

## **Liberty and Identity**

### *Thought for the Day*

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Happy Thanksgiving!

Today is also the first day of Chanukah – the first time ever that the two festivals have coincided since the date of Thanksgiving was fixed by US law in 1941 – and because of differences between the Jewish and the secular calendar, the last time ever too, at least, some have calculated, for almost 80 000 years!

When he declared the first Thanksgiving Day after independence, George Washington spoke of “the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed” – and that is what Chanukah celebrates too: the right of minorities to practice their own religion without fear of persecution.

Children will tell you about the miracle of the oil that burned for 8 days; the Talmud obsesses in a very Jewish way about how to light the candles; but really what it’s about is the attempt by the ancient Syrian successors of Alexander the Great to destroy not Jews but Judaism. What we are celebrating is the survival of our identity.

So it’s fortuitous that this year Chanukah also coincides with Inter-Faith Week, when communities come together to celebrate that we can all coexist despite our differences. We don’t have to pretend we all agree in order to respect one another. I might think you’re wrong about some very deep questions – but I can still respect your right to be wrong!

This week also saw the launch of the White Paper on Scotland’s Future. Its recognition of Scotland’s ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity is something all the political parties agree on. So whatever the outcome next September, it’s important that we all engage fully in Scottish life without losing our identity, just like the different threads of different colour in that overused metaphor, the tartan!

So happy Thanksgiving, happy Chanukah, happy Inter-Faith Week, and, whatever your views on independence, a happily diverse Scotland.

*Ephraim Borowski*

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