

In the spirit of decolonising education, I turn my gaze to our modern celebration of Christmas in Western societies. It is enlightening to look back on the origins of this event, back to its Celtic, Norse and Roman roots.

Those roots include a festival of light, an ancient pagan event, during the Winter Solstice when Norsemen or Celts would bring a Yule log into their hearth and party into the night. In Roman times the Saturnalia consisted of a banquet and the offering of gifts in the honour of the God Saturn and then, with the establishment of Christianity became associated with the nativity.

When an empire conquers a land, religious sites are not always systematically destroyed, in order not to antagonise its people too much. The smoothest way of conquering the minds is to overlap major events, including religious ones, with the status quo, thus making them obsolescent without causing too much offence or rioting.

The Christians added the birth of Jesus Christ to what Midwinter signified, that is, in its pagan form, a celebration of the longest night. Thus, associating the birth of a baby to the rebirth of nature in the coming months of Spring.

So the history of our modern Christmas is a study of the accretion of religious and pagan habits with a contemporary sprinkle of our common newest altar: consumerism.

For instance it is fascinating to see how an American brand, Coca Cola, fashioned the mediaeval antithetical pair formed by Saint Nicholas and his antonym, Père Fouettard in France , or Krampus in Austria, into a benevolent and charming, rosy-cheeked and debonnaire Santa Claus.

In any attempt to decolonise Christmas, it is important to peel away its onion-like layers until we reach its core: a celebration of the brutal change of , and the human conquest of our most important technological advance, originating from neolithic times: the mastery of fire.

The beauty of Christmas is in families. Which Christmas traditions do you follow? When do you open the gifts? Is it like in Continental Europe at the midnight bell on the 24th for Christmas Eve? Or is it the Anglo-Saxon way - on the 25th in the morning in your matching pyjamas? Do you reject Christmas because it is too commercial or because you are not a Christian? Are you always up for an opportunity to party and be merry?

A decolonised Christmas should first and foremost be an informed Christmas: where family members are aware of the history of the event they are partaking in. Some Christian sects reject Christmas because of its pagan roots. Some people would never contemplate setting foot inside a church, but are nonetheless happy to spend hours in a commercial centre to find a last minute gift.

Should we erase centuries of Christian domination, and focus on the unbridled consumption of products that are endangering our ecosystems?

Should we design an eco-friendly tree instead of buying a fir tree that ends its short luminous existence in a landfill?

These are questions everyone should choose an answer for.

My take is - for each family or group of friends, - let us spend quality time together as a unit, honouring the past. without forgetting we need to work on our shared future.

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