

We wish you a merry – and free – Christmas

Posted: Thu, 22nd Dec 2011 by [Nigel Sewell](#)

A seasonal message from Bristol Secular Society

This time of year has many names: Winter Solstice, Christmas, Yule, Hanukkah, Saturnalia, etc. Some of these are ancient, others more recent. In particular many belief systems have a special event or holiday centered around the time when the days are short, nights are long and cold.

Ask yourself, which it is that you celebrate? One of them? All of them? None of them? Also ask yourself, of all your friends, relatives and acquaintances, do they celebrate the same event exactly the same way? Also ask yourself, if these traditions have been celebrated exactly the same way every year? I would think that almost all of us know people whose traditions differ from our own.

This diversity of belief and practice, and change of belief and practice, is part of what makes our culture so vibrant and engaging. What was popular last year may not be popular this year; it may also become part of the popular tradition of Christmas.

An example of this is the popularisation of the Christmas tree during the reign of Queen Victoria. That people can change what and how they celebrate is an attribute of a secular society. It is also why this society must be protected from those who would demand that one of belief or tradition should be given a special place of privilege.

When one viewpoint gains prominence and has the power and will to impose itself on others, the risk is that this will result in a theocracy or a dictatorship of some kind. When this happens, your choice as to how you practice your Christmas, or your politics or your religion will be curtailed.

Secularists campaign to remove religious privilege from society, not to remove religion from society. This should be welcomed by all people, religious or otherwise, as it is the best guarantee that they will be able to practice their religion, traditions and culture freely and without hindrance from any other part of society, within the law of the land.

From all of us at the Bristol Secular Society, we would like to encourage you to take advantage of the freedom that secularism offers, spare a thought for those who don't have the freedom that we have, and have the best Christmas (or whatever!) that you can. After all, it's your choice to do whatever you want with this time.

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