

Paul counsels that, while it is all nonsense, we should not take part if 'the weak', the easily influenced, will get the wrong idea. John of Patmos, the author of the Book of Revelation, will deal with the same issue and, in a later time and a different world, will take a very different view.

The question for us is: do we accept and go along with all that the world does, or do we stand apart from it? There is no one answer. We will need to decide on each issue as it arises. But we must not simply go with every flow. Our stance as citizens as well as as Christians must be to look critically at the world, and question what is being done in our name.

The cabinet in Rotherham have been dismissed, and we would disown much that has been done, and not done, by elected members and officers in our name. But we elected the members, or by our passivity in not going to the polls and not finding out who was standing, and maybe, by not standing ourselves, we enabled the horrors, we allowed the heinous mistakes to be made.

Lent approaches. Next Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. Lent is a time for realigning ourselves on Christ. Reconsidering and reorientating our lives and our values. A time, in a busy world for standing back and reflecting on where we are going and how we are doing. Not much is asked of us in Lent: two days, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, are days for fasting and abstinence. Hardly demanding as I, and many people, fast and abstain most days of the year, without noticing. Lent does not have the rigour, the discomfort of *Ramadan*. What we should do is try to go back to the basics. AMDG: remind ourselves everyday that what we do is done not for ourselves first and foremost, but for God's glory. And a handy mental exercise is to say each morning a prayer like 'The Morning Offering' and have little sign posts in our day, a coffee break, as we get into the car, an arrest-point to remind us to repeat the sentiments of the prayer. We could not do much better than a friend of mine who every day says Psalm 137. It begins:

“O Lord you search me and you know me,  
You know my resting and my rising,  
You discern my purpose from afar,  
All my ways are open to you.”

If we kept that in mind each day we would be well set to do everything for the greater glory of God.