

On Validity, Efficacy, and Effectiveness

1. Heretofore I have usually distinguished between the validity of a means of grace, on the one hand, and its efficacy, on the other, assuming that, whereas the faith of the person using the means is a condition prerequisite to its efficacy (in accordance with the dictum nullum sacramentum sine fide), the validity of the means, depending as it does solely on its appropriateness to its content, is independent of the faith not only of the person using it but even of the person administering it (this being the truth in the Catholic notion of the opus operatum).

2. The difficulty with this, however, is that the grace of which any valid means is the instrument cannot be conceived except as in and of itself efficacious. But if grace itself is efficacious, the same must be true of any valid means of grace, whose validity is eo ipso its efficacy. Precisely because or insofar as it is valid, it cannot fail to have the power of the grace of which it is the instrument.

3. What, then, is to be done? Evidently, a distinction needs to be made between the efficacy of a means of grace that is of a piece with its validity and, therefore, independent of the faith of the person using it as well as of the person administering it, on the one hand, and the efficacy of a means of grace that, unlike its validity and the efficacy that is of a piece with its validity, depends on the faith of the person using it as its prerequisite condition, on the other hand. As it happens, the word "efficacy" can express both of these meanings, although it is usually defined as the power or capacity to produce the desired effect, or the ability to achieve results. But there are obvious risks of confusion in using the same word to express both meanings; and there are other terms which, though often used interchangeably with "efficacy," are usually understood as expressing the

other meaning that it can be used to express--namely, proven power or capacity to produce the desired effect, or proven ability to achieve results.

4. The other terms to which I refer are "effectiveness" and "effectuality" or "effectualness." Although their respective adjectival cognates, at least, are often used as roughly synonymous with that of "efficacy," where they are not so used, "efficacious" suggests having the potential to produce the desired effect or to achieve the results, while "effective" or "effectual" implies the actualization of this potential.

5. With this in mind, I propose hereafter to distinguish between the validity and the efficacy of a means of grace, on the one hand, and its effectiveness, on the other, on the assumption that, whereas the prerequisite condition of its effectiveness is the faith of the person using it, its validity and efficacy are independent of the faith of the person using it as well as of the person administering it.

6. As it happens, the same distinction was made by the Lutheran orthodox theologians by distinguishing either between the efficacia verbi divini in actu primo and in actu secundo considerata or between the efficacia and the efficientia of the word. This makes perfectly good sense since "efficient" is often used in contemporary English as a synonym of "effective" and "effectual." But the connotations "efficiency" has acquired in the modern technological, industrial world make it less useable for my purposes than "effectiveness" or "effectuality." As for the other distinction between actus primus and actus secundus, it serves quite precisely to distinguish between potentia operandi, on the one hand, and operatio actualis, on the other. But one can no longer presuppose the knowledge of Aristotelian or medieval philosophy that understanding the distinction requires.

7. I also want to ask in this connection whether the distinction between the validity and the efficacy of a means of grace may not correspond more or less closely to the distinction made with respect to scripture between its auctoritas normativa and its auctoritas causativa; and whether the distinction between its validity and its efficacy, on the one hand, and its effectiveness, on the other, may not correspond more or less closely to the distinction between de jure and de facto authority.

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