



Martin Hailer

## **Gift Exchange**

Issues in Ecumenical Theology



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In memory of

**Otto Hermann Pesch**, 1931-2014

Expert in ecumenism, esteemed counsellor, gifted musician

# Contents

Title Page

About the author

Copyright

Preface

Introduction

*Ecumenical Theology as Mutual Exchange of Gifts*

Chapter 1

*Ministry and the Office of Oversight: Anglican-Lutheran Dialogues*

Chapter 2

*The Claim of Reason: Benedict XVI.'s Theology and Catholic-Lutheran Deliberations*

Chapter 3

*One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism: Baptists and Mennonites Challenge Lutheran Theology*

Chapter 4

*Righteousness and Deification: Approaching Eastern Orthodoxy*

Chapter 5

*The Gift of Theological Interconnectedness: Pursuing  
Ecumenical Hermeneutics*

More books

Endnotes



# Preface

Ecumenical theology as such does not exist. Those trying to compose it ended up in mere abstract phrases or in highly reductive layouts. Frustrations like these are inevitable when one attempts to do theology stripped of close contact to the actual life of a denomination and its tradition of theological thinking. Therefore rather than ecumenical theology as such there are ecumenical endeavours within the many ventures of doing theology. Whenever an author or a study group is aware of the fact, that the gospel allows others to draw different yet coherent conclusions from it, one might speak of the presence of ecumenical awareness. This volume presents ecumenical awareness from the perspective of a given denomination. It takes a *tour d'horizon* through a number of dialogue processes and theological discussions the Lutheran Church and theology are intertwined with. That is its way of paying respect to the fact that ecumenical theology is not an abstract discipline in itself but a series of specific endeavours. Nevertheless the last chapter reflects on ecumenical hermeneutics in order to further improve its methods.

This book's material was first presented as a series of guest lectures at Canterbury Christ Church University and at King's College, Aberdeen. The result is an English book from a German perspective: My English speaking dialogue partners in mind I widely referenced and quoted books and articles in German not only because they influenced my position, but also to foster theological exchange over the divide different languages still provide.

After the lectures at Canterbury and Aberdeen I was able to discuss most of the material with my students at Heidelberg University of Education, with colleagues at the

universities of Bochum, Munich, and Heidelberg as well as with ministers and broader audiences at various places. Many thanks to Professor Risto Saarinen of Helsinki University, who supported my writing through an exchange of letters and e-mails concerning the Finnish interpretation of Luther. His research studies on the concept of gift provided the central idea to understand ecumenical discourses as exchange of gifts, as can be seen in both the introduction and the final chapter. When I found myself in serious doubt Professor Friederike Nüssel of Heidelberg University encouraged me to pursue the project.

Furthermore, I am especially grateful to Elisabeth Wiedemann and to Brian D. Asbill. Both of them studied the manuscript in a selfless way, deleted a large number of mistakes and carefully improved my use of the English language. Without their contribution I would not have dared to publish the manuscript. However, any remaining mistakes and unclarities are entirely my own. Stephan Mikusch's typographic expertise helped to put the book into shape.

Beyond words are my thanks to Brigitte Gallé, my wife: She not only endured a mentally absent husband at times, but with her being a Mennonite also adds an ecumenical dimension to our every-day life, that I would not want to miss.

The book is dedicated to one of the Church Fathers in ecumenism of our day. A catholic theologian himself, Otto Hermann Pesch used to teach at the department of Protestant theology at Hamburg University for 25 years. His seminal work's title *Catholic Dogmatics from Ecumenical Experience* (Katholische Dogmatik aus ökumenischer Erfahrung, 3 vol.s, 2008–2010) is programmatic in itself: We need not strive for ecumenical theology "above" the denominations. Rather denominational theology should discover that it needs

complementary partners in order to do its own work in proper fashion.

When I first met Otto Hermann Pesch many years ago, he turned to me and said: “In order to take you seriously, I have to ask you, do you play a musical instrument?” Fortunately, I am an amateur viola player. Pesch, by contrast, played the piano and the organ like a professional musician. He used to practise one of his instruments every single day for an hour. This was not just a musically educated scholar’s habit, but a core insight into the theology of the gift: *Musica optimum Dei donum*.<sup>1</sup>

Heidelberg, Pentecost 2019, Martin Hailer

# Introduction

## Ecumenical Theology as Mutual Exchange of Gifts

*Tzum ersten bitt ich, man wolt meynes namen geschweygen und sich nit lutherisch, sondern Christen heyssen. Was ist Luther? ist doch die lere nitt meyn. Szo byn ich auch fur [1. Cor. 3, 4. 5.] niemand gecreutzigt. S. Paulus i. Corint. iij. wolt nit leyden, das die Christen sich solten heyssen Paulisch oder Petersch, sondernn Christen. Wie keme denn ich armer stinckender madensack datzu, das man die kynder Christi solt mit meynem heyloszen namen nennen? Nitt alszo, lieben freund, last uns tilgenn die parteysche namen unnd Christen heyssen, des lere wir haben. Die Papisten habenn billich eynen parteyschen namen, die weyl sie nit benuget an Christus lere unnd namen, wollenn auch Bepstisch seyn, szo last sie Bepstisch seynn, der yhr meyster ist. Ich byn unnd wyll keynysz meyster seyn. Ich habe mitt der gemeyne die eynige gemeyne lere Christi, der alleyn unszer meyster ist.*

“To begin, I pleadingly ask that people keep silent about my name and not call anybody Lutheran but Christian. What is Luther? The Christian doctrine is not mine. I was not crucified for anybody (1 Cor. 3:4-5). In 1 Corinthians 3, St. Paul did not permit Christians to name themselves after Paul or Peter. Instead, they were to plainly call themselves Christians. I am just a foul bag full of maggots, so Christ’s children must not be named by using my unholy name. No, my dear friend, let us delete the factions’ names and instead be named after Christ, whose doctrine we have. The Papists evidently bear a faction’s name, for they think that Christ’s doctrine and name are not sufficient and they want to be

papal. So let them be papal for the Pope is their master. I am nobody's master, nor do I want to be. I join the congregation abiding the one doctrine of Christ, who alone is our master."<sup>2</sup>

Martin Luther wrote these lines during his stay at the Wartburg in December of 1521. He had visited Wittenberg in secrecy for a few days before and hurriedly returned to his exilic post when rumour had it that he might be in town. We do not know much about the days the Reformer spent in Wittenberg, but apparently he had reason to be concerned. He wrote the pamphlet called *Eine treue Vermahnung zu allen Christen, sich zu hüten vor Aufruhr und Empörung* (A Trusty Admonition addressing All Christians to Refrain from Upheaval and Turmoil) after coming back to the Wartburg and sent it to Wittenberg to be printed immediately. Compared to the Invocavit Sermons delivered in March 1522 the *Vermahnung* is modest in tone and concentrates on the basics of the reform programme which Luther had in mind for Wittenberg. This makes it a document of enduring value still today.

Luther compares the situation of his days to the one Paul was entangled in during one of his stays in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle complains that a number of factions exist which apparently named themselves after a leading person, Paul himself being one of them. In turn, Paul firmly rejects this sectarianism, calling himself a labourer together with God, who alone is the wise master builder, and calling Christ the foundation. Luther did not see factions among his friends (this, in fact, was the case only weeks after he had written the *Vermahnung*) but he compared Paul's complaint to the beginning process of division within the whole Church. He emphasized that those who call themselves "papal" freely indicate their membership within a faction and that all others should refrain from doing so. This argument sheds light on a basic

ecumenical motive of the Reformation. It is not meant to be the basis of a new denomination—let alone a new Church. Instead, Luther and his friends felt they were called to labour for the renewal of the one Church of Christ.

Generally speaking, the Reformer's admonition was not given much attention by his followers. They in fact named their denomination after him and thus ignored his own claim to be "a foul bag full of maggots." Even more important, it is a widespread opinion among Lutherans in particular and Protestants in general that the Reformation created a new and modern Church, while Roman Catholicism is more or less a continuation of medieval Christianity. The ongoing debate concerning the formation of the modern period fosters the self-understanding among Lutherans that they have been one of the main factors to shape this modern context. Without itemising things here, there is good evidence to say that Luther and his friends did not—so to speak—invent modernity, but were medieval scholars influenced by humanism who sought answers to medieval questions. The dawn of a new era called modernity has something to do with the Reformation's outcome but surely was not intended by the Reformers themselves. The same holds true for the ecumenical question related to it. Phrases like "the new faith of the Reformation period" are widespread in textbooks and even renowned editions of Luther's works.<sup>3</sup> However, they fail to account for the key insight that whatever might be "new" in Luther's teachings is spoken as a corrective for what he perceived as modifications and falsifications of the Gospel's truth.

In contradiction to the self-understanding just mentioned the present book argues that the Reformation's heritage is understood properly only when it is seen as a contribution to repentance and renewal of the entire Church of Christ. One should not call oneself "Lutheran"

without respecting this basic self-understanding. Moreover, commitment to issues in ecumenism is not a supplementary endeavour of Lutheran theology but one of its core tasks and an indispensable aspect of its identity.

The deliberations of the present book are committed to that intrinsic ecumenical dimension of the Wittenberg branch of Reformation theology. Through the use of case studies, I will attempt to explore how Lutheran theology is engaged in ecumenical endeavours and how it thereby faces a variety of specific problems and promises. A multifaceted account of these endeavours will be examined along with the consideration of ecumenical hermeneutics in general with a view to offering a modest contribution to Luther's statement that Christ alone is our master.

### *Glimpses at the Present Situation*

It is next to impossible to draw a picture of the present situation in ecumenics given the variety of dialogue processes, their differences in style and outcome in the processes of acceptance or refusal. Furthermore, there are the countless projects in ecumenics fostered by individual theologians who are not part of official dialogue processes. Thus, it is hard to judge the sentiment or temper concerning ecumenism in general. However, the following can be stated: Active and committed ecumenical theologians repeatedly say that academic theology has already fulfilled its duty concerning ecumenics, but that it is still waiting for Church officials to adopt its insights. This, for example, is the case concerning eucharistic hospitality. Theologians claim that separate denominations such as Catholics and Lutherans have far more in common than they differ from one another. Therefore, since a jointly celebrated eucharist (often named "altar fellowship") is not at hand, Catholics might rather invite Lutherans to the

eucharist celebrated in their masses, and vice versa. Elaborate argumentations for this view have repeatedly been presented to the interested public so that this theological task may be brought to completion. However, an official appraisal has not yet been given by those Churches who do not celebrate open eucharist and/or who advise their members against partaking in another denomination's eucharist. In German theology, it is Otto Hermann Pesch for example, who utters a prudent and considerate plea in favour of eucharistic hospitality.<sup>4</sup> Then there is the somewhat more rigorous work by a joint study group of three ecumenical institutes in France and Germany—one Catholic and two Protestant. They claim that those dialogue papers drafted by joint official study groups between Catholics and Lutherans and accepted by the Churches, provide a sufficient basis for mutual eucharistic hospitality. It is, so they say, the Churches' responsibility to finally recognise what they themselves accepted and to alter their practices respectively.<sup>5</sup> As is widely known, this has still yet to take place.

As matters stand, there seems to be good reason for the committed theologians' disenchantment: It is the bishops and not the theologians who are to be blamed for the lack of progress in ecumenics. Even a theologian who would not voice any hasty critique or debonair programme joins in this criticism. In the foreword to Volume III of his *Systematische Theologie*, Wolfhart Pannenberg writes: "Hardly any other factor obscures the truth of the gospel of Jesus so much as the fact of church division and accompanying phenomena, especially the combination in leading ministers of a pursuit of power with a limited outlook. Indeed it is usually a limitation of individual judgment that has plunged well-meant advocacy of the truth of the gospel into the ambivalence of human efforts at an entrenchment of dominion."<sup>6</sup> Pannenberg's view of the



question at stake here is worthy of consideration, for he has promoted the dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans for decades. Moreover, in the volume just cited, he submits a number of proposals which are unprecedented from the Lutheran side. So one might well presume that Pannenberg precisely knew what he did when ascribing imperiousness and narrowness of mind to leading Church officials.

If this was all there is to say, the theologians' task concerning ecumenics would come to an immediate end and things could be handed over to those who are likely to empower Church officials with courage for makeovers and changes. This, however, is far too simple a picture. Despite the given justification of the criticism just described, academic theologians cannot abstain from continuing this work. Once again, one or two examples should be enough to shed light on the matter. In today's German discussions, for example, there is talk of a major paradigm shift in ecumenics. The decades after World War II, so the argument goes, were dominated largely by the paradigm of *ecumenics aiming at consensus*. This aim is often embodied in the production of programmatic doctrinal statements. For example, consider the triadic formula of the World Council of Church's plenary meeting in New Delhi in 1961, when the Orthodox Churches joined the WCC. They helped to promote the idea that longanimous dialogue processes should be able to find a consensus in key issues of the Christian faith between denominations which have been estranged from one another for a long time. Dialogue processes such as the revision of doctrinal reprobations of the Reformation period by a joint study group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany provided good reason to pursue to this agenda. Probably the best-known example in recent years is the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran Church which was signed in 1999. This document

states a consensus concerning basic truths in the doctrine of justification. It is precisely this declaration which marks the cornerstone of the paradigm shift. Protestants widely criticised this declaration for giving in to the Catholic side of issues that are central to their own viewpoints. This critique was not voiced by Church officials but rather by academic theologians who tried to hinder the document's official acceptance. However, this attempt failed and the document was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Secretariat for Christian Union on Reformation Day in 1999. Despite this failure, these critics even felt entitled to maintain their position just a few months after the ceremonious signing of this first document when the papal Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document named *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000). This latter document restricted the use of the word "Church" to the Roman Church alone. Therefore, although it claims to have established a dialogue *par cum pari* (among equals), the non-Catholic participants were denied the status of being a proper Church. In this way, the latter statement brought the efforts of the former to a halt. The critics argued that a new paradigm in ecumenics must be critical of any method of consensus that reaches too far in order to achieve goal. Instead it must clearly state that the status of the Protestant Churches as the Church cannot depend on Rome's perception of them. This is how the catch-phrase "distinctive ecumenics" ("Ökumene der Profile") came into being. The slogan for this endeavour could perhaps be "denominational identity first and ecumenical dialogue second." The participants in the dialogue must be clear about what their identity is before the dialogue can begin. This is because a proper dialogue requires such self-understanding in order for the participants to know how far they can go in the pursuit of consensus. The President of the leading committee of the Protestant Church in Germany at that time, Wolfgang

Huber, published a volume on the main ideas of distinctive ecumenics. Nobody, he says, wants to go back to the isolation of denominations from one another; but at the same time, differences must not be left unclear. Courage to confess one's creed and respect for different traditions is required. Expressing one's own identity is preferable to remaining undefined.<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Körtner from Vienna University concurs with Huber's basic position noting that ecumenics have seen a shift from a model of consensus to a model of difference. In discussing the hermeneutics of diversity, he concludes that ecumenical hermeneutics should not foster any programme of unity. They should rather discover and comprehend the complex family resemblances which unite the denominations despite their ongoing differences.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, the current state of ecumenics is as follows: On the one hand, there is discord between those suspecting Church officials of being both negligent and hesitant in their efforts. On the other hand, there are those who claim that the model of consensus has reached a barrier and needs to be replaced by another model.

### *Identity and Dialogue*

The present book is written from a perspective that has largely profited from the model of consensus in ecumenism and must therefore at least in part be read as a critique of the distinctive ecumenics model. The main reason for this is that identity and dialogue are closely connected with one another. Therefore the basic assumption that the clarification of one's denominational identity must precede dialogue is overly simplistic. In fact, the clarification of one's denominational identity is an indeterminate and multifaceted process. Those who favour a hermeneutical

model of difference and profile rightly note one of these key features, namely, that a denomination's identity is grounded in the story of that denomination itself. The first point, here termed factor (a), is that identity is reflected in what individuals and groups say about themselves. No dialogue process which discounts this basic fact will yield satisfactory results. Yet, there are at least three more factors to be considered with regard to a denomination's identity. Factor (b) is the phenomenon of mirroring. As with the previous factor, this one is likewise known from the philosophy and sociology of identity. That is, a person or group needs to become aware of the way others perceive it. Their own version of their story (i.e., their "inner perspective") must converge with the story of their perception by others (i.e., their "outer perspective"). Whether in good fellowship or in conflict, this process is more than an exchange of information; it will alter and enhance the identities of those involved. In light of this mutual shaping of identities, the idea of Christian denominations entering a dialogue with a fully-formed self-perception of their own identity becomes somewhat unsophisticated. This is also true with respect to factor (c), namely, that identity is something that is in progress.

Factors (a)–(c) are not a speciality of theology or denominational studies. They may be found in modern classics concerning the topic, such as George Herbert Mead's main work.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, most of those favouring distinctive ecumenics will agree to these basic insights. It is only on closer inspection that differences become visible. In supporting his notion of a hermeneutic of difference Ulrich Körtner writes, "Ecumenical hermeneutics is not an instrument of implementation let alone an enforcement of a programme of unity however shaped. It is rather a skill helping us to discover and to better understand the complex and dynamic family resemblances that connect the

denominations—their differences notwithstanding. To discover and to understand this is an exercise of interpretation, an open process of semiosis.”<sup>10</sup>

This quotation clearly indicates that ecumenical understanding is a process and might lead to new results. It is therefore more than merely the comparison of denominations. Yet there are two factors in this definition-like description which merit further inspection. First, Körtner says that the process of semiosis is open-ended. In my opinion, this implies that a dialogue process could lead the involved parties to undergo a change in their self-understanding as denominations. If this is indeed the case, regardless of whether the resulting situation was one of greater commonality or of estrangement, their relationship would nonetheless be altered. Secondly, and perhaps more conspicuously, is the fact that Körtner sees a contradiction between a programme of unity, on the one hand, and a skill to discover and understand family resemblances, on the other hand. In doing so, he denies the possibility that the discovery of family resemblances *in itself* is a programme of unity. The hermeneutics he approves of may very well be found to encourage substantial steps towards the unity of the Church. Additionally, the phrase “programme of unity” is misleading. Nobody engaged in ecumenical processes that aim at a broader consensus is willing to pursue a programme installed by a higher faculty. Instead, those committed to consensus claim that union is at hand in Christ Himself and, consequently, that Church union is His work.

There is still another, a fourth consideration, factor (d), which is derived from denominational studies and thus cannot be found in philosophical or sociological conceptions of identity. It is the fact that denominations tend to display themselves *ad extra* as homogenous formations. *Ad intra*, however, they allow a comparably

broad range of self-interpretation. This may partly be due to strategic ideas or to differing styles in the organisation of Church leadership. However, this is primarily due to the fact that the identity of a denomination is a highly complex phenomenon and thus a matter of permanent debate. This can easily be seen in denominations that do not have an overarching hierarchy, as is the case for example with the Baptists and Mennonites. Their self-understanding implies the autonomy of every single congregation. Therefore, the question of Baptist (and, respectively, of Mennonite) identity is under permanent debate. This includes the existence of factions as well as a considerable amount of distress. The search for identity *ad intra* may be inspiring and stimulating at times, but it can also be quite gruelling. This being said, there isn't a single member of one of these denominations that would request for a governing body of their Church to be given the right to determine their denominational identity. Despite the differing terms and conditions of the various institutions of Church leadership, this holds true for the vast majority of Christian Churches. Currently the Anglican Communion finds this to be distressing, whereas others explicitly make hermeneutic use of what can be called "differentiations within a denomination."<sup>11</sup>

Any ecumenical hermeneutics, regardless of whether they are inclined towards consensus or towards diversity, must take this fact into account. In accordance with Körtner's terms, which are in turn drawn from Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance in language games, one may say that it is true that denominations differ from one another and that steps toward Church unity cannot be enacted. Instead, they must be discovered through the process of understanding. But in doing so one should see that a denomination's identity is a multitude of interpretations relating to one another just like language

games do in family resemblance. Therefore, the key presupposition held by distinctive ecumenics that denominational identities are stable and well-defined is fundamentally debatable.

Thus the tradition of ecumenics aiming at consensus still has some sustainable reasons. Nevertheless, even those who endorse it see the danger of one-sidedness. They affirm that a consensus need not, and indeed cannot, be the principal goal of ecumenical deliberations. (see [Chapter 5](#) for an examination of the model of differentiated consensus). In general, however, doctrinal consensus is not the primary goal in ecumenics (hereafter, I use “doctrine” to refer to official formulations of the faith such as dogmas, confessions, and other expressions which are viewed as vital for a denomination’s identity; “theology” is a more individual form of expression that aims at the intellectual clarification of an issue and that is normally carried out by single theologians—although undertaken with a sense of ecclesial responsibility).<sup>12</sup> Actually, the aim is to gain good reasons to acknowledge that the Church’s Lord is present among partner denomination’s believers. It is, of course, desirable to acquire an understanding of another denomination’s doctrines and theology, but not merely for its own sake. Such understanding is rather helpful in exploring the central issue of Christ’s presence within the partner denomination. Insofar as this doctrinal understanding facilitates the discernment of the presence of Christ among the denomination’s members, the fundamental aim of ecumenical hermeneutics is achieved. Likewise, a denomination’s doubt concerning the worship and ecclesial practice of a partner denomination fosters ongoing labour to promote mutual acceptance. Consensus is a means to that end, but never the end itself. Acceptance stands in contrast with uniformity. Among other reasons, this is why Protestant theologies reject the idea of simply

returning to Rome, that Roman Catholic officials speak of as well as practice through the ordination of former Anglican priests into the Catholic priesthood.

*The Book's Main Task: The Ecumenical Exchange of Gifts*<sup>13</sup>

This overview of the current state of ecumenical hermeneutics does not attempt to be anything more than an introduction. A comprehensive analysis of this material is simply not possible given the scope of this work. Additionally, the at times distracting multitude of problems in ecumenism calls into question the notion that there might simply be one ecumenical method and style. This is why even the more detailed exposition in the concluding chapter is more or less an outline. However, I want to introduce one key concept which is fiercely discussed in theology today, but scarcely addressed specifically in ecumenical theology, namely, the notion of *gift*. It was in anthropology and social science that theories of gift were first developed. They concentrated on the question how groups and societies are held together by means of the mutual exchange of gifts. Among other things, giving responds to needs, it increases the social status of the giver, and it installs a cycle of giving and receiving. All these things, in turn, serve to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity. Moreover, this line of inquiry has raised a host of open questions concerning the nature of a gift. For example, how can a true gift be distinguished from a hidden form of payment or an exchange of goods? Furthermore, can a gift truly be free if it merely consists in the act of giving? In the case of this latter question, the sceptics seem to be the prevailing voice. Every giver has some personal interest which she hands over in the act of handing over the gift itself. The question is, if we argue



that it is a quality of the gift itself to be free, how does this fact fit in with the idea that no gift is given without some degree of personal interest on the giver's side.

This is also one of the key issues with regard to theological reflections on gift. Theology makes ample use of this word and concept. One thinks, for example, of the gift of creation (sometimes labelled as "givenness"), the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gift of justification by grace alone, the gift of a flourishing life, and so on. What unifies all these modes of speech is the fact that they depict God's gift to humanity and the fact that the gifts themselves are free. Once more, consider the following ideas. The gift of creation is unprecedented and precisely for this reason it provokes wonder and amazement. The gift of God's grace is unconditional—a conviction which both Augustine and Luther went to enormous lengths to preserve. Nobody is worthy of themselves to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but He generously spreads them among believers as well as those who might not even be able to recognise them for what they are. However, if there are "no free gifts,"<sup>14</sup> then basic claims such as these are in need of close inspection and even reinterpretation.

The Finnish systematic theologian Risto Saarinen contributed another important idea to the concept of gift. In order to further clarify the task of ecumenical hermeneutics, we turn briefly to his work. According to Saarinen, theological conceptions of gift are normally receiver-oriented. By contrast, he proposes a giver-oriented perspective. Indeed, from the receiver's point of view, since the gift of creation is primarily the receiver herself, it is therefore free. The same applies to the unconditional giving of grace via justification, as well as the other examples mentioned above. If we focus on the giver of the gift, things will change. In this case, while the gift of justification is indeed unconditional for the person to whom it is given, it

nonetheless comes along with intentions of the giver. Indeed, God wants something by granting this free gift.<sup>15</sup> The gift does not leave the recipient unaltered. This reception of the gift moves a person to act and even to be shaped in accordance with what has been given. Saarinen explains this with reference to the classical concept of the imitation of Christ. There is a certain educational value of having received a gift. It disposes and prepares the individual for conduct that is right in God's eyes (128).

We will return to Saarinen's interpretation of justification as receiving a gift in greater detail in [Chapter 4](#). The present task is to outline how and why the ecumenical endeavours just stated could be understood as a mutual exchange of gifts. Saarinen's proposal merits close reflection. In analysing the difference between receiver-oriented and giver-oriented perspectives, he argues that the former case is as follows: the receiver gets something from the very tradition of the giver. This adds something new to what he already possesses. The gift is "a souvenir reminding us of the otherness of the giver" (136). This is an important stance, but it is one-sided because it imposes something alien on the person who receives the gift. If we shift to a giver-orientated perspective, by contrast, Saarinen says that the situation is quite different. In this case, a thoughtful giver considers whether her gift imposes an embarrassing obligation on the recipient and chooses something the recipient is really eager to have. In Saarinen's words, "In giving gifts, the givers should not propagate their peculiarities, but the very idea of the gift presupposes freedom and considerate behaviour. If I have papacy and you don't, it does not mean that my best gift to you is papacy. Perhaps you lack something else and would really need it. You may even think that as a considerate giver I would possess so much empathy or skill in applying the golden rule of reciprocity that I can give you what you

really need. In aid programs, for instance, such considerations play a major role. In ecumenical exchange, however, they are not given much attention" (ibid.).

Saarinen may be right in claiming that. Concerning theology in general, however, things are different. There is a long and fairly complex tradition of understanding God's grace as gift transferred from Him to man. For instance, grace as gift (*donum*) is a major topic in both Augustine's and Thomas Aquinas' works. Later on a number of high rank Reformation theologians disputed whether God's grace may or may not be understood as gift literally transferred to the faithful—those opposed to the idea suspected semi-pelagianism to come along with this position. According to a widespread opinion—at least in German speaking theology—the stand of the Reformation did not understand grace as a gift but as God's realm of power where the unjust is justified and at the same time remains entirely sinful. However, this is under debate: A thoroughgoing rediscovery and re-appraisal of the theology of gift of the reformers takes place, mainly of Martin Luther's contribution to the field: Against a widely held prejudice the concept of gift is a core concept in Luther's theology.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these findings there is a vivid discussion about the concept of gift in various fields of systematic theology. Veronika Hoffmann of Siegen University identifies four main fields that should—and can—be interpreted by means of the metaphor of giving and gift: (1) The doctrine of justification; (2) Christ's death as sacrifice and the biblical notion of sacrifice as such; (3) the Eucharist; (4) love of God and one's neighbour.<sup>17</sup> After discussing a large number of aspects in these fields Hoffmann concludes that a theology of the gift is a pneumatological enterprise, for giving in a strictly theological sense means to give something one does not possess.<sup>18</sup> That also holds true for an adaption of the

thought in terms of ecumenism: to hand something over to the ecumenical partner is associated with the conception that the giver also does not possess what he gives. On the contrary he gives something bestowed upon him as well and thus becomes aware of the fact that the ecumenical dialogue is not about unalienable possessing but about the awareness of being the beneficiary oneself.

One more aspect from a general, i.e. non-theological, theory of gift is of importance here. I have stated that there are “no free gifts” and thus made the claim that gifts intrinsically call for an answer. Precisely this, however, is under debate. If gifts are not unconditional, so the argument implies, they are no gifts at all. A gift waiting for an answer is a hidden kind of payment and thus counterplays the idea of a gift. Consequently, in order to be able to call it a gift, none of the participants—giver as well as recipient—must know that a transfer of gifts takes place: Should the giver know what he is doing, he would inevitably await an answer, inarticulate as it may be. The same applies to the recipient: If he knew that he was given anything, he would as well make up his mind on how to respond to the gift. The outcome inevitably is paradoxical: Neither giver nor the recipient are supposed to know what happens between the both of them.—This, at least, is how Jacques Derrida puts it.<sup>19</sup> I hold this position to be unsatisfying although it points out a crucial moment. A gift that must not be detected as a gift by definition is a paradox. This alone need not be wrong, for it may perfectly well be that events of the highest importance happen beyond man’s understanding. The tradition of thought Derrida stands for actually brings about an appealing claim for the rediscovery of the unnamable and for rethinking concepts of mystery and—put in theological terms—negative theology. However, the unsatisfying momentum is this: Derrida’s position completely excludes the notion of

reciprocity and mutuality. According to him, a gift has a certain mysterious value in itself, as long as it remains undetected. But by definition it must not be seen as a token of solidarity, friendship, or love. A theory of gift should take mutuality into consideration.<sup>20</sup> But there is a caveat from Derrida's somewhat inconvenient position, that calls for close inspection: A gift must be distinguished from payment. A gift does not establish a form of mutuality that works in terms of change, trade, or barter. Derrida claims precisely this to be the crucial point. So, if on the one hand, it is correct to implement a momentum of reciprocity into the concept of gift, and, on the other hand, a gift differs from payment and exchange, how should that intricacy be dealt with? I suggest to do so by means of a Kantian distinction: It is a well-known fact that Kant differentiated between means and end. Additionally, he said that humans must not be used entirely as means for a different person's end but intrinsically are ends in themselves. This applies to the distinction between trade/ change and gift: Within certain limits, someone selling things to others treats them as pure means, because he wants to benefit from the trade. Even if he treats his trade partner in a courteous way or hands over an advertising gift, this will not alter the purpose of his action: Manners of behaviour like these follow a clear imperative: "sell and increase your (financial) benefit"—even so, when the trade follows all rules of fair and respectful trade. By contrast, a gift focuses on the other person as an end in itself: A gift implies a thoroughgoing wish that the beneficiary herself/ himself benefits from the gift and from the relationship established hereby. That may include a momentum of reciprocity but is to be discerned from the de-personalised view of the other a trade or change implies.

In reaction to Derrida's position Marcel Hénaff, University of California, proposes to distinguish between

three types of gift, (1) ceremonial gift, (2) benevolent gift, and (3) solidary gift.<sup>21</sup> To begin with (3), a solidary gift is given among friends, siblings, or family members. This normally asks for a gift in exchange, but the return gift is not a necessary element of its ratio. Rather, solidary gifts take place within an established network of reciprocity, in order to depict and to intensify it. Type (2), the benevolent gift, is given spontaneously, gladly, and without any expectation for a gift in return. A giver of such a gift acts in a self-forgetful way and is completely attracted by the apparent need of the recipient. This type comes close to what Derrida is willing to label a gift alone. By contrast, Hénaff states that type (1) is of an utmost importance: A ceremonial gift is presented in order to establish a network of reciprocity. Givers know that they need to establish a social network beyond trade and change. And this is why they do not want to enter a mere circle of exchanged goods and money but want to establish relationships between human beings. In order to do so, the gift stands for the very self of the giver: *“to give something from oneself to the other person as pledge and substitute of one’s own self”*. (65) Exchange of gifts in this manner, Hénaff states, does not follow rules or even laws. Rather it is a delicate procedure entirely based on the benevolence of the participants. Reciprocity is a game of balance, although it may eventually lead to states of two-sided or even multipolar reciprocity. The ceremonial gift “hints to a form of confidence that yearns for full confidence and is on its way to constitute itself.” (127)

I propose to regard this to be a helpful typology.<sup>22</sup> There are, indeed, several types of gift and there is no good reason to deny the label to all others than type (2). Hénaff gives good reason to distinguish a gift from an item of trade: “something from oneself as pledge and substitute for oneself” establishes a personal relationship, that money or