

## Letter from Mark Williams

I wonder how bothered you are about words. Do you have pet hates? The humourist Stephen Fry, for example, has a very flexible attitude to the development of language – even to the point of not being too fussed about the correct use of apostrophe's (hmm!).

Just recently I was at a meeting where the wording of a document was changed, because it was felt that the terminology used in the original was somewhat loaded. You may consider that no one should be described as 'churched', other than a woman who has recently given birth (whatever happened to that rite?). Similarly, the comedian Alexei Sayle once stated that "anyone who talks about 'workshops' and isn't in light engineering is a twit – though he used a rather more colourful term!

One source of phrase that makes many people wince is words that come from another country. The Académie française objects strongly to English words appearing in the French language (e.g. Le football), and many English purists object to American terminology – Americanisms as they are called. Examples noted by the BBC include 24/7 instead of all day, every day; "I'm good" instead of "I'm well"; or Math instead of Maths (there's more than one 'Mathematic'!).

One word often cited as an Americanism is the use of the word 'fall' instead of 'Autumn'. It never seems to sound quite right – yet, in this case at least, we have assumed incorrectly. 'Fall' was a word used in Tudor and Stuart England for the season. The early settlers took it to America, where it has continued in use. It is in its 'home' country that the word has fallen into disuse (if you will excuse the pun).

And what an appropriate word it is. It describes the season so well, with the falling of the leaves. It also gives a feeling of falling into the dark and cold of winter – inevitable and unavoidable. There is a certain melancholy about the word.

The word also carries more when we think of the biblical account of the Fall. Adam and Eve fall from Grace through their sin in eating the fruit. We carry this image forward in the phrase 'fallen woman' – though, interestingly, not 'fallen man'!

As we consider these ideas in combination, perhaps we have a very powerful image about this time of year. We experience a world that is gradually shutting down for the winter... aging as it were, losing the freshness of youth (spring) and the joy of the prime of life (summer). We say farewell to these, and look towards a future that might be colder, achier, and more threatening. Yes, winter is coming... but there is still much beauty and much life to be seen and experienced. God is present in the fall.

And, as we all know, after winter comes the spring, and the promise of new life again.

*Mark*