The Etymology of bless

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**The Etymological History of the Word “Bless”**

**Abstract**

How did the word bless evolve into common expressions like “God bless you”? This linguistic project explores upon the origin, various definitions, and uses of the word bless.

**Introduction**

Oxford English Dictionary:

“To make sacred or holy with blood”

**Étymologie**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary:

The word bless has transformed in the English language from a specific religious practice, into a euphemistic utterance, which is part of a natural semantic evolution. Bless once meant to consecrate with blood and is now attested when referring to a divine spirit. According to the OED, bless is derived from Old English bless and blódian, which is reflected elsewhere in common languages like German, Danish, Dutch, and Gothic. Around the 11th century, the de/bloesian phonetically shifted into its sound, and pitch became a similar phonology. For the fourteenth century, the t was dropped, and formed blódsian, which looks identical to the way we currently spell the past participle of bless. Although the word bless and blood co-existed with each other throughout the English language, bless has a unique derivate from its Germanic roots. The word bless is derived from Old English blod and bloedsian, which is not found elsewhere in Germanic languages. Blot was originally used to describe a pagan ritual of marking or affecting with blood. According to the OED, the borrowing history of the word bless can be traced back to the Hebrew word brk meaning “to bend.”

**Uses**

1. Bless was also cited as an adoration towards God, and can be used when praising God for a mortal or divine. Bless once meant to consecrate an entity with blood to gain God’s favor over it.

2. This usage of bless, which is “to sanctify or hollow by crossing yourself,” can be linked back to the eleventh century. The cross is put up in the defense of evil, and the usage started to circulate in circa 1225.

3. Bless also had a goal of protecting towards God, and can be used when praying God for blessing before an entity. God can also bless someone by showing a supernatural favor over them. Bless can also be used before dinner, when praying over food. The OED dates this documented history back to the eleventh century.

4. Bless can also be used to show reservation or a state of surprise. This is described by the OED as an elliptical or ironic use of bless, which would be stated as such: “bless me!”

5. The last entry in the OED states that bless can be used in an ironic way or an euphemistic saying. The word bless has taken on multiple functions over time, which will yield facts and well-being for that individual. The usage of bless began circulating around the eleventh century.

**Conclusion**

Bless started off as a concrete and specific word to describe a religious practice, but has since transformed over time into an utterance spoken for various reasons. Although bless has not lost its religious ties with Christianity, it has taken on multiple functions within present-day English. So, next time one hears the word bless it may happen as an elliptical or ironic use of the word, which is to invoke different emotions or serve specific contextual purposes.

**New lines and ideas are related**

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, ideas take on the meaning of “happiness” and “well being,” which was used first documentarily in the early 19th century. The word bless, or similar words like bless, is related, but phonological developments may have caused the concrete meaning to be pronounced differently. The semantic similarities between the two means, once bless is converted to take the place of Latin-benedictus, the spelling of bless in Middle English varied by using i or y. The spelling, semantic, and phonetic changes make one wonder if it would have been for the human psyche to intertwine these words.

**Vocabulary in today’s society**

The Urban Dictionary refers to bliss as a euphemistic utterance after someone sneezes, because it was believed that your spirit was trying to escape your body. Uttering bless immediately after someone sneezes will help keep the spirits inside of them. This use of bless has been well circulated in YouTube videos and blog sites that warned foreigners about the use of bless in America, which seemed logical because of how frequently it’s used. The word bless may appear in other languages, but the context in which it is used will differ from American usages. Generally, in America no matter what religion you practice “bless you” will be uttered after someone sneezes.