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Solving for "X"

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Solving for "X"

If my mathematical skills in high school had developed beyond basic Algebra, I might have become a Physics teacher. But I was not adept at the art of solving for "x," or much else in the field of mathematics and wound up in a profession (warning: bad pun to follow,) where I sometimes interact with people in solving for the "X" in Xmas.

Not many of us have a problem recognizing that the "X" stands for Christ, and that Christ is the person who was born in a stable and was put to death by crucifixion. Some of us might not have always known that "Christmas" is short for "Christ Mass." In the U.S. the National Holiday of Christmas has its roots in the medieval celebrations throughout Europe when just about everyone in every place where there was a chapel or church participated in the evening Mass commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Whereas mathematics usually relies on there being only one correct solution, solving for "X" at Christmas turns out to provide us with many levels of meaning. Our own birthdays are celebrations of one particular day of each year and are meaningful because we are alive. When we celebrate the specific date of a famous person's birth or death, that person is not present. Rather, the celebration is straightforwardly ours, for purposes of remembrance, commemoration, or for encouragement to imitate the values and ideals of the one whose life we honor.

When we "solve for" the Christ of Xmas or of Christ Mass by reflecting on various possible implications, we enter an art gallery where many individual treasures are available to us. We can quickly read a catalog, or walk briskly through the rooms and look briefly at the displays of art, but if we are to appreciate any of them, we need to take some time to carefully observe them and to attend to the thoughts and feelings elicited by them.

We are much more likely to take delight in discovering the beauty and relevance of Christ through our reflections, than we are by laboring to "put Christ back into Christmas." Besides, we are not likely to change the culture or the habits of those around us by anything other than our example. But just as our sense of compassion might be deepened by gazing upon Michelangelo's "Pieta," we will surely grow as caring and compassionate persons, no matter what our formal religious training or affiliation might be, when we ponder the Christ of Christmas.

Christ is born as a human who learns about life from personal experience as we do, but as God, refrains from taking on royal or administrative prerogatives, and thereby empowers us to be our best selves without

needing to assume power over others. Christ is alive in our time and yet does not grow older each year as we do. The Christ of Christ Mass is the host for the banquet celebrations held all over the world through all ages, and gives his very self completely to those of any condition, culture, or way of life who trust him.

Even little children can successfully solve for this "X," which turns out to be: Love.