

As the World Changes So Words Change Meaning

Language is the vehicle that puts thoughts into words. It bridges what we think and what we say. Language is important. Just imagine if we didn't have it for communications.

Language is a tool we use daily. The correct usage and understanding of words are of the greatest importance. For example, I read how "the Japanese government used the word *mokusatsu* in replying to a U.S. surrender demand. U. S. Military leaders understood the word to mean 'ignore' instead of 'withholding comment until a decision has been made.' Thinking the Japanese high command had chosen to ignore the surrender ultimatum they decided to drop the atomic bomb."

A living language is always changing. New words are added, others are no longer used. In England, in the times of King James, charity meant self-giving, sacrificial love. Now we think of a handout.

A whole new list of words has been added to our vocabulary: Nowadays you hear such terms as "jet age," "cop-out" "turning-on" "blow my mind" etc. A pig has always been known as a four-legged curly tailed animal to be consumed as pork and bacon after its demise, But now in some parts in North America a pig is an insulting name given to a policeman.

Grass used to be known as cow feed. Now "grass" is a vital word in the vocabulary of a drug-addict, Studying the development of modern language you discover an increasing lack of refinement. The violence, roughness and sensuality of our times have impregnated our basic language.

An increasing number of books are making no reference whatever to normal sex relations. In the name of modernity and freedom of expression vulgarity and crudeness have made their way in much what goes under the name of "modern literature." The world is full of conversational cripples who use barnyard rhetoric. Many spice their talk with four letter words.

Even in the mass media you read and hear profanity. Profanity and vulgarity are apparently substitutes for refinement and excellence of thought. Where are the men of moral stature and conviction who are willing to lead us out off this wilderness?

In the past dynamic leadership was given by one of our governor generals. The late Georges Vanier was a man of deep religious conviction and great refinement. Once he launched a campaign against blasphemy and invited those who were inclined to use the name of their Saviour or the Virgin Mary to express their anger or irritation to substitute the name of their father or their mother. They did not find it easy.

After four years on the western front he knew from experiences what he was talking about: "I shall always remember a certain evening during the battle. Painfully we were advancing in India file towards the front line. It was dark and the shells were exploding. Suddenly in the night, I heard a voice blaspheming. These blasphemies, at a moment when we were so near to death, frightened me because blasphemy calls in the wrath of God. I managed to reach the man who was blaspheming and I asked him: 'What has Christ done to you, my friend, that you should insult him like this?' He trembled like a child and very nearly burst into tears. He had blasphemed without thinking, almost without knowing, what he was doing. Without thinking? Without knowing? In fact, most of those who blaspheme try to excuse themselves by saying that they weren't thinking. As if one could forget!"

In contrast to vulgarity in language there are four letter words which express the noblest and highest aspirations of man. Words such as love and hope give real spice to life.

Of course we hear much about love. So many popular songs are about love. Love stories you can read in abundance. Hearing all these love songs you would think that soon a heavenly state on earth will be reached. Far from it! We see so much lovelessness and inhumanity in our society. Real love is not sentimental or sweet. Love is a discipline. It is an action of the will.

Love involves self-denial. Self-sacrifice and an outgoing concern for others. Actually, love is a theological virtue. The greatest love story ever told is found in the Bible. God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. This love soars high above secular understanding and man's selfish nature.

The word hope is also theological. Our Canadian Ambassador to Egypt, Herbert Norman, committed suicide. A scrawled note was found in his pocket: "I have no option. I must kill myself, because I cannot live without hope."

"What oxygen is to the lungs," observed Emil Brunner, "such is hope for the meaning of life." Without hope our world cannot go on. The world hopes for the best but Jesus Christ offers the only hope.

Yes, I like these four letter words - love and hope. The language that has captured my heart and life was written by the apostle John in his sunset years: "We are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him (Jesus Christ), for we shall see Him as He is."

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