

## GRABAU REHABILITATED

Several years ago during a free-conference debate concerning the so-called Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod views of the ministry, the WELS presenter commented that some advocates of the Missouri Synod view make the pastoral ministry too directly descendent from the apostolic office. He observed that this "excessive emphasis on the role of public ministers, rather than the church, in appointing a new generation of ministers for the church seems more sympathetic to the approach of Grabau than to that of Walther" (*WLQ*, Winter 94, p 40). One would think that such a theory which traces a form of the "Missouri Synod view of ministry" to Walther's adversary Grabau would be "fighting words," which would be vehemently denied by proponents of this view. It was, therefore, somewhat surprising that this assertion passed unchallenged at the free conference, but this omission could be attributed to the limited time for discussion rather than to acceptance of the premise.

But now there is more to the story. A recent article by an advocate of this form of the "Missouri Synod view of ministry" repudiates important elements of Walther's position and expresses partial support for the position of Grabau (*Logia*, Eastertide 1996, pp 25-40). The author, Lowell Green, rejects Walther's definition of the church as the congregation of the holy, the sum total of believers in Christ. He, furthermore, implies a connection between Walther's definition of the church and the anthropocentric views of Schleiermacher (p 32). Green rejects Walther's assertion that "no unregenerate person belongs to the church in its strict sense" as an error derived from pietism (p 32). Walther's thesis that the church in its proper sense is invisible is rejected as an error derived from the Neo-Platonic thinking of the Reformed (p 33). It was

rather surprising when another advocate of the "Missouri Synod view" recently attempted to link the WELS position on church and ministry with the views of Schleiermacher (See *WLQ*, Summer 96, p 225). It is downright amazing to have an advocate of the so-called Missouri Synod view link portions of Walther's position with pietism, Reformed Neoplatonism, and Schleiermacher.

To maintain his position Green also has to dismiss Luther's great works on the priesthood of all believers as early aberrations which Luther outgrew (p 26, 34). Even Francis Pieper, whom many regard as the real originator of the "Missouri Synod view" is criticized for being too accepting of the view that the administration of the means of grace is delegated to the called minister by the congregation (p 34).

Although Green also finds fault with Grabau, he concludes that leaders of the Missouri Synod sometimes overpowered the Buffalo Synod with arguments that were less consistent with confessional Lutheran theology than those of Grabau (p 35).

The basic fallacy of Green's argument is that he identifies Walther's view as an anthropocentric theory of church and ministry in contrast to his own view which he classifies as theocentric. It is true that Walther emphasized the role of the congregation in the calling of pastors, but his view can hardly be labeled "man-centered," since Walther clearly teaches that pastors are called by Christ through the congregation (Theses VI & VII on Ministry) and that the public ministry of the Word is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers (Thesis I). For Green to call his own view, which emphasizes the role of the ministerium in perpetuating the ministry "God-centered" is curious and perhaps even presumptuous. According to both views it is Christ who establishes the public ministry. The question is whether he does this directly from the apostolic office through the pastors, or he does this through the church. Walther's view hardly deserves the label "anthropocentric" because he focuses on the role of the congregation. A view which exalts the public ministers at the expense of the congregation can hardly be called "God-centered."

WELS writers have long claimed that the so-called Wisconsin Synod view of church and ministry is in essential agreement with the position of Walther, and that apparent disagreement between the two views is largely due to unclarity about Walther's use of the term *Predigtamt* and to misinterpretation of Walther's view (*WLQ*, May 82, p 85-139. Reprinted in *WELS Ministry Compendium II*, pp 465-520). That claim may seem incredible to some, but Green's treatment of Walther helps lend credibility to it. Green can be commended for honestly acknowledging that the stringent version of the "Missouri Synod view" which traces the origin of the pastoral ministry directly to the apostolate and ministerium rather than through the congregation can-

not be harmonized with the position of Walther. The view of Walther and the so-called "Wisconsin Synod view," which is held by very many in Missouri, both emphasize that the public ministry is of divine origin, but that the call of Christ comes through the church (see *WLQ*, Summer 95, pp 168-178).

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