

Present company

IT'S the season of giving and taking, but let's distinguish between two types of giving.

The first, "having to give", is where we give reluctantly, grudgingly. Gifts in this category tend to be bought according to monetary value to avoid embarrassment or to follow convention. As in, "I suppose I'd better buy them something. It won't look nice if I don't".

The second type is "wanting to give", the kind that comes from the heart.

The motivation is not to match the cost of a previous gift from the person we give to, to be seen to have done one's duty, or to make the other party feel obliged to us.

The motivation is to give pleasure to the recipient and our reward is that pleasure.

I want to suggest something else. That we are all naturally generous. That behind much of our bickering about having to give lurks a forbidden pleasure of giving. That fear stops the pleasure of giving.

The fear is twofold.

First, in this competitive win-lose world, we may fear that by giving we lose comparative advantage; that by spending money we lose security.

Paul Valent

More importantly, we may feel that when we give with love, we make ourselves vulnerable.

We not only hand over a financial gift, but also a part of ourselves, and we fear that we will be rejected and hurt.

These fears are not reasonable.

Give and take is the glue of community, and what is given with generosity usually comes back directly or indirectly, with interest.

If we give with our hearts, we say, "I want to give you a token that shows that I have been thinking of you".

Or to those we really cherish, "You are so dear to me that I want to give you something that will make your life happier". Such statements evoke gratitude, not rejection.

In this season of giving, let us take the opportunity to enrich both receivers and ourselves.

Let us be reminded how good it is to be generous and to think of others.

PAUL VALENT is a freelance writer