

# The 'Thought for the Day' debate

Background and development	3
Controversies around Thought for the Day	4
Defence, praise and religious critique	7
Alternative approaches	9
Thought for the Day contributors	10
Concluding observation	13

# Background and development

*Thought for the Day* is a daily slot on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, offering a reflection on a current event or issue from a particular religious perspective. Written and presented by one of about thirty guest contributors, the slot lasts just under three minutes, and is broadcast at around 7.50 each Monday to Saturday morning. The Today programme attracts an average of 6.51 million listeners, according to data released in August 2009.<sup>1</sup>

While an established part of the Today programme's regular broadcasting schedule, *Thought for the Day* is produced independently by the BBC Religion and Ethics department based in Manchester, which holds sole editorial responsibility for the slot. The programme evolved from the BBC Home Service's early morning prayer and praise broadcast, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, established in December 1939 as part of the BBC's wartime religious programming schedule.

The new policy of extending religious programmes beyond Sunday into the working week continued after the end of the war in 1945 under Dr James Welch, then Director of Religious Broadcasting, who held that the true task of religious broadcasting was evangelistic and missionary, and proclaimed that the BBC had a vital role in making Britain 'a more Christian country.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1965, the explicitly Anglican *Lift Up Your Hearts* was re-branded as the more nominally neutral *Ten to Eight*, in a move designed to reflect the changing beliefs of the listenership. The five-minute religious slot was to be more varied, focussing on finding out what faith meant to ordinary people in practice, in light of the fact that fewer people in Britain could be assumed to be Christian.

The change attracted widespread criticism. The Anglican Bishop of Leicester, for example, suggested that this was part of a more general withdrawal of the BBC from its position as a central broadcaster in a Christian country, complaining that, 'they now want a policy of neutrality instead of a policy of acceptance of a Christian way of life.'<sup>3</sup>

*Thought for the Day* replaced *Ten to Eight* in 1970, as a scripted monologue offering 'a unique reflection from a faith perspective on topical issues and news events' (BBC TftD website). The slot was shortened from four and a half minutes to just three in 1986 by Jenny Abramsky when she became editor of the Today Programme, reportedly stating that, 'if someone can't say something in two minutes fifty seconds they've got nothing to say.'<sup>4</sup>

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1 Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) data, August 2009.

2 See Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Sound and Vision*, volume 4, OUP, 1978.

3 Church Times, 14th and 21st May 1965, quoted in Hugh McLoed, *The Religious Crisis of 1960s*, OUP, 2007. McLoed points to this shift in the BBC's stance as marking a crucial turning point in the history of Christendom in Britain, as Christianity no longer had a protected position in the eyes of the BBC.

4 Quoted in *All Our Todays: Forty Years of Radio 4's 'Today' Programme*, Paul Donovan, Arrow Books, 1997, p. 161.

# Controversies around Thought for the Day

'It is hard to think of any three minutes in the whole of British broadcasting which is more sensitive.' – Paul Donovan, *All Our Todays: Forty Years of Radio 4's 'Today' Programme*, Arrow Books, 1997, p. 149

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The programme slot has generated widespread debate throughout its forty year history. The BBC's obligation to be politically neutral, in particular, has caused recurrent difficulties for Thought for the Day contributors. Welch had stated in 1941 that 'religion is concerned with men in society, and therefore with politics and economics', but emphasised that, when it came to public religious broadcasts, these concerns should relate to 'the moral and religious principles which Christians believe should test and guide these two activities of mankind (sic)' rather than to 'details of planning.' This sentiment became the principle of the BBC Concordat, accepted by the Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) in October of that year, and is largely indicative of the flavour of the BBC's religious broadcasting policy for future decades.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, when it came to TftD, in which the brief was to comment theologically on current affairs, the line between theological reflection and political propaganda has often proved a source of disagreement. In 1971, Methodist minister Colin Morris' criticism of the government's draft immigration bill on TftD prompted much public anger, leading to a meeting of the Religious Broadcasting department to debate the arguments for and against the broadcast. Morris was dropped from the show for some months, provoking a motion criticising the BBC's action by more than 70 opposition MPs.<sup>6</sup>

A further controversy was sparked in 1979 by the BBC's postponement of Labour MP Tony Benn's Thought until after party conference season. He accused the BBC of political censorship. Likewise Canon Eric James resigned from TftD in 1990, after his script scheduled for the opening day of the Labour Party conference was heavily censored by the programme's producer. He had planned to defend the actions of the poll tax protestors at a moment the BBC considered too politically sensitive for such a broadcast, and, following his refusal to accept the editing, was axed from the show for the next three years, and replaced by Methodist minister Leslie Griffiths.

Some individual Thoughts which have controversially been passed apparently uncensored have given rise to a number of debates; notably those which centred around Anne Atkins' slot on homosexuality in 1996, and one of Gabrielle Cox's Thoughts concerning the International Monetary Fund, accused of being politically biased, ('Don't let lefties lecture', Daily Mail, August 1996). Atkins' contribution, which blamed the decline in numbers joining the clergy on the Church's failure to stand firm on moral issues such as homosexuality, prompted an official complaint from the Church of England. The BBC also received over 1,000 letters and calls, mostly in support of Atkins, and of the BBC for allowing the script to be broadcast. According to the Today Programme's biographer Paul Donovan, 'the avalanche of letters showed a perception that, at last, the liberals who ran the BBC had allowed someone to express feelings in accordance with the majority of the population.'<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite such controversies, many accuse *Thought for the Day* of being so constrained by its requirements to be unbiased that its conception of religion is alien to most people in the country. Polly Toynbee's article in The Independent newspaper on 4 October 1996 mocked the programme for the watered-down versions of the various theologies that it presents, writing that: 'The BBC is the nation's punch bag because it is all we have to symbolise and codify our increasingly fissiparous, pluralistic society. The BBC's guidelines have become a kind of national bible in which we express our identity, our standards of fairness and morality, taste and decency...[TftD] symbolises a respect for religion which does not reflect the national state of mind. Worse, it peddles a phoney religiosity which prettifies religion.... True believers in Jerusalem and elsewhere kill each other. So if *Thought for the Day* must continue, and if it refuses to admit rationalist thinkers, at least let us hear some of the trumpeting of unbridled true religion - including the Anne Atkinses.'<sup>8</sup>

Others challenged the view that only vituperative or aggressive faith is 'true religion', but shared the concern

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5 Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, volume 3, p. 536

6 David Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio 4*, OUP, 2007, p. 327

7 Donovan, p. 168

8 'Give us hellfire, not opiate, in the God slot', Polly Toynbee, The Independent, 14 October 1996, (<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/give-us-hellfire-not-opiate-in-the-...>)

that the slot might become vacuous or over-policed.

More recently Rod Liddle, who had been critical of TftD during his time as editor of the Today Programme, in an article for The Times Online argued that the programme presents only an inoffensively liberal and middle-class God, 'created by BBC producers and made in their image'. He too called for a broader spectrum of more extreme religious voices, claiming that, effectively, TftD is secular already.

Yet TftD remains the target of outspoken criticism from those who claim to speak for secularism. The National Secular Society (NSS) have been lodging official complaints about the religious slot since its inception, criticising the BBC for airing unchallenged 'religious propaganda' at the license-payers' expense. They call for an end to what they see as the BBC's discriminatory policies, challenging it to manifest the fairness and balance required by its charter. It is one of their complaints that will be considered in November 2009 by a sub-committee of the BBC Trust.

Such appeals are by no means new. Indeed, the BBC's attitude towards religious representation in its broadcasting has been a subject of controversy ever since the Second World War. The rights of access of non-Christians to the microphone were debated by the CRAC as early as 1946, and then by the BBC's Board of Governors later the same year. The Governors' conclusions were made public in an article published in Radio Times which stated that 'The Corporation's highest duty...is towards the search for truth. The Governors recognise that this must involve the broadcasting of conflicting views...but the controversy, which is bound to be incidental to the primary purpose, shall not wound reasonable people nor transgress the boundaries of courtesy and good taste...' <sup>9</sup> At this stage, 'seeking after truth' was considered the highest criterion for programming decisions.

In 1950 the BBC went on to defend the exclusively Christian nature of its religious broadcasting by arguing that 'if broadcast services were no longer to be exclusively "Christian", there would be no other point at which it would be logical to draw a line and it would be necessary to include broadcasts by every kind of religious organisation short of those "offensive to public taste or disruptive of public order"'. <sup>10</sup>

The debate continued, however, and in a letter to The Times in 1952, which included Bertrand Russell as a signatory, the idea was put forward of establishing a committee run in parallel to the CRAC, on which would be represented ethical and Humanist organisations, as well as sects too unorthodox, controversial or minority to hold a place on the CRAC. The idea was rejected by the BBC, as were proposals for a Humanist contribution to *Lift Up Your Hearts*, on the grounds that the programme was more an act of worship than a talk. While at the establishment of TftD in 1970 the Head of Religious Broadcasting made clear to its contributors that they could not expect a wholly Christian audience, the contributors themselves remained largely Christians, and for the most part, Anglicans. <sup>11</sup>

Despite ongoing criticisms and a gradual widening of the slot to include representatives of other faiths such as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, an internal review of the show in April 1995 led to the decision not to open it up to atheists and agnostics. The decision received widespread attention in the press; The Guardian, The Daily Express, The Times and The Telegraph all quoted Ernest Rea, BBC head of Religious Broadcasting at the time, as saying that, 'Thought for the Day is there to give a distinctiveness and to throw a different light on news events; if you secularise it then you dilute that special perspective'.

Official complaints have been regularly put forward by the programme's critics. In August 2002, a letter was submitted to the BBC's board of governors by the British Humanist Association (BHA), the NSS and the Rationalist Press Association, to protest against the religious monopoly on the show. Notable signatories included Richard Dawkins, Harold Pinter, and politicians Michael Foot and Tony Banks. Many Humanists are arguing argued that the BBC must accept the ethically-valid set of values held by many non-religious people, and cite the philosophers of Ancient Greece as an established tradition of non-religious moral thought. Madelein Pym, policy officer of the BHA, argues that, 'These beliefs are at least as valid as those of the major (and, let's not forget, minor religions). And they are alive and well in the views of modern philosophers and in the everyday moral perspective of many of the 30-40% of non-religious people in this country.'

With such arguments in mind, in May 2005 the BHA put forward a paper to the House of Lords Committee on the BBC Review protesting against the privileged position of religious voices in its broadcasting. In the same month a qualitative research survey carried out by independent communications regulator Ofcom raised proposals from its respondents for a TftD-style programme offering thoughts from an ordinary lay person, rather than a religious authority. A Select Committee report on the BBC charter review in March of the following year recommended that the 'BBC should review its programme output to ensure that it complies with the Communications Act 2003 by providing services of a suitable quality and range dealing with religion and other beliefs.'

In the wake of such debates, Christian contributor Jonathan Bartley, co-director of Ekklesia. was dropped

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9 Radio Times 14th March 1947, quoted in Briggs, volume 4, p. 708

10 'The mainstream of historic Christianity', paper prepared for meeting of the CRAC, Oct. 1950, quoted in Briggs, volume 4, p. 710.

11 See Hendy, p. 330

from the BBC slot in 2007 after his appearance on the Today Programme in which he suggested opening up the slot to a wider field than just representative of the major world religions. Ekklesia has argued for some time that the value of TftD, which it supports, does not lie in being a ghettoised 'God slot' but in its capacity to reflect and deepen the spectrum of beliefs (religious and otherwise) about what life means and where it is going – in the midst of programming where the politics competing self-interest is naturally at the top of the agenda.

In February 2009 Tim Maguire of the Humanist Society of Scotland penned a petition claiming that the BBC's charter obligation to represent the views of its license-paying audience obliged it to invite secular contributors to join the TftD pool. (<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/thought-for-the-day.html>)

In 2008 the NSS published on its website this response to the discussions surrounding the programme from Radio 4 Controller Mark Damazer, who had written:

*TftD is commissioned as a theological reflection on current events. It is not an opinion piece. All contributors are told to ground their 'thought' in their own theological tradition, using the words of scripture or liturgy that have been worn smooth as a pebble by centuries of repetition and devotion... It is therefore a unique voice on the BBC. I would contend that the BBC should strive to maintain its 'uniqueness' in an increasingly overcrowded market place and serve the audience by giving them a chance to hear a perspective from the great faith traditions that have shaped our society and continue to wield enormous influence over current events...I do not accept that the majority of the country are [sic] atheistic or agnostic...In a survey a few years ago Radio Four discovered that one in four of its audience go to a worship service every week so we know there is a lot of interest in the subject...With religion so high on the agenda it would be a strange time to change the one place where it is possible to hear the intelligent religious voice in a secular setting and understand something of why millions if not billions of people still put faith at the centre of their lives.*

In its most recent response on the issue, in July 2009, the BBC announced a decision to consider the proposals from Humanist and Secularist groups. Damazer acknowledged the programme's need for diversity, commenting that the slot should be a forum for a wide range of voices from around the UK, rather than 'metropolitan figures sitting in a studio in Broadcasting House or the news centre in west London'. 'There may well be quite a strong argument for including Secularists and Humanists' he continued, but 'it's absolutely not a cut and dried issue'. A spokesman for the BBC Trust said that its General Appeals Panel expects to publish a decision before the end of the year.

# Defence, praise and religious critique

'This short strand is unique, offering a faith perspective within a news programme. If we include secular voices, we undermine the slot's very distinctiveness.' – Christine Morgan, Series Producer of *Thought for the Day*.<sup>12</sup>

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Reactions to the criticisms of TftD's current format have been offered by representatives of various faith groups. Leader of the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, said: 'All faiths have been sidelined. *Thought for the Day* is practically the only place where you can hear religious thoughts and it is sad if this important outlet becomes marginalised. There is a market for faith and the BBC needs to learn that this is a respected institution which should not be diluted.'

Some have accused the Secularist campaigners of confusing ethics with religion and spirituality. Paul Valley, for example, writing in Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* on 12 September 2009, argued that while secularist and humanist traditions may well have significant ethical insights to offer, they cannot claim to be able to speak meaningfully on religious or spiritual matters.

Many representatives of the Christian faith, which currently enjoys the majority of the air time on the programme, have defended the BBC's decision so far to keep TftD as an exclusively religious slot. According to one BBC article from August 2002, Dr Colin Morris, former head of religious broadcasting at the BBC, likened claims that TftD discriminates against atheists to accusing the Proms of discriminating against the tone-deaf. He says that 'Their ears are tuned to a different wavelength', while Steve Clifford, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance argued that: 'It strikes me that the secularists predominate in the other 2 hours and 55 minutes [of the Today Programme], so is it really asking too much for religion to just have a small chunk of dedicated time?'

In a similar vein, Giles Fraser, now Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral and a regular TftD contributor, has praised the programme for its distinctiveness and argued that changes to its current format could threaten the future of the slot itself. He maintains that the proposed changes could be a way of destroying it 'through the back door, through political correctness...One of the main rules about the *Thought for the Day* slot is that contributors are not allowed to attack other faiths. If we had Richard Dawkins attacking and rubbishing religion, it would change the fundamental nature of it.'

Not all voices from the Christian Church have taken such a line, however. Simon Barrow's article 'Why we need to rid ourselves on the "God of the Slots"' on Ekklesia's website in 2007 (<http://ekkleisia.co.uk/node/5160>) offered a theological criticism of the Church's defensive reaction against opening up the programme, arguing that, 'the job of the church is most definitely not to give people the entirely false impression that God is only present when *they* are in power, or that the presence of "secular" persons or ideas means the exclusion of God – as if God were a competitor for space within the world, constantly in danger of being "squeezed out".'

Barrow also pointed out that non-religious people frequently consider themselves spiritual, that we live in a mixed-belief society, and that it was false reasoning to consider all programming not directly concerned with religion as somehow being reflective of Humanism or the life-stances of the non-religious, whose explicit voices were rarely heard.

Meanwhile, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church, Martyn Atkins, offered the opinion that while faith-based communities did not have a monopoly on 'thoughts', the BBC had a 'challenge to represent a variety of views in society. Faith-based communities have a distinctive voice, and large numbers of people listen to *Thought for the Day* for that very reason, so I would be saddened to lose those crucial few minutes of spiritual reflection.' He continued, 'Methodists are not afraid to be challenged about what we believe, and we are not threatened by hearing secular voices on *Thought for the Day*. But we, along with other Christians, will hope to continue to be given opportunity to speak of the things that matter so deeply to us.'<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in response to the controversy, one Church of England spokesman was also quoted as saying that: 'We would strongly resist moves to add non-religious voices to one of the few protected spots in the

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<sup>12</sup> BBC news article, 14th August 2002

<sup>13</sup> [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)

schedule where religious views on issues of the day can be expressed openly. *Thought for the Day* is highly valued by people of all faiths and none.'



# Alternative approaches

Recent years have seen a range of alternative TftD-type slots and approaches emerging.

- BBC Radio Scotland broadcasts its *Thought for the Day* programme at 7.22 on the Good Morning Scotland programme, while BBC Radio 2 has its own *Pause for Thought*. BBC Radio Ulster's TftD includes contributions from the non-religious, chosen for 'what they have to say' rather than any particular group or belief-system that they represent. The TftD format has also been copied by various local BBC radio stations: BBC Radio Leicester's morning show, for example, has its own slot, lasting only 90 seconds. Contributors are drawn from a wide range of local Christian churches, and there is significant representation from the Muslim, Hindu, and occasionally, Jain, communities. BBC Radio Suffolk also hosts a 1 minute 45 seconds *Thought* slot at around 7:30 which draws on a wider range of religious voices, including Humanists, as well as a regular Pagan speaker.
- There are also an increasing number of broadcasts offered from those not included within the current boundaries of Radio 4's TftD. In 2002, in response to a letter to the BBC governors criticising the religious monopoly on TftD, Professor Richard Dawkins was given two-and-a-half minutes to deliver an 'unofficial' one-off reflection from an atheist viewpoint. His *Thought* was broadcast by the BBC, but not in the regular ten-to-eight slot. It was criticised for being negative rather than positive.
- Juliet Wilson of the Humanist Society of Scotland established *Thought for the World* two years ago as a secular alternative to the BBC's TftD, available to download from the HSS website. Contributors in the first week included A. C. Grayling, Nigel Warburton, Gillian Stewart of the HSS, and Kate Hudson, chair of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, as well as Jonathan Bartley after his barring from TftD. The recordings were also available for two weeks in February 2009 as podcasts via the 'Comment is Free' section of the Guardian website.
- Secular Thought for the Day, <http://www.secularthought.org/>, calling itself 'moral and ethical thought from a secular perspective' is a website open to daily contributions in writing of around 300 words from volunteer members of the public.
- Satirical website *Platitude of the Day*, created by a member of the National Secular Society, offers daily parodies and mockery of the TftD scripts from a non-religious (many would say anti-religious) perspective. The website's founder Peter Hardy campaigns via the website for opening up TftD to the everyday moral thoughts of average 'ordinary' people up and down the country.
- Most recently, in January 2009, the BBC's iPM podcast programme broadcast a one-off 'Thought for the afternoon' by Ariane Sherine, creator of the atheist bus advertising campaign, intended to show the BBC that atheists can make thoughtful and reflective contributions to moral and ethical debate.

# Thought for the Day contributors

*Someone who can think theologically, someone who will represent a particular religious perspective, because you know we try and fulfil balances of denomination and religion and male and female and so on...someone who can actually engage with a Today audience at ten to eight in the morning and not sound completely out on a limb, who doesn't sound pious, and who doesn't sound like a vicar delivering a sermon.*<sup>14</sup>  
Producer David Coomes on his requirements for a TftD contributor.

While *Thought* began as a largely Christian enterprise, Jewish voices were present from early on in Thought's history, and as early as 1975 there were occasional Buddhist slots. The first Muslim speaker, Umar Hegedus, was recruited in 1992. Two years after this, having considered the request for Humanists and atheists to be given a voice on the programme, BBC Head of Religious Broadcasting Ernest Rea defended the status quo by arguing that 'allowing atheists to present it would turn it into an exercise in God-bashing.'<sup>15</sup>

In 1996, George Austin, Philip Crowe, Leslie Griffiths, Richard Harries, Oliver McTernan, Donald English and John Newbury, all white, male, ordained Christian priests, were sent nearly identical letters to inform them that they were to be 'rested' from the show. The BBC's failure to provide a good reason for their dismissal attracted widespread criticism when the contents of the letters were leaked to the Times. The reason finally offered by Producer David Coomes was that he wanted to bring in some new names, to 'slowly shift things around a bit'.<sup>16</sup> To this end, conservative and often controversial Anne Atkins, catholic commentator Christina Odone, and physicist Russell Stannard, were among their replacements, in a move that therefore looked like an attempt to balance the genders and broaden the theological angles represented. The Independent newspaper published an article in response which suggested that the decision was based on the men's outspoken political views, a claim denied by Ernest Rea.

Following this cull, the overall pool of contributors included one Muslim, one Sikh, two orthodox Jews and one reform Jew, as well as one Hindu. The rest was made up of Christians of various different denominations and traditions. This range remains largely unchanged to this day.

Current presenters (as of November 2009) are as follows:

**Akhandadhi Das:** Vaishnava Hindu theologian.

**Abdal Hakim Murad:** Historian, translator, commentator on Islamic issues. Educated at Cambridge.

**Alan Billings:** Member of the Youth Justice Board and is a retired Anglican priest. Director of the Centre for Ethics and Religion at Lancaster University. Active in local government, Alan Billings was a member of the Home Office Community Cohesion Panel.

**Angela Tilby:** Vicar of St Benet's Cambridge. Former BBC producer.

**Anne Atkins:** Journalist, agony aunt, broadcaster. Read English at Oxford. Anglican evangelical.

**Brian Draper:** Former editor of Third Way Magazine and lecturer in culture at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Runs a consultancy called Echosounder, nurturing spiritual intelligence in leaders.

**Catherine Pepinster:** Editor of The Tablet - an independent English Roman Catholic weekly paper - and former executive editor of The Independent on Sunday. MA in philosophy and religion from Heythrop College, London University.

**Clifford Longley:** Author, broadcaster and journalist specialising in British and international religious affairs. Since 1972 he has written a weekly column in religion, morality and culture in both The Times and The Daily Telegraph. His range of subjects includes Christian, Muslim and Jewish affairs, contemporary morality, secularism, politics, legal affairs, sociology and interfaith relations.

**Colin Morris:** Methodist minister and former Head of Religious Broadcasting and BBC controller in Northern

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<sup>14</sup> Coomes, interview 1996, in Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching*, T. and T. Clark, 1999, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Church Times, 30th December 1994, quoted in Hendy, p. 346

<sup>16</sup> Interview, 1996, quoted in Mitchell, p.164

Ireland. Also former President of the Methodist Conference in Britain, and missionary in the former Northern Rhodesia, where he spoke out against racism and injustice.

**Cormac Murphy O'Connor:** Cardinal of RC Church, Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster. Supporter of Strangers into Citizens, the campaign calling for one-off naturalisation of long-term irregular migrants in the UK.

**David Wilkinson:** Principle of St John's College, Durham, and teacher in theology and religion. Formerly an astrophysicist, then Methodist Chaplain in inner city Liverpool.

**David Winter:** Former Anglican vicar, former editor of Crusade Magazine, and former head of religious broadcasting at BBC.

**Dom Antony Such:** Benedictine monk. Former headmaster, now Suffolk parish priest.

**Elaine Storkey:** Philosopher, sociologist, theologian. Writer and broadcaster, specialising in gender, race and ethnicity. President of Tearfund and Chair of Fulcrum, network of evangelical Anglicans, seeking to renew the centre of the evangelical tradition and the centre of Anglicanism.

**Giles Fraser:** Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral. Has been described as a liberal Anglican. Former lecturer in philosophy at Wadham College Oxford, specialising in Nietzsche.

**Indarjit Singh:** British journalist and broadcaster, a prominent British Asian active in Sikh and interfaith activities. Editor of the Sikh Messenger, and a contributor to British and overseas newspapers and journals including The Times, The Guardian and The Independent. He studied engineering at Birmingham University.

**James Jones:** Became Bishop of Liverpool in 1998 having been Bishop of Hull since 1994. Over the last thirteen years he has been deeply involved in Urban Regeneration. For four years he chaired the New Deal for Communities programme in Liverpool, and has championed community-led regeneration in lectures, newspaper articles and broadcasts.

**Joel Edwards:** Former General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, now Director of Micah Challenge International, providing relief, development and justice activities around the world.

**John Bell:** Hymn-writer and Church of Scotland minister, he is a member of the Iona Community, a broadcaster, and former student activist. Studied at University of Glasgow, and now works internationally, lecturing in theological colleges in the UK and US. Involved in the renewal of 'grass roots' congregational worship.

**Jonathan Sacks:** Chief Rabbi of UK, spiritual head of United Synagogue. Studied at Cambridge, and then obtained a PhD in philosophy at King's College London.

**Laura Janner-Klausner:** Ordained Rabbi at Alyth North Western Reform Synagogue. Having studied Christianity at Cambridge, she moved to Jerusalem where she spent fifteen years working in Jewish education, with Christian visitors to Israel and in Palestinian-Israeli dialogue.

**Lionel Blue:** British Reform Rabbi, journalist and broadcaster. He was the first openly homosexual British rabbi. Read history at Oxford and Semitics at the University of London before being ordained as a rabbi in 1960.

**Lucy Winkett:** Canon Precentor of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Formerly a professional singer, and currently responsible for the Cathedral's music and liturgy. Founding advisor for the public theology think-tank, Theos; a columnist in Third Way magazine; a trustee of the Amos Trust and chairs the Governors of two schools. Writes, speaks and broadcasts on culture, gender and music.

**Mona Siddiqui:** British Muslim academic. Currently Professor of Islamic Studies and Public Understanding at the University of Glasgow, as well as the Director of its Centre for the Study of Islam. Contributor to The Times, The Scotsman, The Guardian, The Herald and, as its first regular Muslim columnist, The Tablet. Her areas of specialism are classical Islamic law, law and gender, early Islamic thought, and contemporary legal and ethical issues in Islam.

**Oliver McTernan:** Co-Founder and Director of Forward Thinking, a non-denominational Christian organisation working with grassroots Muslim communities and wider society. He has an established background in conflict resolution and interfaith relationships.

**Rhidian Brook:** Welsh novelist, broadcaster, TV dramatist and short-story writer. He has contributed articles on faith, travel, social issues and education to The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, Daily Mail and others.

**Richard Harries:** Retired bishop of the Church of England. He had an army career, and then read theology at Cambridge. Since 2008, he has been the Gresham Professor of Divinity.

**Rob Marshall:** He now works partly for the Archbishop of York, as well as for his own company which provide media officers for Christian groups.

**Rosemary Lain-Priestly:** Anglican priest whose current role focuses on the development of female clergy.

**Rowan Williams:** Current Archbishop of Canterbury, and an academic theologian. Spent much of his earlier career at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford successively. Held a professorial chair in Oxford and went on to become Bishop of Monmouth and Archbishop of Wales before moving to Canterbury.

**Roy Jenkins:** Baptist minister based in Cardiff. Often leads the Morning Service on Radio 4.

**Tom Butler:** Anglican Bishop of Southwark since 1998. Member of General Synod since 1991 and entered the House of Lords in 1997. Vice chair of the Mission & Public Affairs Committee of Church of England.


**Vishvapani:** Manchester Buddhist, member of the Western Buddhist Order. His biography of the Buddha will be published in 2010.

# Concluding observation

The purpose of this paper has been to give a fair overview to inform the current debate, rather than to advocate a particular viewpoint. Further research is in-hand concerning a qualitative evaluation of the specific recent content of TftD.

However, Ekklesia has made its own position clear – which is that there is a strong case for the further opening up of *Thought for the Day* to humanists, ‘non-believers’ and others who are ‘spiritual but not religious’ in a post-Christendom society, and that this should be seen as an enrichment rather than a threat by current contributors and by religious communities. Co-directors Jonathan Bartley and Simon Barrow have both contributed to the debate, in ‘The politics of Thought for the Day’ (<http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/8302>) and ‘Why we need to rid ourselves of the “god of the slots”’ (<http://ekkleisia.co.uk/node/5160>) respectively.

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