



CNI

COMMENT - There is something sacred about words and their use

Presbyterian minister John Dunlop spoke on 'Thought for the Day' on BBC Radio Ulster on Friday 26th. -

We are on the edge of a summer of great sporting events; like the Open Golf; tennis at Wimbledon; The Ashes Test matches between England and Australia.

We might be tempted to sit in front of a television regardless of the weather for hour after hour or we could do other things and at the same time listen to Radio 5 Live or whatever station is carrying the commentary on these and other great events.

One of my earliest memories of the summer is listening to John Arlott commentating on test matches; me, with the plan of the fielders provided by the Radio Times so that I knew where mid off and backward square leg and actually were. Such was my introduction to the mysteries of cricket.

John Arlott somehow managed to evoke the atmosphere of the event as well as describing what was happening. It was descriptive commentary without haste. He was followed by a long line of others, like Aggers and Brian Johnston, Richie Benaud and more recently by Geoffrey Boycott, although there is an edge to Boycott which is entertaining, provided you are not on the receiving end of his criticism.

Commentators have a rare gift of allowing us to be present with commentary appropriate to the event. Murray Walker at Formula One or Jim Neilly in full flight at an Ulster Rugby match are the opposite of commentary without haste.

We have been entertained and informed by a long list of people with a facility for using words which enlighten and entertain. If I was on a desert island with the choice of a radio or a television, I would opt for the radio, for there would be more space for my own imagination.

Poetry also creates space, stimulates imagination and asks us to contemplate what we may have seen but never noticed.

I remember the Swiss Psychiatrist, Paul Tournier, saying when an important issue is raised in counseling, the client may not respond; may say nothing. Tournier said, don't interrupt the silence;

the person will respond in good time and may be entirely unaware of the perhaps long silent gap; there was too much going on in that person's head for a ready response to be offered.

Don't spoil thought, by filling silence with anxious chatter.

We can either ask questions which open up issues and let people think and talk or we can aggressively close things down.

In everyday life, so much depends both on what is asked and how it is asked; what is said and how it is said; what and how a response is offered and how it is heard.

"I never said that" might be an angry or defensive response in a conversation. It may be so but it not just what we said, it was how we said it.

A transcript only tells part of what was communicated.

There is something sacred about words and their use which requires a kind of respectful reverence.