

Theology of the Cross and the Office of Ministry

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Introduction

In the past few decades of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (and its predecessor bodies), there has been a robust debate regarding the office of ministry. From the ordination of women and practicing homosexuals, as well as the adoption of the Historic Episcopate, the office of ministry is being challenged and sometimes redefined. The result has been that we cannot so easily answer the question: How do we know who is a pastor?

Knowing is a very curious activity according to theologian Mary Solberg.¹ While the ordained ministry remains a debated category, this paper hopes to propose a hermeneutic for that conversation. The hermeneutic for our discussion comes from using the theology of the cross as an epistemological tool to define the office of ministry. The inspiration for this idea comes from Martin Luther's 1523 letter to the Bohemians, *Concerning the Ministry*.² In this letter, Luther uses the language of the theology of the cross as a way to point out what the office of ministry is not. By doing so, he also lets us know what a criterion for knowing what the office of ministry might be: the theology of the cross. Following Luther, we note that the constructive result of such a proposal would deny a *characteres indelebelis* (ontological character) to the office of ministry.

¹ Mary M. Solberg, "All That Matters" in *Cross Examinations*, ed. Marit Trelstad, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006), 150.

² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Lehmann and Pelikan, (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955) vol. 40, 3-44. [Hereafter, LW] Also, *De instituendis ministris ecclesiae*, 1523, WA 12, 169-195.

Luther's use of the theology of the cross as an epistemological tool on the office of ministry is our starting point for this paper. After exploring this, I intend to show that using the theology of the cross as epistemological tool is valid and timely by surveying how two contemporary theologians have done so. Following the constructive moves by these authors, I then return to Luther to look briefly at his writings regarding the *characteres indelebelis*, arguing that his denial of the indelible character in ordination is a valid conclusion of using the theology of the cross as an epistemology. The denial of *characteres indelebelis* is not the only move to be made from Luther, but it is a result of this proposal that can be verified from Luther's other writings. If we hold to this interpretation, there is a reintroduction of an old hermeneutic for the office of ministry. While the theology of the cross has not been used to understand the office of ministry as of late, it may be a timely offering for Lutheran churches to consider.

The Theology of the Cross and the Office of Ministry

The key to our proposal centers on the fact that Luther used the language of the theology of the cross to help define the office of ministry. Using the theology of the cross as an epistemology is not a one-time event for Luther. Jürgen Moltmann writes that "Luther uses [the theology of the cross] strictly as a new principle of theological epistemology. For him the cross is not a symbol for the path of suffering that leads to fellowship with God."³ Moltmann continues:

For Luther understands the cross of Christ in a quite unmystical way as God's protest against the misuse of his name for the purpose of a religious consummation of human wisdom, human works and the Christian imperialism of medieval ecclesiastical society. It is a protest for the freedom of faith.⁴

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 207-08.

⁴ *Ibid.*

In what follows, we will see how Luther's protest for the freedom of faith came to be applied to the office of ministry.

Luther's use of the theology of the cross to better know the office of ministry means that the interplay of the hidden and revealed God (*deus absconditus & deus revelatus*) are at work in understanding the office of ministry. God's saving work is hidden in suffering and the cross while yet revealed through this same action. The indelible character, were it to exist, would be *deus revelatus*; meaning that it would point to God, but in an open and tangible way contingent on human ritual (ordination). Luther's argument is that we only ever find the revealed God as it relates to Christ on the cross. This seeming paradox is the center of the issue. How can we know a God whose good news only appears as he is dying on a cross (*deus absconditus*)?⁵ Luther's answer, in the theology of the cross, points to revelation where we least expect it, and Luther also points out that a claim of *deus revelatus* outside of Christ's death on the cross is most likely not good news. The situation in Bohemia had, for Luther, become just such an instance of God exposed outside of Christ.

Because of the Roman Church's methods for determining who was a Priest in Bohemia, Luther responded in order that there would not be any confusion about God's revelation in Christ. The text for our discussion comes from Luther's letter, *Concerning the Ministry* (1523), where he laid out seven characteristics of ordained ministry.⁶ In the section on the office of the keys, he writes:

⁵ Following Alister McGrath [*Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 165-167] and Walther von Loewenich [*Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 48-49] I understand two subtle meanings of the hiddenness of God. Here, I am addressing the earlier, pre *De Servo Arbitrio* understanding; a *deus absconditus* in which God's revelation is yet found *sub contraria specie*.

⁶ These seven characteristics are similar to Luther's marks of the church from *On the Councils and the Church*, LW 41, 3-178.

Yet what is the use of struggling to secure this office for us who know Christ? It is clear enough that among the papists knowledge of Christ, faith, and the gospel are altogether unknown, and at present even damned. When faith is lacking and Christ is ignored, it is impossible to see what is and is not sin before God. For the blindness of unbelief forces them to call evil good and good evil, and to lose their way altogether. If we do not know the difference between sin and good works we cannot loose or bind.⁷

Luther's here accuses the papists of being theologians of glory ("call evil good and good evil"). Because of this, as Luther says, they lack faith and cannot see what sin is. Their "blindness" in this respect means that they cannot loose or bind, i.e. they cannot perform one of the functions of the office of ministry. Therefore, the theology of the cross is employed as a hermeneutic for Luther's understanding of the office of ministry. Since the papists do not know the office of ministry, Luther argues that they use other criteria, tonsuring and anointing, for knowing what the office actually is. Luther's implication is that they have taken the visible things of God and claimed to know God through them. As Moltmann noted, Luther "does not dispute the possibility of natural knowledge of God, but he does dispute its reality."⁸ The result is an office of ministry which can be known outside of revelation and the cross.

For Luther, the real-life situation of the Bohemians may be the most important factor in how to decide what to do about the lack of pastors. It is notable that his critique of Rome comes in the section on the Office of the Keys, which comes after the sections on proclamation, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. One could infer that, for Luther, the most important aspect of the office was the forgiveness of sins since there is no mention of functions that do not have to do with proclaiming the word. As Edgar Carlson notes, "that which the minister does as the official and essential function of his office, in behalf

⁷ *LW* 40, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 211. (c.f. McGrath, 55-56 on the absolute and ordained powers of God.)

of the church, is to absolve from sin.”⁹ By withholding the forgiveness of sins, the Roman Catholic Church was causing spiritual suffering in the people in Bohemia. The Catholics are theologians of glory according to Luther. Regarding the papists’ concept of the office of ministry, Luther would agree with Vitor Westhelle: “The theologian of glory speculates behind the visible in search for the invisible, and in doing so looks for something visible that would serve as an indication of the invisible.”¹⁰ For Luther, it seems not so much a political issue as one to do with the daily spiritual lives of believers.

Luther’s use of the phrase “call evil good and good evil” is verbatim from thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation. The thesis reads, “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.”¹¹ In the proof, Luther continues by stating, “This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil.... Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good.”¹² Through his application of the theology of the cross on the office of ministry discussion, Luther is using the theology of the cross as an epistemological (hermeneutical) tool. In so doing, Luther gives a model for the use of the theology of the cross. By linking the theologian of glory and unbelief, Luther makes it clear that issues like tonsuring and anointing do not secure the office. To argue otherwise, that these practices are of the essence of the office (*esse*), threatens the gospel.

⁹ Edgar Carlson, “The Doctrine of the Ministry in the Confessions,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993): 82.

¹⁰ Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 117.

¹¹ *LW* 31, 53

¹² *Ibid.*

The authority of the gospel, which is spelled out by the theology of the cross, focuses the theologian on what can be known for certain and what is speculation. Luther addresses it in the following thesis:

Thesis 22 – That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened. ... Thus also the desire for knowledge is not satisfied by the acquisition of wisdom but is stimulated that much more. Likewise the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise, and so on... The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it.¹³

The psychological insights which Luther conveys in this thesis and its proof are quite remarkable. While he uses scripture to back up his thoughts, he is speaking from his own desire to know certainty regarding God. However, Luther's only certainty is that we cannot know God through our natural abilities. Instead, as Gerhard Forde notes, we must despair of our natural abilities because what is at stake is "how and where [theologians] expect to find and know God."¹⁴

The theological implications of this thesis as regards this church are clear. For a church to declare that it has wisdom which "sees the invisible things of God" threatens its integrity. Yet, the temptation to satisfy these desires often drives theology.¹⁵ Luther wanted a theology based upon the proclamation of the word. As he noted in thesis 24, "Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner. ... he who has not been brought low... takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God."¹⁶ For Luther, with the indulgence controversy

¹³ Ibid., 53-54.

¹⁴ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.

¹⁵ I John 2.16-17

¹⁶ *LW* 31, 55.

still in sight, it was about ensuring that the gifts of God were not misused for human purposes.

For the Lutheran church today, wrestling with various issues surrounding its ordained ministry, clarity on the office of ministry would be very helpful. Also, given that the issue of ordination as a sacrament which gives an indelible character is hinted at by some Lutherans, it might be helpful to look at this issue more closely.¹⁷ Luther's own thoughts in *Concerning the Ministry* point toward a view of ministry which is focused on proclamation. When this focus is lost, there may be trouble ahead; as Luther noted in Heidelberg Disputation thesis 3: "Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins."¹⁸

Epistemologies and the Theology of the Cross

My use of the contemporary authors will show that an epistemology of the cross is used to establish authority. This is done by disestablishing an older authority, much as Luther did to the Roman Catholic Church's authority in his address to the Bohemians. In the space created, new authority is asserted, and new constructions and proposals may then be made.¹⁹ The two step move is one that Luther used as well; for Luther the new authority was usually a gospel authority. Vitor Westhelle and Mary Solberg do similar things, in different ways. I bring them into the conversation to highlight how they make theological moves similar to Luther with the theology of the cross; create authority and

¹⁷ C.f. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 228-249; & Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology in its Systematic and Historical Development*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 286-297; *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, Ed. by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

¹⁸ *LW* 31, 43.

¹⁹ The flexibility of interpretation after the application of the epistemological piece (i.e. assertion of authority) of the theology of the cross may attest to its popularity in the contemporary scene.

offer constructive proposals. Luther's own method from *Concerning the Ministry* is not an antiquated piece to be easily dispensed with. Instead, his system is a vibrant piece of today's theology.

Mary Solberg's understanding of Luther's theology of the cross rests heavily upon the idea of epistemology. "In Luther's theology of the cross, there is nothing to systematize, legalize, or even grasp hold of. In a real sense, there is no content;" it is an "epistemology of the cross."²⁰ Solberg writes, "for Luther, it is almost as if a theologian of the cross is someone who has been struck ... by what God reveals on the cross: namely, God's own self.... There is no human capacity to comprehend the depth, mystery, even scandal, of what is transpiring on the cross."²¹ The lack of human ability to express what the cross is about suggests that the cross must itself offer a way to know what transpires there. In her book, *Compelling Knowledge*, she names why the revelation of God is so vital to our theology. "Humans' constitutional proclivity for misnaming is rooted in the brokenness the Christian tradition associates with the Fall, an estrangement from God whose completeness is such that humans are not even aware of the extent of its impact."²² As Solberg notes, "the cross, after all, is the *last* place human beings like us would expect to see God, and yet – if Luther is right – that is precisely where God reveals Godself to eyes of faith."²³ The idea that faith is the key to proper knowledge is fundamental to a theology of the cross.

Solberg's epistemology focuses on what we receive through God's revelation. She writes, "God's things, even as humans experience them and describe them, are not

²⁰ Solberg, "All That Matters," 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

²² Mary Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 74.

²³ Solberg, "All That Matters," 151.

like humans' things.... Human language is all humans have to point to these things."²⁴ Solberg lets us know that God's things, i.e. divine attributes, are unknowable as humans. This means that "what happens at the foot of the cross entails a radical reevaluation, and a demotion, of human knowing."²⁵ This is uncomfortable to theologians as Solberg notes, "Even if we were constrained only in this way – and not also by our compulsion to run our own lives and save our own skin – we would likely and quickly reify this confounding of our expectations of who and what God is and how God ought to work."²⁶ Solberg's assertion that the theology of the cross is an epistemology counters any attempt at reification. Instead, we can only know through God's message to us on the cross.

Solberg asserts that the theology of the cross is not simply a description, it is also about praxis. She writes, "Luther's *theologia crucis* functions as critique, announcement, and equip-ment... [or] critically, constructively, and ethically."²⁷ She also notes that Luther sets the theology of the cross, "over against a 'theology of glory' that he claims characterizes the thinking and praxis of those who represent the church.... It lays bare and names the pretentious human self-centeredness that corresponds to idolatry and ignorance of God."²⁸ This idolatry and ignorance of God is what Luther meant when he said, "Unbelief forces them to call good evil and evil good."²⁹ Solberg is keenly aware of Luther's attack on the Rome. She notes that, "Luther argued: [that the Roman church] 'believe and act as if they have the power to invent, name, describe, control, and dispense God...[And t]he gods human invent can be found wherever (human) glory, majesty, and

²⁴ Ibid., 140-141.

²⁵ Ibid., 144.

²⁶ Ibid., 141.

²⁷ Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*, 106.

²⁸ Solberg, "All That Matters," 141.

²⁹ *LW* 40, 28.

power are most evident whether in an institution or an individual heart.”³⁰ Solberg’s praxis is contingent on the epistemology that is set up by the theology of the cross. This constructive move points toward a feminist proposal for an epistemology of the cross. This proposal is based in, “Considerations of power, experience, objectivity, and accountability are both central to any epistemology...and indicative of its bearing.”³¹

In Vitor Westhelle’s book, *The Scandalous God*, he finds the theology of the cross helpful in our understanding of suffering. “The discourses about cross and suffering (Luther called them *praedicare passionem*) are attempts at ‘making sense.’”³² Westhelle notes that in Luther’s theology of the cross attempts to make sense are “ironic gestures,” where “values are subverted.”³³ One thus arrives at “transgressive knowledge,” from which Westhelle points to three basic categories in which the theology of the cross serves as a key for our knowledge of suffering. In describing our understanding of suffering, he uses three keys: the apoteletic (“from the Greek *apoteleo* ‘to accomplish,’ ‘to bring to an end,’ or ‘to perform’”)³⁴ moral and epistemic. Westhelle notes that the cross brings questions to us, and the epistemology present within each key means that “the nature of our questions will shape the answers that ensue.”³⁵ Westhelle uses the first two keys as general types found in various theologies, writing “since Augustine the tradition has oscillated between these two, what the cross accomplishes by itself and what it moves us to do.”³⁶ In the end, the epistemic key displays the central content for Westhelle.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*, 109.

³² Westhelle, 82.

³³ Westhelle, 109

³⁴ Ibid., 77.

³⁵ Ibid., 76.

³⁶ Ibid., 81.

The apoteletic key brings forth questions asking about “what the cross accomplishes, how its economy works,... what objective difference it makes for the world that Jesus died as he did.”³⁷ Its epistemology focuses on the sacramental nature of Christ’s suffering and its relationship with human suffering. The moral key asks the questions, “What does the cross move me to do?”³⁸ Answers to the moral key lie in the category of example. Westhelle pushes these two keys to the side in order to create space for the epistemic key. In doing so, he denies absolute authority to two dominant atonement theories, although careful not to make them irrelevant.³⁹

Westhelle’s main point centers on the questions, “Why did Jesus die? Why do people suffer? and, What is the relationship between these two questions?”⁴⁰ He offers that “a suggestive way toward an answer is that there is a concealed truth in suffering that risks disclosing the nature our societal and human relations – discloses it in ways we might not otherwise endure.” The goal is truth; truth that is found at the “margins of the text... and to seek what Foucault called ‘subjugated knowledges.’”⁴¹ The epistemology here is allowing our knowledge to be “transgressive knowledge;” going outside the accepted realms of thought to “corroborate... or criticize.”⁴² Westhelle’s constructive move is made by giving us questions that might be different than what we normally ask, and by asking, changing how we frame our beliefs, and subsequently practices.

These authors demonstrate that the theology of the cross has epistemological implications for our contemporary debate. Their particular views of the office of ministry

³⁷ Ibid., 77.

³⁸ Ibid., 79.

³⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

are not assumed through this connection, nor does this summarize what each thinks about the theology of the cross. Now that we have established the validity of using the theology of the cross as an epistemology, we turn our attention to Luther's use of the theology of the cross as an epistemology.

Cross, Office, and the *Characteres Indelebilis*

While Luther does not directly do so, one may connect the language of the Heidelberg disputation and a denial of an indelible character in ordination by Luther's own comments on the *characteres indelebilis* in various texts. If we use the epistemological implications of Luther, we arrive at the same end. As Westhelle writes, "As such, the cross becomes an epistemological locus, the privileged place of God's own self-revelation."⁴³ Luther asserts again and again that God has not disclosed this indelible character, and as such, puts such a character outside God's self-revelation. The following summary of Luther's denial of the indelible character is provided as support for our thesis. Because the indelible character was part of how the church in Rome established its authority, it is natural to link it with Luther's critique of tonsuring and anointing.

The language of the theology of the cross is first intended to show us what we cannot do. Humanity cannot clearly define God, nor is God available in certain and quantifiable ways. The theology of the cross ends by pointing us to the crucified God, and telling us that our good news is present there. Such an ironic statement proves difficult for humanity, and leaves us only able to offer confession through faith. Faith is thus the epistemological key for what we know about God. If we bring this line of thought to the office of ministry we soon enough realize that there can be nothing

⁴³ Westhelle, 111.

ontological in that office. An indelible character present in the office of ministry would violate the good news being found only in Christ on the cross, and would be a theology of glory. It would be good news that is found without the proclamation; good news found by merely gazing upon a pastor. We can also point to God in the Lord's Supper or baptism, but they are accompanied by the proclamation of the good news. The office of ministry does not contain such proclamation within it. The person in the office can proclaim the good news, but so can every other Christian.

In 1520, in two different treatises, Luther denounces the indelible character. In *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther makes the remark, “now the Romanists have invented *characteres indelebilis* and say that a deposed priest is nevertheless something different from a mere layman.”⁴⁴ In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), Luther brings up the concept of indelible character. Luther asks rhetorically, “Whence do such ideas come, I ask?” He ascribes these ideas to opinion and invention, and proceeds to deny that the indelible character is provided for by “heavenly and divine ordinances.”⁴⁵ Later in the same section, he writes, “For that fiction of an ‘indelible character’ has long since become a laughingstock. I admit that the pope imparts this ‘character,’ but Christ knows nothing of it.”⁴⁶

Luther calls the indelible character the “fictitious character” in *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521). Here Luther connects this fictitious character with “anointed and oiled fingers, the tonsured head and the pharisaical dress.” Similar to Luther's language in *Concerning the Ministry* is the use of “anointed” and “tonsured” with regard to the

⁴⁴ *LW* 44, 129.

⁴⁵ *LW* 36, 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

indelible character as something that does not define the priesthood.⁴⁷ Luther later compares the indelible character with the mark of the beast.⁴⁸

In *Concerning the Ministry* (1523), Luther again refers to the “indelible character”, and says regarding that the “authority and dignity of the priesthood [reside] in the community of believers. In this view of ministry, the so-called ‘indelible character’ vanishes and the perpetuity of the office is shown to be fictitious.”⁴⁹ From this and the above we can conclude that in the early 1520’s, Luther clearly does not support an indelible character. Most likely, his lack of support has to do with the “fictitious” nature of it.⁵⁰ But, this denial resembles his attack on tonsuring and anointing in *Concerning the Ministry*. In fact, his linking of tonsuring, anointing and indelible character may point to just such a belief. In contrast, Luther argues that our knowledge of the office is found in the revelation God gives on the cross, and this excludes an indelible character.

Conclusion

Using the theology of the cross as an epistemology for the office of ministry may yield other results than a denial of the indelible character. It may mean that the office of ministry is rethought in new or different ways. Considering the debate surrounding the office of ministry in the last 50 years, it seems that this rethinking is already happening. But, has our theology of the office changed to fall in line with the changes in our practices? Westhelle and Solberg do not write much about the office of ministry in their own work, even while their energy is very much about vocation and ethics; addressing

⁴⁷ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁹ *LW* 40, 35.

⁵⁰ C.f. *LW* 36, 111, footnote 201.

what we do with the knowledge of suffering we see in the world now. This disconnect between the office and our approach to suffering in the world may imply that our thinking about the office of ministry limits it to priestly functions, with churches that are hermetically sealed from the outside world. Luther's point is to contradict this idea of pastors who serve only priestly roles. Luther intends rather to emphasize that ministry is about a community of believers who are hurting, and who need pastoral care daily. The contemporary theologians focus more on the ministry of every person, not on creating a theologically appropriate office of ministry.

The growing debate about the office of the ministry could be served by an epistemology that starts with the theology of the cross. With nearly ten years since the passage of the Concordat of Agreement, and with the current debate over the ordination of people in same-sex relationships, the ELCA needs as much clarity on the office as possible. The proposal here is that the theology of the cross provides an epistemology that will help us to know better what the office of ministry actually means today. Luther does not indicate what a theologian of the cross might say about the office after he defined what it is not, although we can draw some conclusions.

For Luther, the office of ministry, while instituted by God, is only feebly filled by the pastors who occupy it. Pastors, as they live out their lives in ministry, both do and do not fulfill what God intends for the office. That is why we can claim that a pastor is not ontologically changed by ordination. If we argue anything more, then we have no defense for flagging church attendance since our pastors would have an indelible mark which should guarantee the gospel. Instead, the office of ministry seen through the theology of the cross is filled by sinners who yet can proclaim the gospel. Luther's split from Rome

on this matter was neither an accident, nor a response to an emergency. As Westhelle notes when describing Luther's hypothetical lay-authorized ordination in *To the Christian Nobility*, "Luther seeks no exception to the rule for this hypothetical group... Instead, he vindicates a radical catholicity that exceeds that of those who claimed to administer it."⁵¹ Given that the theology of the cross has at its center a focus on the proclamation of the gospel under the form of its opposite, the office of ministry as it currently stands in the ELCA may be growing outside the hiddenness of God; a hiddenness which can only be attested to by faith. An office of ministry that exposes God so that the world may believe is vanity of vanities. That message may be a hard lesson for us. Yet, we remember what Luther said, "what is the use of struggling to secure this office for us who know Christ?"

If our baptism gives all the authority we need to proclaim the word, it may be that the debates about the office of ministry are irrelevant. The reality on the ground is that strong emotions are at work. The proposed hermeneutic suggests that perhaps we would be better off if we simply focused on preaching the gospel. For those who claim to be the inheritors of Luther the question of "How do we know who is a pastor?" may very well have been answered almost 500 years ago. It is only through faith that we claim to hear and know God's promise for us, and faith cannot be secured or bound by human institution or decree. The office of ministry is not ours to control; it is a gift from a faithful God.

⁵¹ Westhelle, 109.