

On Efficacy as Distinct from Validity and Effectiveness

In my earlier thinking and speaking I typically discussed means of salvation (or, more commonly, actually, "means of grace") by distinguishing between their *validity*, on the one hand, and their *efficacy*, on the other. Since at least the mid-1980s, however, I have regularly employed a three-part distinction between not only their validity and their efficacy, but also their *effectiveness*. This I was led to do by two considerations: (1) that, because grace is *eo ipso* efficacious, the same must be true of any valid means of grace; and (2) that, although the term "efficacy" could express the two distinct meanings that needed to be expressed, confusion might be minimized by using it to express only one of them, while using the third term "effectiveness" to express the other. Thus my distinction between "efficacy" and "effectiveness" serves to retrieve the distinction made by the Lutheran orthodox theologians between the *efficacia* and the *efficientia* of the divine word, while avoiding the irrelevant connotations of the term "efficiency" as it has come to be used more recently.

The difficulty with this, however, is that I have never managed to be as clear as I should have been about the precise meaning of "efficacy," as distinct from both "validity" and "effectiveness." To be sure, I have been clear enough in distinguishing verbally between the efficacy of a means of salvation that is of a piece with its validity, and therefore is independent of the faith of the person using it as well as that of the person administering it, on the one hand, and the effectiveness of a means of salvation that, unlike its validity and the efficacy that is of a piece therewith, depends on the faith of the person using it even if not on that of the person administering it, on the other. But in looking over my actual uses of the distinction, I am struck by my never really explaining the difference as well as the relation between efficacy and validity, beyond asking suggestively at one point whether they may perhaps correspond more or less closely to the difference and relation between *auctoritas causativa* and *auctoritas normativa*. (As it turns out, further reflection has served only to confirm my suggested affirmative answer.)

In any case, the question that now occurs to me is whether there isn't an important connection to be made between all this and my continuing reflections on rightly locating "the 'objective' component of the revelatory correlation." According to these reflections, taking something to be revelation actually involves a *double* taking. The subject of revelation first takes something *as* something, i.e., *as* re-presenting a certain possibility of self-understanding/understanding existence; and only then does (or can) the subject also take this possibility to be our authentic/true possibility as human beings. But, then, the "objective" component in the revelatory correlation is not simply the something taken, but the something taken *in that particular way*—namely, *as* re-presenting a certain possibility of self-understanding/understanding existence, which itself is then taken to be the possibility of understanding oneself authentically/understanding existence truly. Thus the proper question to ask in determining whether or not what is taken to be revelation really is so is not whether someone has *re-presented* our authentic/true possibility by what she or he says or does, but whether the possibility that someone *is taken to re-present* is also correctly taken to be that authentic/true possibility.

Also relevant here, of course, are such distinctions as: the scholastic distinction between material object and formal object; Luther's distinction between *res* or *factum*, on the one hand, and the *usus rei* or the *usus facti*, as well as the *vis rei* or the *vis facti*, on the other; and Bultmann's distinction between "understanding [or translating] the text, which "can take place only by methodical [historical] interpretation," on the one hand, and "hearing God's word in faith," which "can only be the work of the Holy Spirit," on the other. But however the distinction is made, experiencing something *as* existentially significant, because it explicitly re-presents some possibility of self-understanding/ understanding existence, is undoubtedly distinct both from experiencing the same something nonexistentially and from so experiencing it as also to decide for the self-understanding for which it calls by actualizing the possibility it is experienced as re-presenting.

But, then, the three-part distinction between the validity, the efficacy, and the effectiveness of a means of salvation should be correspondingly clear. Whether or not such a means is *valid* depends entirely on whether or not it appropriately re-presents the

meaning of ultimate reality for us—be its re-presentation primal, primary, or secondary. Whether or not it is *effective* depends entirely on whether or not it is received through faith by the person using it. But whether or not it is *efficacious* depends only on its being experienced as existentially significant because it calls one to decide for or against a particular possibility of self-understanding/understanding existence. In other words, the efficacy of a means of salvation, unlike its validity, is *not* entirely independent of the person using it, although, unlike its effectiveness, *is* entirely independent of the person's *faith*. What it is not independent of, but entirely depends on, however, is that person's taking it *as* something, i.e., *as* something existentially significant, because it explicitly calls for the decision of faith or unfaith.

Of course, my taking something to be a means of salvation doesn't make it such, even though it does make it such for me. If it really is a means of salvation, then, whether I take it to be so or not, it has to be such that it re-presents—whether primally, primarily, or secondarily—our authentic/true possibility as human beings, and does so not only to me but to anyone else who takes it to do so. In this sense, it has to be valid, and its validity is "objective" in that it in no way depends on me or on any other person using it or administering it but only on its own appropriateness—on its being appropriate, formally as well as materially, to the meaning of ultimate reality for us. And whether or not it really is thus appropriate is entirely a matter of critical reflection—specifically, of theological judgment—as distinct from existential decision. But whether a means of salvation is not only valid but also efficacious very much depends on how it is used—on whether one takes it *as* explicitly re-presenting a certain possibility of self-understanding/understanding existence, for or against which it summons one to decide. On the other hand, whether a valid means of salvation is effective as well as efficacious is eminently a matter of existential decision, depending, as it does, on whether one decides through faith *for* the possibility it re-presents—again, primally, primarily, or secondarily.

Unless I am mistaken, making (or really recognizing) this connection not only provides the wanted clarification of the meaning of "efficacy," as distinct from "validity"

as well as "effectiveness," but also explains the aptness of this threefold distinction for any discussion of means of salvation.

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