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NOTE ON VALIDITY

1. The term 'valid' is applied to a sacrament whenever the particular conditions (the due minister, matter, form, and intention) are fulfilled. It is distinct from 'fruitful' or 'efficacious', since unfitness in the recipient may hinder the grace of God. Yet this unfitness does not invalidate the sacrament so that it has to be repeated.
2. Validity is further distinct from 'liceity' (or, as some say, 'regularity') E.g. canon law or church custom may treat certain actions or procedures as inappropriate and impermissible (e.g. the ordination of an epileptic), but such a breach in church law and custom would not affect validity, which is limited to the essential features of a sacrament.
3. Because of the antithesis between 'valid' and 'fruitful' (or 'efficacious'), and because 'valid' is a term concerned with the juridical conferring of powers, the language of validity may seem to some to be technical, impersonal, even apparently indifferent to the essential realities of spiritual and moral fruitfulness. This is a misunderstanding. Concern for validity arises for two reasons. It safeguards the truth that in the sacrament it is God who acts, so that it does not depend on particular personal qualities in the minister of the sacrament. Secondly, adherence to the accepted conditions of sacramental actions serves as a bond of mutual recognition among believers. We accept sacraments as valid when we have confidence in the conditions of their conferment.

H.C.