

Scrap 'discriminatory' Thought for the Day, says former presenter

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The National Secular Society has urged the BBC to reform its Thought for the Day slot on Radio 4 after the former presenter John Humphrys described it as "discriminatory".

Appearing on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* on Wednesday, Humphrys called Thought for the Day "rather pointless" and agreed with a suggestion that it was "anachronistic".

Humphrys said he had "no problem with the Thought for the Day" but criticised the fact the slot is "not sold to us as religious Thought for the Day".

He also criticised the fact that those with religious views can present it while those without them cannot.

Asked whether he thought the slot was "anachronistic", he replied "totally". And asked whether it "should go", he nodded and said: "I would go further. I would say it's discriminatory."

The NSS has long campaigned for reform of [Thought for the Day](#), a three-minute slot for reflection within Radio 4's *Today* programme, which Humphrys presented until his retirement last month.

The slot is only open to those speaking from a religious perspective. The NSS argues that it should be scrapped or secularised, so non-religious people can take part on equal terms to the religious.

In response to Humphrys's comments NSS chief executive Stephen Evans has written to Sarah Sands, the editor of *Today*, and Mohit Bakaya, the controller of Radio 4.

Mr Evans said Thought for the Day should be turned into "an ethical current affairs reflection slot" if the BBC was committed to keeping it.

He described the BBC's current approach as "indefensible and unsustainable" and said the corporation should review whether the programme is compatible with its duties on impartiality.

"As things stand the slot reinforces prejudice and discrimination against the non-religious and is regarded as irrelevant by a majority of the British public.

"Widening the scope of the slot would not only make the programme more relevant but increase the overall quality of the broadcast. It would allow reflection on current affairs and ethical issues – including those of a religious perspective – without having to shoehorn in a religious framework."

He also highlighted NSS research from May 2018 which [found](#) that fewer than one in five British people think the slot should always feature religious content.

Explaining the NSS's position, Mr Evans said: "John Humphrys is right to highlight the discriminatory nature of Thought for the Day in its current format.

"It's inappropriate for Britain's national broadcaster to privilege a religious message or push the idea that only religious people can be trusted to engage in ethical reflection. These comments from a long-standing presenter of the programme should prompt reform."

Watch John Humphrys's comments (from 5:57)

Most recent NSS lobbying

- Last year BBC director-general Tony Hall told the NSS that the BBC was "open to ideas about how to bring to life a wider range of different beliefs". But he said the BBC was not minded to make any changes to Thought for the Day.

John Humphrys's previous comments

- Humphrys made similar comments in 2017, while he was still presenting *Today*. At that time he [said](#) Thought for the Day was "inappropriate" and often "deeply boring".

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Reform Thought for the Day

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This discriminatory radio slot should be reformed and opened to non-religious views or abolished.

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