

ON THE CAUSALITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

PHILIP McSHANE, S.J.

Milltown Park, Dublin

ALTHOUGH THERE is general agreement among theologians that the sacraments are in some way causes of grace, there the agreement ends. There is, for example, a large school of opinion which advocates some form of what is called physical causality, of which Cajetan is representative:

That motion by which God uses our sensible action, constituting the sacrament in its being effective of sacramental grace . . . is a spiritual force, because it is that by which the spiritual effect occurs; it is the grace itself in an incomplete and transient existence, for it is a certain process or motion towards grace.¹

Against such a position one may cite L. Billot:

One may ask first of all what this force might be, whether spiritual or corporeal. If corporeal, how can it effect a spiritual thing? If spiritual, how can it be in a corporeal or material instrument? Whether complete or incomplete, it will remain in the genus of spiritual being, which of its very nature excludes dependence on the material.²

Billot avoids the difficulties of physical causality by proposing a theory of intentional causality according to which the sacraments are practical signs, productive of an effect in the juridical order, "a title of itself demanding grace."³ Yet a third type of solution is represented by the opinion of Franzelin:

The sacraments, in being conferred, are morally the actions of Christ the Redeemer and High Priest . . . Within the sacraments are a supernatural price and an objective dignity which, flowing from the merits of Christ, demand the sanctification of those who receive them; the sacraments are thus true moral causes of the giving of grace.⁴

More recently K. Rahner has insisted on the necessity of an explanation of the causality of the sacraments precisely in terms of their

¹ *In tertiam partem Sum. theol.*, q. 62, a. 4, n. 3. Unless otherwise stated, translations from other languages are mine.

² L. Billot, *De ecclesiae sacramentis* 1 (7th ed.; Rome, 1931) 132. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴ J. Franzelin, *De sacramentis in genere* (5th ed.; Rome, 1911) p. 106.

nature as signs,⁵ and the opinion of W. Van Roo is certainly representative of such an approach:

Is the sign a real efficient cause of the effect? . . . The answer is to be found in the analogy with the human sign in the juridical order. It is not the inner act of the will alone which produces the juridical effect: a contract is produced by the whole human action of the parties. Inner act and external manifestation of consent are one human act, one with the unity of order. The external sign is not a mere condition or occasion, but a real instrumental cause. Proportionately in God's operation, if He chooses to give grace visibly, He must use a sign.⁶

Of the opposite opinion is E. Doronzo: "The *ratio* of cause and the *ratio* of sign in a sacrament are formally diverse and in this sense concomitant and accidentally conjoined."⁷ Less critical of the approach represented by Van Roo is J.-H. Nicolas,⁸ who considers Van Roo's appeal to a unity of order with the divine imperium as insufficient⁹ and proposes that the imperium of the minister is immediately relevant to the solution:

According to this point of view, the unrestricted imperium of God, the Christ God, moves, uplifts, and makes efficacious the human imperium of Christ; this imperium, so moved and raised, in its turn moves and elevates the imperium of the minister and through him the sacramental rite in which it is realized and expressed, so that, by the sacramental action, the Christ Man and the minister together cause instrumentally the grace of the sacrament.¹⁰

The following note will, it is hoped, throw some light on this long-debated question. However, it is by no means a complete treatment of the problem: we restrict ourselves rather to the clarification of two basic points which are, it would seem, essential to any adequate solution. What these essential points are will gradually appear in the exposition and justification of the following thesis: the grace conferred by a sacrament is identically a real relation of dependence on the sacrament as sign, such a real relation being the necessary and sufficient

⁵ Cf. K. Rahner, *Kirche und Sacramente (Quaestiones disputatae 10; Freiburg, 1960)* p. 33.

⁶ W. Van Roo, "The Resurrection of Christ: Instrumental Cause of Grace," *Gregorianum* 39 (1958) 280. Cf. the same author's *De sacramentis in genere* (Rome, 1957) pp. 273-348.

⁷ E. Doronzo, *Tractatus dogmaticus de sacramentis in genere* (Milwaukee, 1946) p. 187.

⁸ Cf. "La causalité des sacrements," *Revue thomiste* 62 (1962) 517-70.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 545, n. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 563.

condition for the truth of the traditional affirmation, *sacramenta causant significando*. Having presented this thesis in positive fashion, we will further elucidate it by comparison and contrast with the views already cited.

Perhaps the most immediate difficulty raised by the statement of the thesis concerns the identification in it of grace with a real relation. This identification, which is equivalent to a denial of any real distinction between a real relation and its base, rests on a view of real relations which may not be familiar to the reader.¹¹ Briefly, according to that view a real relation is either internal or external. An internal relation is inseparable from its subject; an external relation may be present or absent.¹² The notion of internal relation is illustrated by considering the problem of defining anything: an accident, a nature, the soul, etc. In every case one finds that the definition is relational. Thus, the soul may be defined either in relation to the body or in relation to the operations of life; in both definitions a relational element is unavoidably present. Against this one might be tempted to argue that, for example, one may think of grace and one may think of its relations, and since the concepts are different in the two cases, the corresponding realities cannot be the same. But the premise of such an argument is false; for concepts are the expressions of acts of understanding, and every act of understanding is a synthesis of terms and relations which mutually determine, define one another. This is clearly illustrated by our understanding of the principles of being or of scientific laws. An enlightening example is provided by the definition of quantity as a relation of proportion.

Someone may say, however, that quantity is simply absolute. But quantity is an accident; it belongs to it, therefore, to be in another; and so, as accident, it is referred to another. Besides, quantity corresponds to the question, *quantum?* To this question one always replies by a comparison of one quantity with another.

¹¹ Cf. B. J. Lonergan, *Insight* (New York, 1957) pp. 490-97; *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum* (Rome, 1957) pp. 272-97, 110-16.

¹² We may remark here that the relations in question are transcendental: they are not something apart from the basic metaphysical elements of potency, form, and act (cf. *Insight*, pp. 496-97); they are not classifiable in the Aristotelian categories, which pertain not to an explanatory but to a descriptive viewpoint (cf. *ibid.*, p. 395; *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum*, pp. 288-93).

Therefore, known quantity is not given without a relation; so it would seem that the objicent is thinking of unknown quantity.¹³

All this may lead one to wonder whether every reality qualifies for the title of internal relation, and the wonder is met by the thesis that no finite reality, be it substance or accident, is simply absolute.¹⁴

While the terminology may be different, the notion of internal relation was not unfamiliar to St. Thomas:

If anyone by changing becomes equal to me without my changing, that equality was first radically in me in some way by which it has real existence; for from my having such a quantity follows that I may be equal to all those having the same quantity. When, therefore, someone newly acquires that quantity, that common root of equality is determined to him, and so nothing new is added to me by my beginning to be equal to another through his change.¹⁵

The internal relation in question is the relation of proportion inseparable from quantity. Furthermore, the citation serves to illustrate what we mean by external relation. The external relation in this case is the relation of equality, and it is constituted by nothing more than the existence of the terms. I may acquire a new relation of equality without a change in me. This latter point will take on more significance when we come to discuss causality. We have, at any rate, given some meaning to the identification of grace with an internal relation.

A further point worth noting is that relations are distinct only when they are mutually opposed.¹⁶ So, for example, the soul is related to the body, to the operations of sense, intellect, etc., yet this complex of relations is identical with the absolute reality of the soul. Similarly, sacramental grace is multiply related, to the divine Persons, to the humanity of Christ, to the members of the Church, to the sacrament and its ministers, etc., yet without absolute complexity. It is one and the same reality of grace which St. Thomas discusses in the *Secunda pars* as *forma animae* and in the *Tertia pars* as *beneficium salvatoris*.¹⁷ However, in going on to consider primarily the external relation provided by the sacrament and its conferring, we must pass over in

¹³ *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum*, p. 287.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 285-88, 110-16.

¹⁵ *In 5 Phys.*, lect. 3.

¹⁶ Cf. *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum*, pp. 295-96, 100-101.

¹⁷ This point has been made by H. Schillebeeckx, O.P., in the introduction to his *De sacramentele heilseconomie* (Antwerp, 1952).

silence the whole complex of real relations of the sacramental grace which belong to it in its concrete temporally-distributed reality. Obviously, too, since the thesis proposed is generic, neither the signification of particular sacraments nor their varying degrees of permanence will be discussed.

We spoke of the real relation of grace with which we are concerned as being one of dependence. More precisely, it is a relation of dependence on an *id a quo*, for it is efficient causality which is involved. The *id* which is the term of the dependence is the sacrament as sign. That dependence is, so to speak, complex, for the grace is conditioned in its occurrence by the occurrence of the sign, and its nature is determined by the signification. We will have more to say about the nature of the sign later; let us pass immediately to an outline of the justification of the assertion that there is such a real relation.

That justification rests on the Thomist thesis that the knowledge of God is the cause of things,¹⁸ that the divine imperium is essentially an act of practical intellect.¹⁹ The present supernatural order is the term of that imperium; it is the realization of a divine idea,²⁰ involving divine personality in a created order.²¹ As God understands and wills the existence and occurrence of things in that order, so things exist and occur.²² Hence, if God understands and wills sacramental grace to come to be in the recipient of a sacrament in dependence on a sign, then that sacramental grace does in fact come to be in dependence on a sign. Whether the antecedent is true can be known only from revelation, through which the supernatural divine economy is made known to us. Hence, for its truth we rely on the mind and tradition of the Church, and it would seem that the requirements of the antecedent fall within the minimum of agreement of theologians and faithful. Thus we are led to affirm the consequent.

However, we are here asserting the consequent in a determinate sense, and so it is clear that its justification should carry us beyond general agreement. It does so insofar as the full significance of the conditional premise is appreciated. As we saw, that premise asserts that

¹⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 8.

¹⁹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 17, a. 1.

²⁰ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 15; q. 116, a. 1.

²¹ Cf. *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum*, p. 214.

²² Cf. *Insight*, pp. 661-64.

things are, and are related, precisely as the intelligent First Cause would have them to be. Among the relations of things are relations of efficient dependence. Such are the relations of natural effects to natural causes: both the existence and the nature of the kitten are really dependent on the parent cats. In such causality the First Cause does not act *immediatione suppositi* in producing the kitten; it acts through the nature of the existing cats. For this mediate divine causality there is a finite analogue in any proper causal series: as the typewriter is used by the man according to its nature, so all things are instruments of God. But there is a further type of mediate divine causality for which there is no such clear analogue; for precisely because God is the cause of the nature of things, He is not restricted to the medium of *natura*. He can operate through the medium of words and signs, and in such a case the nature of what is produced is really dependent, not on the nature, the *natura physica*, of the sign or words, but on their occurrence and their signification.

Now many readers may well agree that God can thus make both the nature and the existence of grace depend on a sign, yet they may equally well remain dubious as to what advance this is beyond the common agreement of theologians. After all, they may say, we have not dealt adequately with the causality of the sign: the sign plays no real role, does nothing, has no proper effect. Such objections will, it is hoped, find an answer in the second half of the original thesis, which states that the real relation of dependence is the necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of the traditional thesis, *sacramenta causant significando*. This statement is equivalent to the more general assertion that the metaphysical condition for the truth of the proposition that A causes B is the reality of a relation of dependence *ut a quo* in B with respect to A.²³ On another view, however, the required condition necessarily includes a causally efficient influence proceeding from A to B. Indeed, this latter view would seem to be a premise of many of the discussions of sacramental causality, and it is a basic source of difficulty for, and objection to, any theory of what is called physical causality.²⁴ Like the theory of physical causality, the view on efficiency

²³ Cf. Lonergan, in a review of *De Deo in operatione naturae vel voluntatis operante* by E. Iglesias, THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 7 (1946) 603; cf. also *Insight*, pp. 539, 663.

²⁴ Cf., for example, J.-H. Nicolas, *art. cit.* (supra n. 8) pp. 547-52.

mentioned can find support in certain expressions of St. Thomas, but it would seem that, despite variations in terminology, St. Thomas' thought on this subject was in agreement with that of Aristotle:²⁵

The actuality of that which has the power of causing motion is not other than the actuality of the movable, for it must be the fulfilment of both. A thing is capable of causing motion because it *can* do this; it is a mover because it actually *does* it. But it is on the movable that it is capable of acting. Hence, there is a single actuality of both alike.²⁶

For St. Thomas, as for Aristotle, the objective difference between *posse agere* and *actu agere* did not involve any change in the cause as such. Change from rest to activity is change only in a metaphorical sense, nor is there composition of the agent and the action.²⁷

The reader may be helped by recalling the somewhat similar situation which we encountered earlier regarding the relation of equality. There it was pointed out that, without any change in me, I may become equal to another. The reader, however, may call attention to the fact that the two cases differ, that they differ, moreover, precisely where it matters, namely, that the relation of cause to effect is established through the *agere* of the cause. He will concede that we have sufficiently discussed how the *agere* is in the effect, but he will deny that we have dealt with the central question, what is the *agere*? More particularly, he may return with the plain blunt question, what does the sign "do"? To this we would answer that the obvious impossibility of the sign "doing" anything would, in fact, seem to favor the present view of efficient causality. It seems indeed to stand out as a clear case of the rule rather than as a troublesome exception. For on the present view, the efficient cause in general does not "do" anything in any popular sense of the word "do." Moreover, this is only an effort to put in popular form the point made earlier, that the transition from *posse agere* to *actu agere* does not involve a change in the cause as such. And it is precisely this which is the real bone of contention. "To later

²⁵ Cf. Lonergan, "St. Thomas' Theory of Operation," THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 3 (1942) 374-402; on *virtus instrumentalis*, pp. 392-95.

²⁶ *Physics* 3, 3, 202a, 13-18 (Ross translation). Cf. also St. Thomas' commentary *in loc.*

²⁷ *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 8 c: "Quod autem attribuitur alicui ut ab eo in aliud procedens non facit compositionem cum eo, sicut nec actio cum agente. . . . De actione patet quod non est motus secundum actionem nisi metaphorice et improprie, sicut exiens de otio in actum mutari dicimus; quod non esset si relatio vel actio significaret aliquid in subjecto manens."

scholastics this seemed impossible a priori: they held that 'Peter not acting' must be really different from 'Peter acting.' They refused to believe that St. Thomas could disagree with them on this; in fact, St. Thomas disagreed."²⁸

Briefly, against the view that requires a causal influence from agent to patient there is the fact that action is predicated of the agent as agent only by extrinsic denomination: the agent as agent is not changed. Again, if the need for a causal influence is put forward as a metaphysical thesis, then it should admit of no exception; yet clearly *motor immobilis* is such an exception. Consider now the patient. If a causal influence, a *virtus transiens in effectum*, is required, then it is either distinct from the effect or it is not. If it is distinct from what is produced, then there seems no good reason for denying the necessity of another causal influence to produce the first. Indeed, one can avoid an infinite series only by asserting that the influence is a different type of reality from the effect. The influence of its nature must require no real further like influence. The problem is uniquely solved by acknowledging that the first influence is, in fact, nothing but a real relation of the effect, since *relatio relationis est ens rationis*, and thus we are led back to the position proposed here. On the other hand, if the causal influence is not distinct from what is produced, then it is merely the effect under another name, and so we are led once more to the proposed position.²⁹

Earlier we mentioned two key points upon which an adequate solution to the present problem rests. What these are should now be clear. The first point concerns divine causative knowledge, and unless one exploits the finite analogue, its significance could be missed. One may think, for example, of the artist or artisan and his plan: "divine knowledge is related to all created things as the knowledge of the artisan is to what he makes, in that the artisan works through his intellect";³⁰ of the extent of the plan: "the builder cannot conceive the structure of the house without having within himself a proper notion of each of its parts";³¹ of the manner in which the intellectual agent can control even chance occurrences: "otherwise the intellect could not

²⁸ Lonergan, *art. cit.* (supra n. 25) p. 380, n. 25.

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion, cf. the review referred to supra n. 23.

³⁰ *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 8 c.

³¹ *Ibid.*, q. 15, a. 2 c.

form this proposition: digging the grave, he found the treasure. And just as the intellect can grasp this, so it can effect it; so, if someone knows where the treasure is hidden, he can persuade some rustic, who does not know, to dig a grave there";²² and so on. Only against such a background can one appreciate the relevant thesis which we may recall here, under a somewhat different aspect, by the following citation: "Divine Providence produces effects through mediate causes. We can, therefore, consider the ordering of the effects in two ways. Firstly, as being in God Himself, and then the ordering of the effects is called Providence. But if we consider this ordering as being in the mediate causes, ordered by God to the production of certain effects, then it has the name of fate."²³ Finally—and this is the key element, where also the finite analogue loses its force—since the reach of the divine plan extends to the natures of things and the media of their causing, the relations intrinsic to the nature of sacramental grace can include the relation of dependence we discussed. In the created order, fate, so to speak, mirrors exactly the complex of real relations envisaged by the divine mind.

The second point concerns the nature of efficient causality, and we recall it here with the familiar Scholastic tag, *actio est in passo*.

And evidently movement is in the movable; for it is the complete realization of this by that which is capable of causing movement. And the actuality of that which is capable of causing movement is no other than that of the movable. For it must be the complete reality of both. For while a thing is capable of causing movement because it *can* do this, it is a mover because it is active; but it is on the movable that it is capable of acting, so that the actuality of both is one.²⁴

It is not absurd that the actualization of one thing should be in another. Teaching is the activity of a person who can teach, yet the operation is performed on some patient—it is not cut adrift from a subject, but it is of A on B.²⁵

The relevance of this point to the causality of the sacraments should by now be clear: by means of it the puzzling *virtus instrumentalis* is properly located—in the effect. Taking the two points together, one comes to an appreciation of the statement that the material thing *can*

²² *Ibid.*, q. 116, a. 1 c.

²³ *Ibid.*, q. 116, a. 2 c.

²⁴ *Metaphysics* K, 10, 1066a, 27–32 (Ross translation).

²⁵ *Physics* 3, 3, 202b, 6–9 (Ross translation).

be an effective sign, and that it *is* an effective sign of the grace without, as such, any intrinsic change.

We have already noted the manner in which much of the discussion of sacramental causality has bogged down in the problem of the *virtus instrumentalis*. On the other hand, the thesis *scientia Dei est causa rerum* has found little place in such discussion. If we turn now to consider in order the various views cited initially, we do so with these two main points in mind. We aim rather at throwing light on the present position than at detailed criticism.

There are, first of all, the theories involving physical causality, of which the view of Cajetan is representative. These theories usually include a virtual or intentional or incomplete motion of the instrument. Of that we have said sufficient. Besides this weakness, there is the fact that physical causality requires the presence in the agent of a physical form, *natura*. Sacramental grace, however, is not physically dependent on the physical form of the matter and form of the sacrament. Furthermore, no adequate physical form can be present in the sacrament unless one is willing to postulate in a material thing an obediencial potency for a participation in the divine nature,⁸⁶ a notion which Billot so heartily rejects. Finally, inadvertence to the thesis on divine causative knowledge leads to the neglect of the possibility of a higher type of mediate divine causality, not *per naturam* but *per signum*.

What of Billot's own proposal? As is often pointed out, his restriction of the causality of the sign to the juridical order is a definite weakness. Still, the logic of his position would seem to lead to this; for, so long as one does not avail oneself of such a thesis on divine knowledge as we have discussed, one has not sufficient grounds for advancing beyond the natural analogue. Thus, for example, in human contracts the sign undoubtedly plays an instrumental role, yet the effect does not depend in its nature and existence on the sign. The sign may move us to act with respect to the signified in a determinate way, but it does not effect the signified in its being. One might fruitfully, in this context, compare the words of Christ, "Lazarus, come forth," with the words, for example, of the centurion who says " 'Come,' and he cometh."

We took the view of Franzelin as representative of a third type of solution. Of the numerous objections raised against his view, we take

⁸⁶ Cf. Cajetan, *In tertiam partem Sum. theol.*, q. 13, a. 2, n. 6.

one as of more immediate interest. It is the objection that in it the sacraments in some way move God to give grace. The objection is met by the proponents of the theory with varying success. Obviously relevant to the discussion is the following thesis of Aquinas:

The will of God in no way has a cause. . . . Just as God in one act knows everything in His essence, so in one act He wills all in His goodness. Hence, just as in God knowing the cause is not the cause of His knowing the effect, so willing the end is not for Him the cause of willing those things which are required for the end; but rather, He wills those things which are required for the end, to be ordered towards the end. He wills, therefore, this thing to be because of this other; but it is not because of this other that He wills it.⁸⁷

Only against such a background can the question of the merits of Christ, and their relation to the sacraments, be satisfactorily discussed. Ultimately one must face the problem of sacramental causality on the level of secondary causes. To its solution the distinction between Providence and fate, already alluded to, is relevant; one cannot afford to mix indiscriminately the two points of view on which the distinction is based.

A further comment on this position concerns such statements as "the sacraments are morally the actions of Christ" and "the sacraments contain the blood of Christ." These statements seem to obscure the issue, raising as they do the related question of how the actions of Christ are now causes. Into this question, whose solution again leans heavily on an understanding of divine causative knowledge,⁸⁸ we do not wish to enter here. It is rather with a tendency towards what might be called a comprehensive obscurity that we are concerned. Such a tendency is, of course, more manifest in the writings of the mystery-presence theologians. Now on the negative side one may say that assertions of the immanence of Christ's mysteries and of the realization of various facets of them in us through the sacraments are not so much

⁸⁷ *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 5 c.

⁸⁸ "Effectus sequitur ex causis instrumentalibus secundum conditionem causae principalis; et ideo, cum Deus sit principalis causa nostrae resurrectionis, resurrectio vero Christi sit instrumentalis, resurrectio nostra sequitur resurrectionem Christi secundum dispositionem divinam, quae ordinavit ut tali tempore fieret" (*In Ep. 1 ad Cor.*, cap. 15, lect. 2). Cf. also *C. gent.* 2, 35, 3; *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 56, a. 1, ad 1m. A further element of solution would be provided by a consideration of *praesentia per fidem*; cf. *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 48, a. 6, ad 2m.

elements of solution as statements of the problem. They serve to raise more acutely the question, how? The crucial underlying question is the question of method: whether or not theology is a science, a knowledge through causes. Undoubtedly, for example, the expression of faith in contemporary thought patterns is of pastoral significance; but the pursuit of theology in these categories, or even indeed within the descriptive categories of Aristotle,³⁹ would seem to profit neither scholar nor apostle.

Just as the equations of thermodynamics make no one feel warmer or cooler and, much less, evoke the sentiments associated with the drowsy heat of the summer sun or the refreshing coolness of evening breezes, so also speculative theology is not immediately relevant to the stimulation of religious feeling. But unless this fact is acknowledged explicitly and systematically, there arises a constant pressure in favor of theological tendencies that mistakenly reinforce the light of faith and intelligence with the warmth of less austere modes of thought.⁴⁰

On the positive side, however, it must be remarked that the tendency in question manifests an awareness of a basic need for a fuller understanding, supplementing the systematic and abstract, an understanding of grace and the economy of redemption in the complexity of its concrete historical realization in each individual and in all, in Head and members.⁴¹

With Rahner's insistence on an explanation in terms of the sacraments as signs we cannot but agree. His own line of solution, however, leans somewhat towards the mystery-presence view already mentioned, and so falls short of his own requirements.

Fr. Van Roo advances beyond the position of Billot in asserting that the power of the instrument is determined by the principal agent, and therefore that God can produce by means of a sign effects beyond the juridical order. This clearly is akin to our own position. However, instead of appealing to the reach of divine causative knowledge, he leans rather on the transcendence of the divine will. Moreover, on the

³⁹ Cf. *supra* n. 12 and the references given there.

⁴⁰ Lonergan, "Theology and Understanding," *Gregorianum* 35 (1954) 643.

⁴¹ Cf. *Conceptio analogica divinarum personarum*, p. 19.

question of *virtus instrumentalis*, although he avails himself of Fr. Lonergan's analysis,⁴² there is still some hesitation.⁴³

The citation from Doronzo represents an objection to the present position with which we have perhaps already sufficiently dealt. Clearly, if one takes *influere esse* as something more than a *modus significandi*, then it is difficult to see how a sign can be a cause. There is a related objection, however, which deserves a comment. It would claim that the sign in the view proposed is merely a condition. Now certainly we may concede that the sign is a condition: our thesis, indeed, consists in asserting that the grace is conditioned both in its occurrence and in its nature by the sign and its signification. But there remains the adverb "merely." What does it mean? Does it imply that conditions do not come to the level of causes? It would seem nearer the truth, however, to say that various types and complexes of causes fall under the general heading of conditions.

Finally we come to the view of J.-H. Nicolas. While this author does not advert to the significance of either of the two main theses of our position, his contribution is nevertheless valuable. In the present treatment we have deliberately avoided the full complexity of the question in order to concentrate attention on what seems the central difficulty. In particular, the role of the instrumental *agens per intellectum*, the minister, which Père Nicolas stresses, was passed over in silence. Clearly, however, a sign is a medium between persons. There is no actual sign without its intelligent source. To speak of its signification is to connote an intellect, and that signification must be known by the persons concerned. In a sacrament the sign leads beyond itself, not logically or naturally, but through the reasonable acceptance of revealed doctrine, through faith. God causes sacramental grace in man, not inhumanly, but only with reasonable co-operation and consent. Thus, the receipt of the grace is multiply conditioned: by the intention of the minister, by the adequate making of the sign and acknowledgment of the signification, by the dispositions of the recipient, etc. Out of the possibility of this last-mentioned condition being fulfilled temporally posterior to the rite arises the problem of reviviscence. This

⁴² Cf. Van Roo, *De sacramentis in genere*, pp. 314, 317, 320.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 320-24.

posteriority, however, does not eliminate the complex of real relations identical with the grace: the grace ultimately received is the grace ordained by God to occur within, and be specified by, the sacramental system instituted by Christ; it is the grace intended by the minister and effectively signified by the sign. No doubt, further discussion of this and other related problems would seem desirable. Still, such further discussion here might well distract from our main concern. So we end, content if we have succeeded in drawing attention to, and clarifying, basic elements of the solution of the long-debated question, *utrum sacramenta causant significando*.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness, in the present work, to John Hyde, S.J., Professor of Dogmatic Theology, Milltown Park, Dublin.