

## Between balance and banality

WHILE “Thought for the Day” can be the cue to put out the washing, a good one has us mesmerised, toast and marmalade forgotten, a reminder of the radiance of things amid the dispiriting whine of the Today programme. The contributors play by elaborate rules – no politics, no inter-denominational biffing – and part of the fun is hearing normally opinionated and excitable people squirming in the straight-jacket of charity and reasonableness.

For many years, the producer and editor has been Christine Morgan, the BBC’s Head of Radio, Religion and Ethics. “Christine has the trick of achieving balance while avoiding banality”, says regular contributor Tina Beattie. “I sometimes push my luck,” Beattie admits, “and Christine reins me in.” But when she submitted an outspoken script earlier this year reflecting on anti-racism demonstrations, Morgan signed it off. The next day, the *Daily Mail* online had the headline “Fury as academic defends pulling down statues on Radio 4 and says Black Lives Matter protesters could be an ‘energising source of hope’”. For a few days, Beattie tells us, “I was a folk hero in the eyes of my children.”



Former *Tablet* editor and another regular Catholic voice, Catherine Pepinster, credits Morgan with broadening the range of contributors and “skilfully protecting it from the anti-religion brigade who say it shouldn’t exist at all, as well as the John Humphrys school of thought which says ‘it’s boring’ but really is just annoyed because it’s run by the Religion and Ethics department.”

Last week, Morgan retired after over thirty years at the BBC. Clifford Longley, a contributor for several years, reflects: “Christine fought hard to keep Thought for the Day as

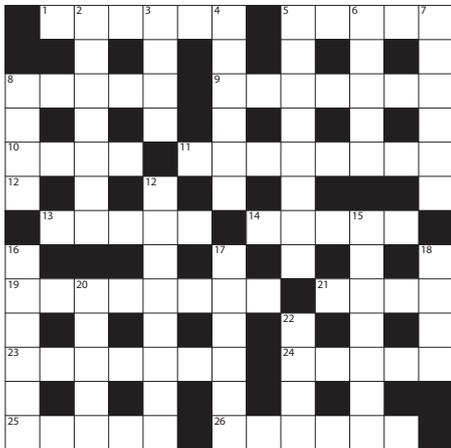
a medium for specifically religious voices. The Humanists will now be sharpening their pencils for another assault on this last bastion of faith in the public square.”

AS MARK LAWSON wrote in his *Tablet* review of *Tom Stoppard: A Life*, Hermione Lee offers no startling revelations about our greatest living playwright. But she does explore how, well into middle age, Stoppard avoided thinking too much about his Jewishness – though three of his aunts, all four of his grandparents and his great-grandfather had been killed in concentration camps. He grew up in a Christian culture, “trying not to be an outsider”. Yet, unlike his mother, Lee tells us, Stoppard is not an atheist – though “he recoiled from all extreme expressions of religiosity”.

“I think about God a lot,” Stoppard said in 2020. “Suddenly, out of the woodwork, out he pops.” He believes in prayer, his prayer comes from a sense of “something beyond our knowledge, beyond the material world”. And he has begun to confront what happened to his family, and to millions of others, in the Holocaust. The fruits of this confrontation could be seen by all those lucky enough to get early tickets to *Leopoldstadt*, just eight weeks into its first run when lockdown turned all our theatres dark.

## PUZZLES

### PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 728 Alanus



#### Across

- 1 Profound saint of York and Tours, adviser to Charlemagne (6)
- 5 God as the Word as in opening of St John’s Gospel (5)
- 8 (& 9 Across) Sung Mass in Latin, not a high Mass (5,7)
- 9 See 8 Across
- 10 Son of Noah, brother of Ham (4)
- 11 US state whose motto is “equality before the law” (8)
- 13 Flower of the primula family or access link to Bodleian Library data (5)
- 14 Antipodean Army Corps formed in WWI with commemorative day on 21 April (5)
- 19 (& 24 Across) German Renaissance artist and celebrated printmaker (8,5)
- 21 Wading bird sacred to ancient Egyptians (4)

- 23 Medieval plague that has been compared to Covid-19 (7)
- 24 See 19 Across
- 25 Eighth letter of the Greek alphabet (5)
- 26 Umbrian town of Benedictine monastery destroyed by 2016 earthquake (6)

#### Down

- 2 Town in the Normandy region associated with the “Little Flower” (7)
- 3 Son of Machir and father of Bedan (1 Chron. 7) (4)
- 4 Place of the first Christian ecumenical council, convened by Constantine (6)
- 5 Archbishop of Canterbury after Norman invasion, predecessor of St Anselm (8)
- 6 Günter -----, Nobel Prize-winning German novelist and moral philosopher (5)

- 7 ----- *Mater* by Pergolesi (6)
- 8 Polyhymnia or Terpsichore, for example (4)
- 12 Name of Ireland to early Romans (8)
- 15 Domenico -----, eighteenth-century Venetian composer (7)
- 16 John, Earl of Shrewsbury, patron and promoter of Pugin churches and buildings (6)
- 17 ----- *à son gout*, French phrase indicating “each to his (own) taste” (6)
- 18 Nicholas II or Michael I, for example (4)
- 20 Douay-Rheims or NRSV, for example (5)
- 22 Major central Europe river on which Frankfurt stands (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 17 October, The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: [thetablet@thetablet.co.uk](mailto:thetablet@thetablet.co.uk), with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on Jesus, Christian Art and Catholicism – from the OUP’s Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random. **■ We cannot process entries or prizes at present. Please keep entering. Winners will be notified and prizes awarded as soon possible.**

### SUDOKU | Tough

5	9	6			
		5	8	9	
7			4	1	
			5		
2	7			3	4
		4	2		1
	6	7	1	2	
	8				4
			9	2	

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

### Solution to the 26 September puzzle

7	6	5	4	2	9	8	3	1
3	2	8	5	7	1	6	4	9
4	9	1	8	6	3	7	2	5
9	7	4	2	1	8	3	5	6
8	1	6	3	4	5	9	7	2
2	5	3	7	9	6	1	8	4
1	8	7	6	5	4	2	9	3
5	3	9	1	8	2	4	6	7
6	4	2	9	3	7	5	1	8

### Solution to the 26 September crossword No. 725

**Across:** 7 O’Hare; 8 Acetate; 10 Soutane; 11 Excel; 12 Occupation; 16 Titus Oates; 20 Adeni; 21 Pythias; 23 No Later; 24 Alice.  
**Down:** 1 Morse; 2 Sarum; 3 Beda; 4 Rameau; 5 Leverage; 6 Bacchic; 9 Ealing; 13 Casuists; 14 Strain; 15 Steeple; 17 Aspire; 18 Mimic; 19 Osier; 22 Than.

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