

IDA HEIKKILÄ

Tradition as Testimony

Dogmatik in der Moderne

57

Mohr Siebeck

Dogmatik in der Moderne

Edited by

Christian Danz, Jörg Dierken, Hans-Peter Großhans
und Friederike Nüssel

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Ida Heikkilä

Tradition as Testimony

The Meanings of Witness in
German Evangelical-Catholic Dialogues
from the 1980s to the 2020s

Mohr Siebeck

Ida Heikkilä, born 1986; 2023 Doctor of Theology from the University of Helsinki, Finland; currently working within university administration and planning for postdoctoral research projects.
orcid.org/0000-0002-0117-6927

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www.mohrsiebeck.com, info@mohrsiebeck.com

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In Järvenpää, Finland, on the 4th of December 2024,

Ida Heikkilä

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List of Abbreviations

Apol.	Apologie der Konfession
BA	Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Kirchenleitung der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands
BDAG	A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature
BE	Barmer theologische Erklärung
BSLK	Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche
CA	Augsburg Confession
CD	Church Dogmatics
CS	Communio Sanctorum: Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
DBK	Deutsche Bischofskonferenz
DEK	Deutsche Evangelische Kirche
DK	Der große Katechismus
DV	Dei Verbum
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
ESAE	Evangelium – Sakramente – Amt und die Einheit der Kirche: Die ökumenische Tragweite der Confessio Augustana
FC	Die Konkordienformel
FC-CT	Verzeichnüs der Zeugnissen heiliger Schrift und der alten reinen Kirchenlehrer
FC-Ep.	The Formula of Concord: Epitome
FC-SD	The Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration
F&O	Commission on Faith and Order
GK	Glaubensbekenntnis und Kirchengemeinschaft: Das Modell des Konzils von Konstantinopel (381)
GSZ	Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen
GTH	Gemeinsam am Tisch des Herrn: ein Votum des Ökumenischen Arbeitskreises evangelischer und katholischer Theologen = Together at the Lord's table: a Statement of the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians
GWM	Gott und die Würde des Menschen
GÖK	Gemeinsame Ökumenische Kommission
HA	Heil für alle? Ökumenische Reflexionen
KAAN	Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge
KD	Kirchliche Dogmatik
KK	Der kleine Katechismus
KWS	Kirchengemeinschaft in Wort und Sakrament
LK	Lehrverurteilungen – Kirchentrennend?
MS	Mysterium Salutis: Grundriß heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik
NT	New Testament
ÖAK	Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen

OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OJC	Das Opfer Jesu Christi und seine Gegenwart in der Kirche: Klärungen zum Opfercharakter des Herrenmahles
OT	Old Testament
RÖP	Reformation1517–2017: Ökumenische Perspektiven
SO	Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel
TP	Von der Gewalt und Obrigkeit des Papstes
VELKD	Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands
VZ	Verbindliches Zeugnis
WCC	The World Council of Churches
WDW	Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background: The Centrality of Witness in Contemporary Ecumenism

From its beginning, the ecumenical movement has used the word “witness”. The first ecumenical documents issued by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the mid-twentieth century did not introduce or analyse this word but simply used it as a natural part of ecumenical vocabulary.¹ In the New Delhi assembly of the WCC (1961), witness and then unity and service were considered the primary concerns of the ecumenical movement.² Two decades later, the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC recognized an “emerging tradition of common witness”, designating common witness as the task to which Christian churches have pre-eminently been called.³

¹ For example, the document *The Church in the Purpose of God: An Introduction to the Work of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, in Preparation for the Third World Conference on Faith and Order to Be Held at Lund, Sweden, in 1952* (Faith and Order Commission Papers no. 3, ed. Oliver S. Tomkins [New York: World Council of Churches, 1950]) uses witness-vocabulary (testimony-vocabulary included) 13 times in 98 pages and “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches” (The Ecumenical review 3, no. 1 [1950]) 10 times in four relatively short chapters.

² Ion Bria, “Witness”, in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicolas Lossky et al., 2nd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), 1206. At the prayer service held on the 60th anniversary of the WCC in 2008, His All Holiness Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, referred to unity, witness and service as the “three pillars” on which the WCC was built. Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Ninth Report 2007–2012: Receiving One Another in the Name of Christ* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013): 6.

³ Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980), 6.

Throughout the twentieth century and as we move into the twenty-first, the use of witness-vocabulary has become more and more frequent. In contemporary ecumenism, this vocabulary is associated with various theological loci, such as missiology, church fellowship, biblical hermeneutics and revelation theology. “Witness” is undoubtedly something most Christians can readily relate to. This is clearly seen in the heading of the most comprehensive ecumenical statement written thus far, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011), representing around ninety percent of the world’s Christians.⁴

Despite the obvious ecumenical popularity of witness-vocabulary, a concept of witness has not been systematically defined in academic research on ecumenism or in ecumenical dialogues and declarations. Some dialogues do explicate that they understand “witness” as a translation of the biblical Greek *martyria*, thereby claiming that the theological idea expressed by the word is not a modern invention but a genuinely Christian and biblical idea with a long history. This reference affords a framework for the understanding of the idea of witness in the ecumenical setting, albeit a very general and undefined one. On a positive note, the non-dogmatic character and multidimensionality of “witness” have enabled the word to function as a building block in many ecumenical agreements. Negatively, the lack of definition has led to a situation where the word has been used without factoring in that it may have different meanings in the respective traditions. As a result, the agreements run the risk of being realized on a facile level.

An overview of ecumenical dialogue documents quickly demonstrates that the functions of witness-vocabulary are various, depending on the ecumenical tradition and setting. At least two approaches can be immediately distinguished: 1) a pragmatic-missiological approach, where “witness” refers to the whole Church’s action of proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world, and 2) a fundamental theological and philosophical approach, where “witness” is primarily a noun that signifies the fullness of the Christian tradition and its reference to divine transcendence. Global, multilateral dialogues, such as those of the WCC, often rep-

Yet another two decades, and the Joint Working Group recognizes “an urgent need for all Christians to be able to give a truly common witness to the whole Christian faith”. Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*, Seventh Report: Geneva-Rome (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 43.

⁴The statement was issued by the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on behalf of the Vatican and the World Evangelical Alliance. Mitzi J. Budde, “Lived Witness”, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 50, no. 3 (2015). See World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Evangelical Alliance, “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”, World Council of Churches, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf. Accessed 3.2.2023.

resent the former approach to witness, whereas the second approach is mostly found in bilateral dialogues with a high doctrinal status. From a European perspective, German dialogues, especially those between Catholics and Evangelical (*evangelisch*)⁵ churches, are the prime example of the latter approach. These dialogues obviously make use of their own witness-vocabulary in German.

One of the aims of this research is to test this observation and to specify the differences between these two approaches to witness. The main interest of this study, however, is the German Catholic-Evangelical approach to witness. What makes this ecumenical approach particularly interesting from a scholarly point of view is, first, that the German dialogues are multifaceted and theologically profound. They also use witness-vocabulary frequently and give the theological idea of witness a central place in their ecumenical agreements. Secondly, while neither of the ecumenical approaches have been studied comprehensively, the German bilateral approach is still less well-known globally, as English dominates the global ecumenical setting. Thirdly, the German Catholic-Evangelical dialogues are in fact dialogues between the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed traditions (*evangelisch* refers to Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches). All of these have characteristic understandings of witness, and this creates a platform for unique and therefore highly interesting ecumenical interpretations of the issue at hand.

In Germany, the two primary groups conducting Catholic-Evangelical dialogues are the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians (*Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis Evangelischer und Katholischer Theologen*, hereafter ÖAK) and the Bilateral Working Group of the German Bishops' Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (*Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Kirchenleitung der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands*, hereafter BA). The former is a semi-official research group that consists of individual theologians but is recognized by the background churches. It was founded in 1946. The latter is an official working group first convened in 1976 by the Roman Catholic German Bishops' Conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany.

The confessional basis of these two groups differs to some extent. The ÖAK involves Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed theologians, whereas the BA consists only of Roman Catholic and Lutheran members. However, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) belongs to the Evangelical Church in Germany (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* or EKD), which is a

⁵ In the broadest sense of the word, *evangelisch* means "in keeping with the Gospel" or "of the Gospel". In the Reformation era, *evangelisch* was used as an identification for the doctrine of the Lutheran Reformation, and soon for the whole movement. Today the word refers to all the confessions born out of the Reformation. Heinrich de Wall, "Evangelisch", in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 2, C–E [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 1709–1710.

fellowship of Lutheran, Reformed and United churches adhering to the Leuenberg Agreement. This does blur the confessional lines between these two groups.

In the official English names of the VELKD and the EKD, *evangelisch* is translated as “Evangelical”. This choice has been followed in the title of this study and it will be followed throughout the whole study. This is done despite the fact that the English term is primarily associated with the worldwide, trans-denominational movement within Protestantism called Evangelical Christianity. Another, more traditional option would be to use the term “Protestant”, but this would be problematic for ecumenically minded German Evangelicals who do not want to identify as anti-Catholic.⁶ Hence, the choice of the term “Evangelical” arguably reflects better the mindset of those whose ecumenical endeavours are under study here. In either case, to quote Pieter de Witte, “[I]nguistic regulations such as these are delicate as they touch upon the issue of denominational identity. Often it is a matter of choosing the lesser evil.”⁷

1.2 The Research Question

The primary aim of this study is to discover the *meaning(s)* of witness in the dialogue documents issued by the ÖAK and BA. In this study, the meaning of witness is constructed through a research process that is adapted from the theoretical framework of Risto Saarinen’s work *Recognition and Religion: A Historical and Systematic Study*.⁸

In his work, Saarinen makes a distinction between the *word* or words that express a certain concept (in his case, recognition), the *concept* as the basic, semantic meaning behind those words and *conceptions* as specific and also broader interpretations of the concept.⁹ When certain relevant conceptions become fused with the prevailing contents of religious thinking, gaining long-term influence, they can be characterized as *paradigms*.¹⁰

In the study of the meaning of witness, all these levels must be taken into consideration. The primary reference point for the “meaning” of witness, however, is set on the level of concepts and conceptions. Hence, when this study sets the discovery of the meaning(s) of witness as its aim, it is expected 1) to deter-

⁶ Wilhelm Graf, *Der Protestantismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006), 11.

⁷ Pieter de Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 100.

⁸ Risto Saarinen, *Recognition and Religion: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24–35. Saarinen in turn applies a strategy that Rainer Forst makes use of in his work *Toleranz im Konflikt: Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

⁹ Saarinen, *Recognition and Religion*, 25.

¹⁰ Saarinen, *Recognition and Religion*, 34.

mine an explicit or implicit concept of witness in the sources and 2) to describe how the sources interpret this concept, that is, what kind of conceptions of witness they hold. An essential part of the description of the conceptions of witness is the analysis of the *functions* of witness in the sources. What this theoretical framework means for the progress of the study will be explicated in section 1.4.

The secondary aim of this research is to place the German Catholic-Evangelical conception(s) of witness in a broader theological context. Here the focus lies on two questions: 1) what distinguishes the German conception(s) of witness from the conceptions of the multilateral global tradition, here represented by the WCC, and 2) which elements from the dialogue churches' typical conceptions of witness have the German dialogue groups incorporated in their ecumenical conceptions of witness?

There are certain concepts that share many traits with witness but are nonetheless distinct from it, concepts such as proclamation (*kerygma*), teaching (*didaskalia*) and confession (*homologia*). This study will occasionally point at the relationships between witness and these concepts in the sources, but its focus lies strictly on the concept of witness as initially outlined in the following subchapters. As it results from the methodological stance, this choice accordingly does not take any position on the meaning of the concepts mentioned.

1.3 The Research Sources

The primary sources of this study are the dialogue texts issued by the ÖAK and BA from the 1980s to the present day. These texts, of which there are 21, range from a bit under 70 to almost 450 pages. For the ÖAK, the limiting of the study to the last four decades means that the earliest dialogues of the study group are left outside the scope of research. This is because the ÖAK began to aim for common statements and for publication of dialogue outcomes only at the end of the 1970s.

Of the dialogue texts published during the selected period, the following are issued by the ÖAK:

<i>Glaubensbekenntnis und Kirchengemeinschaft: das Modell des Konzils von Konstantinopel (381)</i>	1982	“Creed and church fellowship: The model of the Council of Constantinople”
<i>Evangelium – Sakramente – Amt und die Einheit der Kirche. Die Ökumenische Tragweite der Confessio Augustana</i>	1982	“Gospel – sacraments – ministry and the unity of the church: The ecumenical importance of Confessio Augustana”
<i>Das Opfer Jesu Christi und seine Gegenwart in der Kirche. Klärungen zum Opfercharakter des Herrenmahls</i>	1983	“The sacrifice of Jesus Christ and its presence in the church: Clarifications to the sacrificial character of the Eucharist”

<i>Lehrverurteilungen – Kirchentrennung? I–IV</i>	1986–1994	“Doctrinal condemnations – church dividing?” I–IV
<i>Verbindliches Zeugnis I–III</i>	1992–1998	“Binding testimony” I–III
<i>Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen</i>	2001	“Righteous and sinner at the same time? Ecumenical clarifications”
<i>Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge I–III</i>	2004–2008	“The ecclesial ministry in apostolic succession”
<i>Heil für alle? Ökumenische Reflexionen</i>	2012	“Salvation for everybody? Ecumenical reflections”
<i>Reformation 1517–2017. Ökumenische Perspektiven</i>	2015	“Reformation 1517–2017: Ecumenical perspectives”
<i>Gemeinsam am Tisch des Herrn. Ein Votum des ökumenischen Arbeitskreises evangelischer und katholischer Theologen = Together at the Lord's table: A statement of the ecumenical study group of Protestant and Catholic theologians</i>	2020	Note, bilingual
<i>Gemeinsam am Tisch des Herrn II. Ein Votum des Ökumenischen Arbeitskreises evangelischer und katholischer Theologen. Anliegen und Rezeption</i>	2021	“Together at the Lord's Table II: A statement of the ecumenical study group of Protestant and Catholic theologians. Concerns and reception”

Table 1. Selected Dialogue Texts of the ÖAK

The BA, in turn, has issued the following documents:

<i>Kirchengemeinschaft in Wort und Sakrament</i>	1984	“Church fellowship in word and sacrament”
<i>Communio sanctorum. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen</i>	2000	trans. <i>Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints</i>
<i>Gott und die Würde des Menschen</i>	2017	trans. <i>God and the Dignity of Humans</i> ¹¹

Table 2. Dialogue Texts of the BA

The tables above show that while the public and publication-focused activity of these two groups extends over a very similar period of time, the BA has been far less productive than the ÖAK, having issued only three dialogue documents compared to the ÖAK's 18 documents. Formally, the main differences between the two dialogues are, first, that the BA is convened on an ad hoc basis whereas the ÖAK as a group is more permanent; secondly, the volumes of the BA are co-written by the whole dialogue group whereas the volumes of the ÖAK con-

¹¹ In this study, official English translations are marked with the abbreviation “trans.,” whereas the author's own translations stand in quotation marks.

sist – with the exception of the latest dialogues – not only of common statements but also of background articles written by individual members of the working group, the latter texts forming the bulk of the volumes. This means that the common reports of the BA stand bare, so to say, whereas the volumes of the ÖAK inform the reader of the background discussions that preceded the formulation of the common statements. This difference in dialogue methodology has some necessary consequences for dealing with the texts. Most importantly, it means that only the common statements of the ÖAK can be treated as primary sources for this study. We will return to this question in the description of the progress of the research.

The secondary sources of this research place the German dialogues in a wider ecumenical and doctrinal context. In Chapter 2, two relatively recent and theologically significant documents issued by the WCC, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (2012) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013), demonstrate the conceptions of witness that are typical of the global anglophone setting of the WCC. The former of these documents approaches the ecumenical quest from a missiological perspective, the latter from an ecclesiological one, thus bringing forth partly different aspects of witness. The WCC is an apt point of comparison not only because it is the largest ecumenical body in the world but also because the Evangelical churches involved in the German dialogues are members of the WCC and are therefore presumably motivated to conceive of witness in the same way as this wider ecumenical community.

The second group of secondary sources is dealt with in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the dialogue parties' traditional conceptions of witness are outlined through a selection of a few central doctrinal documents from both traditions. From the Roman Catholic point of view, such basic texts are the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the documents and statements of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1970). From the German Evangelical perspective, the central texts are the Lutheran *Book of Concord* (1580) and the Reformed *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) as well as the Lutheran-Reformed *Barmen Declaration* (1934) and *Leuenberg Agreement* (1973). These texts are analysed in their modern German translations and editions, as the focus of the analysis is on the theological starting points of the contemporary dialogues, not the original meaning of the texts.

The sources studied in Chapter 3 do not offer a comprehensive picture of the conceptions of witness in the respective dialogue traditions, let alone how the idea of witness has evolved in the history of the Christian church; they instead paint the elementary traits of the doctrinal scenery that hung before the German dialogue parties as they proceeded into dialogue. That being said, the theological preunderstandings of the dialogue parties have also presumably been formed of many other components, a good many of these being impossible to trace in this study.

1.4 The Research Methods

1.4.1. *The Finnish Tradition of Systematic Analysis*

This study applies a methodological canvas that is typical to the discipline of systematic theology in Finland. In Finnish systematic theology, the method used in most cases is systematic analysis (*systemaattinen analyysi*) as described in Jari Jolkkonen's *Systemaattinen analyysi tutkimusmetodina: Metodiopas* ("Systematic analysis as a research method: Method guide", 2007).¹²

Systematic analysis as a method is based on the axiom that the task of systematic theology – at least in its academic form – is to analyse the content of the Christian speech of God, not to make claims about God or divine truth. Because of this, systematic analysis uses the same methods as any text-based discipline: text-immanent criticism of and comparison with other historical texts.¹³ While this starting point can be criticized in many ways, not least for its indifference towards the question of the truth and for failure to justify the existence of systematic theology as a distinct discipline, it is fitting for the purposes of this research, as the aim here is not to uncover the true or biblical meanings of witness but to find out what the meanings of witness in German Evangelic-Catholic dialogues are.

One of the central aims of systematic analysis is to reveal the so-called structuring principles in the text, that is, a basic solution, perspective or interest that determines the whole thought of a person and explains its details. Hence, true to its name, systematic analysis presumes the existence of a system. This system must be intrinsic to the text; systematic analysis is often described as "system-immanent" since it aims at understanding a certain conceptual system from within, on its own terms, instead of imposing some external standards on it.¹⁴

The word "systematic" in systematic analysis refers not only to the presentation of the results but also to the methods of study. The method proceeds according to the following steps: 1) the formation of preunderstanding (based on the literature dealing with the topic a research question is formulated, and the choice of sources and methods serve the answering of this question); 2) an "understanding" reading of the text (the text is read "from within", on its own terms); and 3) a correction of the preunderstanding and presentation of a convincing overall interpretation, an interpretation that explains both the wholeness and the details of the text.¹⁵

¹² Jari Jolkkonen, *Systemaattinen analyysi tutkimusmetodina: Metodiopas*, Joensuun yliopiston teologisen tiedekunnan julkaisuja (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopiston teologinen tiedekunta, 2007).

¹³ Jolkkonen, *Systemaattinen analyysi tutkimusmetodina: Metodiopas*, 5–6.

¹⁴ Jolkkonen, *Systemaattinen analyysi tutkimusmetodina: Metodiopas*, 20–21.

¹⁵ Jolkkonen, *Systemaattinen analyysi tutkimusmetodina: Metodiopas*, 6–8.

There is a subtradition in Finnish systematic theology that tends to remain descriptive in relation to its object of research. This study does not seek to remain on the level of description; based on elements that are implicit in the results of the research, it also discusses the consequences of the results.¹⁶ Especially the bringing of the primary sources into relation with the secondary ones enables a critical discussion that goes beyond a mere system-immanent reflection.

1.4.2 Research on Ecumenism or Ecumenical Research?

A methodological question that needs to be clarified before initiating the discussion is how the subject of research, ecumenism, affects the method. This question is relevant since contemporary research on ecumenism is often closely connected with the ecumenical movement and scholars involved in ecumenical studies are often ecumenists themselves, actively participating in ecumenical dialogues and committees. In the research literature, this affiliation sometimes finds expression in an identification of the methods of research on ecumenism with the methods of enhancing the ecumenical cause. The current study is set in a different research tradition, one that distinguishes between ecumenics and ecumenical theology and limits itself to the former. Here, ecumenics is understood as an academic discipline that studies the ecumenical movement, its organizations and documents, the history and methods of bilateral and multilateral dialogues, and the typology of the dialogue churches. Ecumenical theology, in turn, is understood not only as an academic discipline but also as a conscious dedication to the ecumenical cause, even “a way of life, a spiritual journey”.¹⁷ Ecumenical theology aims at seeing the theological principles of different traditions beside each other, not placing one above the others, being open to and respecting what is worthy of respect in each tradition, and “re-gaining the reality of what it could mean that tradition and eschatological hope are a common heritage”.¹⁸ Understood in this way, ecumenical theology is a “discipline in its own right”, a discipline with its own methods and principles.¹⁹

This study deals with ecumenism, ecumenical theology and ecumenical actors. In aim and method, however, it is not ecumenical. It aims to be neutral about the goal of ecumenism, examining its structures and concepts without giving

¹⁶ Such an approach is suggested, for example, in Lukas Ohly's *Arbeitsbuch systematische Theologie. Techniken – Methoden – Übungen* (Tübingen: Narr, 2019), 233–244.

¹⁷ Ivana Noble, *Essays in Ecumenical Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 14–15.

¹⁸ Noble, *Essays in Ecumenical Theology*, 23. For example, Gillian R. Evans (*Method in Ecumenical Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996]), Peter Neuner (*Ökumenische Theologie: Die Suche nach der Einheit der christlichen Kirchen* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997]) as well as Friederike Nüssel and Dorothea Sattler (*Einführung in die ökumenische Theologie* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008]), exemplify this way of doing ecumenical theology well.

¹⁹ Evans, *Method in Ecumenical Theology*, 19.

statements regarding its value. This does not mean a purely descriptive approach but a constructive perspective in the sense described above.

Another methodological question that is linked with the relationship between ecumenics and ecumenical theology is the role of the comparative method. The aim of the comparative method is to present the doctrinal positions of the dialogue churches, to compare them with each other and, based on that comparison, to identify points of convergence and divergence.²⁰ It has been argued that “the traditional comparative method has come to its limits” within the ecumenical movement and that confession should rather be reviewed from the perspective of its compatibility with Christianity in its different forms.²¹ Others have claimed that the comparative method is useful in many ways but that it is insufficient when used as the only ecumenical method, since it leads to a one-sided emphasis on agreement, excluding disagreement as something alien to unity.²² The comparative method may have lost its favour in the ecumenical setting, but as a method of research on ecumenism it is as valid today as earlier. In fact, the comparative method has an elementary role in systematic theology; differentiation, the establishing of differences, is a precondition for integration, the establishing of similarities with regard to a third factor.²³ This study makes use of the comparative method understood in this manner.

1.4.3 The Progress of Research

The different phases of this research are conducted in accordance with the methodological framework described above. The study of the German ecumenical meaning(s) of witness begins from the larger setting, then moves on to the individual building blocks and finally evaluates the composition as a whole.

The first chapter of this study, “Introduction”, creates a hermeneutical framework for the analysis of the meanings of witness. The chapter introduces the theme of the research and formulates the research question. It also presents the sources and methods of the research. First and foremost, it formulates a general concept of witness, setting the initial boundaries for the study and showing which parts of the sources are relevant in formulating an answer to the research ques-

²⁰ Minna Hietamäki, “Ekumeeniset metodit: Miksi, miten, mihin?”, *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 121, no. 4 (2016): 300.

²¹ Wolfgang Beinert, “Weltweite Gemeinschaft der Christenheit: zum Dokument ‘Communio Sanctorum – Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen’”, *Stimmen der Zeit: Zeitschrift für christliche Kultur* 219 (2001): 93.

²² Hietamäki, “Ekumeeniset metodit”, 301. Also Evans (*Method in Ecumenical Theology*, 29) assesses that the comparative method has a “preparatory role” in ecumenical theology. Ecumenical processes must attempt to move beyond comparison to genuine dialogue, she argues.

²³ Ohly, *Arbeitsbuch systematische Theologie*, 63.

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