A CANDLE'S GLEAM

BY WILLIAM McDERMOTT

Probably no writer has more ably related the Christian philosophy of giving to the Christian college and our American setting than in this article by William McDermott. Because these ideas have a direct bearing on the service the college is able to render, Taylor University is glad for permission to reproduce the article in the December issue of the Bulletin.

Christmas is significant because of God's gift. This time of year means all that is finest and best in our lives—truth, light, love, faith, peace, hope—because of the Christ of Christmas. It is our prayer that He may be honored through Taylor University.

With this issue the Taylor faculty and staff send their wishes for a blessed Christmas and New Year.

Evan H. Bergwall
President

Surely we are all familiar with the expression: "Don't curse the darkness. Light a candle!" It dispels the black of night—a single lighted candle or burning match can be seen by the naked eye from an airplane a mile above the earth.

Yet it does far more than the momentary dispersing of gloom; the candle's gleam goes on forever. Science holds that rays of light once started on their way continue through eternity. Dr. Arthur H. Compton, one of the world's greatest physicists and winner of the Nobel Prize, eminent pioneer of the cosmic ray and atomic energy pioneer—an ardent Christian, too—once told me:

"Light is perhaps the most fascinating subject in the world; scientists have explored it for generations, yet feel they have only put ashore on a vast, mysterious continent. Light that is visible is only a segment of what science considers to be light; it includes cosmic, radium, atomic and X-rays, infrared and ultraviolet rays, and other forms of radiation.

"Once you strike a light, the emanating rays are launched on an infinite, eternal journey. You may snuff out the candle, then completely destroy it. But it has performed a mission that can never be undone. Its light goes on forever."

Life is much like that; Jesus spoke of himself as the "light of the world," and gave the same title to his disciples. He fully knew the endlessness of light—also of life. Our earthly existence is like the candle; it inevitably is snuffed out, but the influence we leave is immortal.

Whenever I hear the oratorio "The Messiah," I think of George Frederick Handel, who died in body in 1759—but who would dare say he does not live on and on in his music? In 1519 physical death came to Leonardo da Vinci; but countless millions who feel the profound spiritual uplift of his immortal painting "The Last Supper" know he lives today in his great work. The light we have lit goes on for good or evil.

It ties in with the maxim that what one hoards, he loses; what he gives, he preserves. Both what I am and what I have involve a destiny. If I give myself in service to others, I find real life; if I give my possession to an enduring, worthy cause, such as Christian education, I have the profound satisfaction that my means, great or small; continue to benefit humanity after my personal career is ended.

I have known of many cases where people's greatest worry was what would happen to their wealth after they had passed away. They had spent a lifetime of arduous labor accumulating; they felt "you can't take it with you," and feared that profligacy and waste would dissipate it into nothingness. A few were afraid it would cause a never-ending feud among grasping relatives.

All these fears are not without reason. An old-time adage says it is only two generations between shirt-sleeves. One generation with rolled-up sleeves makes a fortune; a second coat-attired generation conserves it; the third generation squanders it and goes back to the shirt sleeves of poverty. This is only occasionally true, of course; but it leaves grounds for worry.

To escape the dissipation of his fortune by nephews anxiously waiting for his death so they could get their hands on it by inheritance, a wealthy Chicagoan pestered his lawyer for suggestions
how best he could bequeath his money. The attorney repeatedly gave him the brushoff.

“But I don’t want it wasted,” the magnate protested. “I’ve worked too hard to accumulate it.” Finally the counsel said:

“You’ve had a lot of trouble with your teeth, haven’t you? Why not found a dental research clinic with it?”

On that “turn of a hair” a $2,000,000 project was established by a large university.

In another instance, a rich Christian man, provoked by kinsmen quarreling as to which would get the largest share of his property, made a will disinheriting them all, leaving the entire amount to a Christian college.

These instances, multipliable many times, reveal you “can take it with you” in a very definite sense—carrying with you in spirit the knowledge that the fruits of your lifetime labor are not being thrown to the four winds by wasters, but go on serving humanity in your and God’s name for years, decades, even centuries to come. A college in England still provides scholarships through income from a bequest made to Christian education four or five centuries ago.

No intelligent man wants to come to the end of his earthly sojourn with the conviction that his life has been useless; he wants to feel he has done something worth while—something that has benefited others as well as himself. Nothing provokes a sense of futility or despair quite like the consciousness of uselessness. Only a ruthless, brittle soul can see his life slipping away and not bemoan a barren existence.

Never in history have so many accumulated wealth as in this country. Vast natural resources, scientific discoveries, free enterprise, inventive genius, unfettered minds and tremendous energies have all contributed to make this the richest nation of all history, also a nation where multitudes shared in the wealth. Our standards of living, our savings and our skills have lifted the level of living to unparalleled heights, and have provided many with a surplus of funds.

It is characteristic, too, of a nation founded for God rather than gold that its people like to give; currently one and one-half billion a year goes to church work alone. It should be more, of course; yet that sums testifies that many people give cheerfully. The tragedy is so much haphazard giving.

One national foundation estimates $100,000,000 each year goes down the drain of fraudulent charities, some of them exceedingly brazen.

How, then, can one know to give wisely? I have talked to more than one benevolent-minded millionaire who has told me “it is harder to give money away intelligently than it is to earn it”; also that the schemes, devices, tricks and frauds used to approach him for money are diabolically clever beyond belief. Too, there are many sincerely conceived philanthropic projects which are inefficient, duplicatory or unnecessary. It all adds up to the fact that intelligent giving and careless doling out of funds are as far apart as the poles.

It is well to give only to that which can prove itself—and that includes not only efficiency of administration but worth-whileness of purpose and the need for the project. In addition, one is wise to search out benevolent enterprises that do not get the spotlight of continued publicity or high-pressure promotion, for they by their prominence attract much wealth. I know of one unique service activity, with moving appeal and great acclaim, which has accumulated many millions of dollars, far beyond the dreams of the founder. No money is wasted, I am sure, but many other, unheralded activities for human advancement struggle along on a pittance.

Granted you are a man of means—maybe God has favored you with the opportunity, ability and drive to acquire much wealth; possibly you have just moderate possessions—you wish to handle your giving just as conscientiously and effectively as you did your earning. Let us talk about that for a moment.

There are two principal types of giving—one from current income for the support of the work of a church, a college, or a charity; the other the making of capital gifts for buildings, scholarships, research, endowment, or the like, from one’s properties, cash, bonds, stocks or real estate.

Looking now at current contributing, the best time-tested and proved form of cheerful giving—remember that is the kind the Lord loves—is the tithe; one tenth of a man’s gross or net income, as he chooses, for others. This is a command of the Old Testament, but not of the New; nonetheless, it is a concrete, commendable, Christian form of giving, with one setting aside the first tenth of each check, salary payment, or dividend, to help others. Not all of it needs to go into the coffers of the
church, although the latter should have much of it.

Christian educational institutions and independent service enterprises are eminently worth while. Christians should be versatile in giving. Give generously to your church, your community chest, youth organizations, the Salvation Army, Red Cross, and proved agencies of relief and healing—but don’t forget the desperate needs of the Christian college in your community or in the widening circle of your personal interests.

In your capital giving, whether made while you are alive or through your will afterward, two subjects are highly important: the mode of your giving, and the beneficiary of it. You may want to make it a memorial to someone, or to serve in a particular way. Let us look first at objectives.

If you were to make a study, as some have, of the charitable, religious, benevolent and educational enterprises in America entirely worthy of your benefaction, you would be both bewildered and thrilled by their variety and extent. Shelters for abandoned children and wayward girls; institutions for crippled children; research into the causes of blindness; convalescent hospitals for destitute mothers; homes for orphans and the aged; missions and industrial homes for the lost men of skid row; clinics for children made speechless by rejecting parents, for victims of rare diseases, for giving new life and hope to blue babies.

There is powerful appeal to the human heart in all the legitimate agencies of mercy. There is also appeal to both head and heart in the hundreds of private Christian colleges which capture much of the cream of idealistic American youth—boys and girls who are intelligent, talented, serious-minded, eager to serve God and man, yet usually having to struggle to get the education they are determined to have—and through brave, sacrificial and dedicated leadership and service, guide, instruct and inspire them, so they reach the highest levels of citizenship.

If you are planning a will, let me suggest that the Christian college is an institution worthy of your major consideration as beneficiary. Let me ask you to think of these colleges as educational institutions which honor God as Creator and Father of us all, and Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of individual, social and corporate life. These colleges strive to mold Christian youth of today into Christian citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

The pioneering institutions of America were the home, the church and the school. Christian education has gone alongside the church with the pioneer, his axe and covered wagon; with the circuit rider and his Bible-loaded saddlebags; with the explorer and the missionary going side by side to penetrate the wilderness. There was rugged piety among these heroic forerunners of our Western World civilization; also courage and intelligence. They knew they must tame wild lands to produce food, clothing and shelter, ultimately to build a land flowing with beautiful farms, splendid cities, and attractive, God-fearing homes. They knew also they must cultivate hearts with worship and devotion, and brains with knowledge and education. Did they succeed? Just look at the historic trails westward, southward, northward: along them will be found strategically spotted hospitals to heal the bodies and colleges to unlock the minds. The evidences of their worth are overwhelming. Records of our national and world leadership show the massive results of our Christian colleges. Let me quote only one testimony.

Who’s Who in America comprises the names of 44,000 of the most meritoriously prominent men and women in the nation. They are professional and business persons, leaders in science, education, religion, public life, law, medicine, literature, welfare, research, and the like. Who’s Who lists private Christian college graduates in a proportion of four to one compared to public, tax-supported universities and others of our largest educational institutions! The personal touch, the inspiring leadership provided by sacrificially minded faculty members, and the Christian idealism which permeate such colleges reflects themselves in the young men and women of strong character, keen minds and sturdy ideals who go out into the world to earn and learn, to save and to serve.

There is no finer cause in all the world than Christian education to guarantee the best in virtue, intelligence, consecration and zeal for the new generation of leadership now in the making on our campuses. Generous, sacrificial philanthropy to this cause will result in the finest flowering possible of your goodness for decades to come.

Returning to the subject of light, a scientist has recently calculated if the sun blacked out, and if
all the oil, coal and gas buried in the earth, and all the wood and other combustible material on the surface of the earth were burned to provide substitute light and heat equal to the sun's, the terrestrial fuel supply would be exhausted in six or seven days—then death-dealing cold would grip the world and all life would disappear. Radiation of the sun that falls upon the earth is said to be equal to 85,000 horsepower for each of the 2,500,000,000 inhabitants. Remove the energy that comes from without, and humanity would vanish.

Another form of light from without must come even if physical life is to be sustained. It is well recognized now that an atomic-hydrogen bomb war would devastate all nations, probably contaminating the air with radio-activity so that no living thing could survive. Save only for the spiritual light that comes from God through His church to mankind, the latter would sign its own death warrant in blood. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

People are pouring into the Christian church in the knowledge that it is the human race's last and only hope. Man's undedicated achievements may serve only to destroy him. Even formal materialistic education can be godless and be perverted to humanity's ruin—witness the degradation of German universities under Hitler. Education can be without morals; knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom and the laboratory can be used for destruction. A man with a high technical education was caught in one of the foremost research laboratories of the nation studying the latest developments in explosives—he was planning to blow up huge bank vaults for the purpose of robbery.

These are exceptions, of course, but they show dangerous potentialities. Consecrated Christian education is the final answer. Knowledge is acquired and thinking abilities developed in the light of a Christian moral order that lifts the spirit and mind of man above the brute level of self-preservation only, and places him in human society as one who serves rather than aggrandizes; who gives rather than takes; who blesses rather than exploits; who goes into partnership with God for the good of all, instead of partnership with evil for self-promotion.

Take away the church, and the jungle quickly closes in. Take away the Christian college and the main source of the church's leadership in the ministry and Christian teaching dries up like a fruitful land made parched and dead by drought. No