

Diversity is not enough

Thought for the Day

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I hope this doesn't sound like my "bah, humbug" moment, but I have to say I always find these winter holidays a very odd time of year. Don't misunderstand me – I have no objection to a day off, having a long lie, a respite from the always-on demands of modern communications.

But there are aspects of this 'season to be jolly' that leave me feeling uneasy. I heard last week about a teacher who was proud that she had children from 16 minority cultures in her class and laid on a Christmas party because (quote) "otherwise some of them wouldn't have a Christmas". At one level her sentiment is generous, inclusive, altruistic, but she's missed the point – for many children it just isn't Christmas! Nowadays I hope no school would force all its pupils to eat pork pies for lunch, but how many think before expecting the whole school to sing Christmas carols?

One of my earliest recollections of school was receiving a prize in the local church, accompanied by service, sermon, and hymns. The fact that I still remember shows how alienating that was, and I've heard from many others too how ceremonies intended to honour them instead made them feel different, distant, outsiders.

There's no need for this. Religion's place in public life is a question for another time, but it shouldn't be imposed on those who don't share it. That is tantamount to cultural colonialism – you're welcome to join us, but only on our terms, only if you're just like us, only if you eat our food, drink our drinks, wear our clothes. Surely as a society we are better than that!

As a society, we celebrate diversity, but diversity alone is not enough – we need to strive for inclusion. So a happy new year to all, whatever it represents, and may it be meaningful and fulfilling for you all.