

“Insidious, pious, cliched and gushing”: the problem with Thought For The Day

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The problem with BBC Radio Four Today Programme’s [Thought For The Day](#) slot is not (just) that it’s religious. It’s that it’s so bad.

As a mildly active atheist I do object to the privileged time slot handed over to organised religion. They have enough pulpits – and even seats in the House of Lords – without giving them three minutes of radio prime time. It’s bad enough that the BBC always runs to Bishops when it needs a ‘moral’ perspective on an issue – usually to do with sex.

But the real problem with TFTD is that it’s so often rubbish. Columnist David Aaronovitch can be a grumpy atheist at times but he’s spot on with criticising today’s TFTD (8/9/12) as particularly hapless to the point where it’s offensive:

Thought For The Day

Thought For The Day



David Aaronovitch @DAaronovitch

2h

I think this morning's Thought for the Day may well be the worst ever broadcast. Insipid, pious, cliched and gushing. Stunning.

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As I pointed out to David, this one was a particularly good example of a religious person appropriating a very secular triumph – in this case the wonderful atmosphere around the Olympics and Paralympics – and trying to use it to make a religious assertion. As Aaronovitch put it: “that quality of sidling up to a secular success and then draping it in a mantle of religiosity”

Of course, the point is that *London2012* was a secular success. Yes, it might have been a kind of opiate for the masses, but the real lesson was how a corporate jamboree was turned into a very positive human and social happening. With almost no trace of organised religion.

The answer to the ‘problem of TFTD’ is not to have secular contributors to leaven the daily diet of God botherers but to get rid of it completely. The pressure to come up with a delivery of spiritual insight and moral instruction every morning is a cast-iron, lifetime guarantee of sententiousness. It’s an open invitation to patronising, banal, self-satisfied simplification.

I have no objection to theology or religion elsewhere in the schedules, indeed, I have worked with religious people and [written about how they can improve their use of media](#). But please save me that daily irritant of TFTD. At least with Twitter I can unfollow those people who post ‘inspiring’ thoughts by Martin Luther King, Ghandi and Stephen Fry. Stick it on the website please, BBC.

Update:

A good critique of TFTD from a more humanist perspective [here](#) by Pdraig Reidy who points out how offensive many TFTD contributions can be.

