

## QUESTION 3

### The Exterior Act of Faith

Next we have to consider the exterior act of faith, i.e., confessing or professing (*confessio*). And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is confessing an act of faith? (2) Is confessing necessary for salvation?

#### Article 1

##### Is confessing an act of faith?

It seems that confessing or professing (*confessio*) is not an act of faith:

**Objection 1:** It is not the case that the same act belongs to diverse virtues. But confessing belongs to repentance (*confessio pertinet ad poenitentiam*), which it is posited as a part of. Therefore, confessing is not an act of faith.

**Objection 2:** A man is sometimes kept from confessing the Faith by fear or even because of some sort of confusion; hence, in Ephesians 6:19 the Apostle asks for prayers for himself in order that it might be granted to him “to make known with confidence the mystery of the Gospel.” But it belongs to fortitude, which moderates fear and daring, not to withdraw from a good because of confusion or fear. Therefore, it seems that confessing is more an act of fortitude or constancy than an act of faith.

**Objection 3:** Just as one is induced by the fervor of his faith to confess the Faith outwardly, so he is induced to do other good works as well; for Galatians 5:16 says, “Faith operates through love” (*per dilectionem*). But these other exterior good works are not posited as acts of faith. Therefore, neither is confessing.

**But contrary to this:** A Gloss on 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (“... and the work of faith in power”) says, “That is, confessing, which is properly a work of faith.”

**I respond:** Exterior acts are properly the acts of the virtue to whose ends they are related by their species; for instance, fasting is related by its species to abstinence, which is the taming of the flesh, and so fasting is an act of abstinence.

Now confessing what belongs to the Faith is by its species ordered, as to an end, toward what belongs to the Faith—this according to 2 Corinthians 4:13 (“Having the same spirit of faith, we have faith and, because of this, we speak”). For exterior speaking (*exterior locutio*) is ordered toward signifying what is conceived in the heart (*ad significandum id quod in corde concipitur*). Hence, just as the interior conceiving of what belongs to the Faith is properly an act of faith, so, too, the exterior confessing is likewise an act of faith.

**Reply to objection 1:** There are three sorts of confessing that are praised in the Scriptures:

The first is the confessing of *what belongs to the Faith*. And this is a proper act of faith, since, as has been explained, it is related to the end of faith.

The second is the confessing of *thanksgiving or praise*. And this is an act of worship (*actus latriae*), since it is ordered toward outwardly showing honor to God, which is the end of worship.

The third is the confessing of *sins*, and this is ordered toward the remission of sin (*ad deletionem peccati*), which is the end of repentance (*finis poenitentiae*). Hence, it belongs to repentance.

**Reply to objection 2:** As is clear from the Philosopher in *Physics* 8, removing an obstacle is a *per accidens* cause and not a *per se* cause. Hence, fortitude, which removes an impediment to confessing, viz., fear or embarrassment, is a cause of confessing not properly and *per se*, but, as it were, *per accidens*.

**Reply to objection 3:** By the mediation of elective love (*mediante dilectione*), interior faith causes all the exterior acts of the [other] virtues by the mediation of those other virtues, and it does this by commanding the acts and not by eliciting them. By contrast, it produces confessing as its own proper act, without the mediation of any other virtue.

## Article 2

### Is confessing the Faith necessary for salvation?

It seems that confessing the Faith (*confessio fidei*) is not necessary for salvation:

**Objection 1:** It seems to be sufficient for salvation that a man attain the end of virtue. But the proper end of faith is the joining of the human mind to divine truth, and this can happen even without exterior confessing. Therefore, confessing the Faith is not necessary for salvation.

**Objection 2:** By an exterior confession a man makes his faith known to another man. But this is necessary only for those who have to instruct others in the Faith. Therefore, it seems that ordinary people (*minores*) are not obliged to confess their faith.

**Objection 3:** What can tend to scandalize and trouble others is not necessary for salvation; for in 1 Corinthians 10:32 the Apostle says, “Be without offense to the Jews and to the gentiles and to the Church of God.” But non-believers are sometimes disquieted (*ad perturbationem provocantur*) by a confession of the Faith. Therefore, confessing the Faith is not necessary for salvation.

**But contrary to this:** In Romans 10:10 the Apostle says, “With the heart one believes unto justification, whereas with the mouth one confesses unto salvation.”

**I respond:** What is necessary for salvation falls under the precepts of divine law. But since confessing the Faith is something affirmative, it can fall only under an affirmative precept. Hence, confessing the Faith belongs to what is necessary for salvation in the sense in which what is necessary for salvation can fall under an affirmative precept.

Now as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 100, a. 10, *ad 2*), affirmative precepts do not oblige for all times, even if they always oblige; instead, they oblige for *this* time and *this* place and in accord with the other appropriate circumstances according to which a human act has to be regulated (*limitari*) in order for it to be an act of virtue. So, then, to confess the Faith is not always or in every place necessary for salvation; instead, it is necessary for *some* time and place, viz., when the honor due to God, or even the advantage owed to one’s neighbors, would be undercut by the omission of such a confession—as, for instance, if someone, when questioned about the Faith, were to remain silent and if, because of this, others came to believe that he did not hold the Faith or that the Faith was not true, or if, because of his silence, others were turned away from the Faith. For in cases like this, confessing the Faith is necessary for salvation.

**Reply to objection 1:** The end of faith, as of the other virtues, has to be related to the end of charity, which is the love of God and neighbor. And so when God’s honor or our neighbor’s advantage demands this, a man must not be content with being joined to divine truth through his faith, but must confess the Faith outwardly.

**Reply to objection 2:** In a case of necessity, where the Faith is under attack (*periclitatur*), everyone is obliged to make his faith known to others, either in order to instruct or confirm other believers or in order to turn back the attacks of non-believers.

However, at other times it does not pertain to all believers to instruct men concerning the Faith.

**Reply to objection 3:** If the disquiet of the non-believers arose from an open confession of the Faith without any advantage to the Faith or to believers, then it would not be praiseworthy in such a case to confess the Faith publicly; hence, in Matthew 7:6 our Lord says, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine ... lest turning upon you, they tear you to pieces.”

On the other hand, if some advantage to the Faith is hoped for or at hand, then, scorning the disquiet of non-believers, a man should publicly confess the Faith. Hence, Matthew 15:12 says, that when the disciples had told our Lord that the Pharisees, having heard His words, were scandalized, our Lord replied, “Leave them [i.e., the disquieted] alone; they are blind and leaders of the blind.”