

EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO TALK ABOUT GOD WITH THEOLOGICAL AND EDUCATION COMPETENCE

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In the modern world, competence is essential for undertaking any task, trade or profession. Everyone seeking a job is asked to provide a curriculum, qualifications...; papers showing their capacity to perform this job. Teachers at all levels are highly aware of this. Any subject, any academic job requires its own specialisation. Still more so in the field of teaching, more than in any other, as it is not enough to hold the right qualifications. We are asked or required to do advanced courses and update our skills and knowledge in order to be able to continue delivering our subject, under the threat that others with similar qualifications but with more specialised training or more dynamic, will take our posts away.

If advanced knowledge and keeping up-to-date are necessary for performing any teaching activity, they are more so in the pastoral area and in religious education classes. And not only because pastoral tasks and religious education are features of our Centres' identity, not only because these topics being broached are what we supposedly consider more important and decisive for our own lives and those of others. The fundamental reason is the need for good education and training is the law of incarnation. God put Himself at the mercy of a human event; He assumed the risk of what being human involves. The law of incarnation, applied to our pastoral work, sounds like this: The better prepared we are, the better God will act; and when we are not prepared, we hinder and even impede God's action. God never acts directly, He acts through us, through second causes, according to theologians. If God acts through what is human, the higher the quality of the human involved, the better prepared we are, the better God's work will shine through. The quality of the instrument, in this case our preparation, conditions transmission and receipt. I sometimes hear some catechists say, more willing than prepared: "The Holy Spirit will help me and inspire me in what I have to say." They forget that the Spirit acts through study, through our effort. And therefore, when we are not sufficiently trained, when we are not up-to-date, when we have not studied a topic thoroughly, the Spirit "inspires" nonsense, ridiculousness or low quality interventions (in so saying, we must apologise to the Spirit for attributing to It, what should only be attributed to our neglect or to our idleness).

1. Theology does not appear to be necessary

We are talking about theological education and training. Theology is the culture of the faith, a discourse that seeks to understand and to narrate the Revelation in a way adapted to our times, taking the available cultural media into account, seeking to answer the questions regarding meaning that believers ask themselves with respect to their faith; also seeking to provide an answer to the difficulties that challenge the faith, some arising from the environment we have to live in, and others arising from the experiences believers go through in their lives. Theology hence allows people to live a personally assumed faith in an adult, responsible and modern way. Being a Christian and being modern are not only not incompatible, but this dual quality is what the faith requires, what has to be lived at each time in history. Underlining that theological reflection not only makes use of the available cultural media, but it is also a critical facet of that very culture, which it seeks to purify and reverse.

Nevertheless, it could be said that there are a series of reasons which render this study of theology unnecessary or at least that do not foster it, proposed by those responsible for pastoral work and even by religious education teachers. Analysing and saying a word or two about these reasons may encourage the study of theology.

1.- Firstly, it has to be recognised that those doing pastoral work in schools, those who are in the front line accompanying our pupils in following the Good Shepherd, or in finding Jesus Christ as the path and truth in their lives, do not have an easy task. And it is not easy for them, because, in the first place, what Christianity announces may sound like nonsense to intelligent people. We announce that the salvation of the world took place on a cross and this cross is the revelation of God's glory. One must acknowledge that it is difficult to accept crosses, and it is no less so to accept that a cross can be glorious.

But when I say that they do not have it easy, I am thinking more of the fact that they sometimes feel that their work is not sufficiently respected and supported by the rest of the school community. Pastoral work would seem to be their affair and only their affair. And as it is their problem, the school institution is not aware of how decisively important pastoral work is. It is not an issue, as I see it, of all the activities having to rotate around pastoral work, but rather, when it comes to co-ordinating and programming, the issue is that pastoral work should occupy the place at the forefront we are convinced it deserves. It is also a question of arranging timetables so that those responsible for pastoral work can undertake serious

education and training in theology, fostering and facilitating, for example, their attending institutional courses offered by higher level entities.

2.- Secondly, it could be said that sometimes it is unnecessary to study theology to do pastoral work . The catechist's goodness, piety and good will are thought to be what are required. Or alternatively, theology is considered to be a complicated and critical beating about the bush which to cap it all, even appears to question the faith. Hence theologians are accused of diverging from real life or, what is worse, of attempting to destroy the faith. But this does not happen only with theology. Elementary minds usually consider any kind of reflection to be useless. But if the illustrated mind, which the faith should want and must illuminate, does not critically incorporate the childish apprehensions of religious truth, it will eventually abandon religion, considering it surpassed. Hence the need for critical reflection, aside from liturgy, prayer and predication.

These religious education teachers or these pastoral workers who do not value theology usually think it is enough to have good materials that are easy to understand and to follow and to go to a talk more or less pious or to the occasional lecture. But one thing is valid and sufficient materials for pupils and quite another the teachers knowledge, which should go beyond the materials prepared for their pupils. What works in any other subject i.e. differentiating between material for pupils and the need for the teacher to have greater knowledge, is also applicable to pastoral work. Hence the need to study theology.

Surprisingly, it so happens that educated people who try to keep up to date in the various spheres of modern life, do not award sufficient importance to the need for living a mature, illustrated and thought out faith. A faith capable of today showing its credulity and of responding to the challenges people and contemporary society face. It seems a serious contradiction that a believer considers it necessary to be up to date in the aspects affecting his life and yet, at the same time lives his or her faith like a child.

3.- Not always, but on some occasions a third difficulty to studying theology comes from the ruling circles. In some of these spheres a fear of education and training seems to exist because untrained collaborators are supposed to be more orthodox, submissive and obedient. This means that when the study of theology comes up, second-rate courses are recommended offering comments on the Catechism or institutes with teachers whose orthodoxy is supposedly proven and usually offering highly antiquated theology lacking all critical spirit. Theology must be studied in Faculties of Theology and, if this is not possible, in

Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, affiliated to Theology faculties. I am specifying Higher Institutes affiliated to a faculty, which should not be confused with Diocesan Institutes, which usually offer doctrinal syntheses addressed towards a pious public. And if this is also not possible, then one should endeavour to read good theology books.

A lack of training or deficient training does not actually guarantee orthodoxy. It is rather a danger of fundamentalist heterodoxy or leads swiftly to atheism. And one does not know which is worse. The Vatican II clearly said that not only incoherence in the lives of believers but, “neglect of religious education or the doctrine inadequately expressed,” was the direct cause of atheism, because all of this, “tended to shroud rather than reveal the truth of God and of religion,” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 19). Something which is easily understood, because when we give a bad doctrine, we do not convince anybody; and when we give childish reasons, one abandons religion when one begins to grow up. And when we give ridiculous reasons and we make people believe that this is what our faith is based on, and ridiculous reasons means basing our faith on angels, religious prints, devotions, supposed miracles, prayers to St. Judas Tadeo, candles, holy water and similar things, it cannot be sustained when our pupils begin to think and they end up believing that religion is a matter for the ignorant or the naïve. Therefore, the remedy for all these trends towards atheism, and I cite the Vatican II once again, lies in, “an appropriately presenting the doctrine,” and in achieving, “a living and adult faith, educated to be able to lucidly perceive the difficulties and to be able to overcome them,” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 21). Good reasons have to be put forward to believe. And these reasons must aim at the bull’s eye, at the key to faith, at knowing: Jesus Christ died for our sins and resuscitated for our justification.

Without education and training we cannot offer an adult faith. More serious still, we will foster at best an abandonment of the faith, and at worst, atheism.

2.- Theology is so necessary that we are always practising it

Theology is such a necessary task that, whether we know it or not, whether we have studied it or not, whenever we want to tell or think of the faith, we are practising theology. Because faith requires theology. Hence, if we are going to practise, better we do so properly. And this requires study.

Many believers have the same experience as Molière’s character, Monsieur Jourdain, the bourgeois gentleman, who pleasantly surprised himself by speaking in prose without

knowing it. What happens is there are two ways of practising theology; spontaneously and scientifically.

Theology is the same as many aspects of life. Most people solve the problems arising in their lives as best they can. However, there are problems that can only be resolved, or are much better resolved, if one has certain training or applies a particular technique. In the life of the faith, something similar happens.

The faith, by being what it is, is food for thought, as it above all things belongs to the Mystery. This reflection may be spontaneous. Hence, all believers are theologians. All believers, likewise our children and adolescents, have questions or problems and one way or another seek answers and solutions to them. If listening to the Church's predication and, above all, reading or listening to the Scriptures does not give rise to questions, the person is likely not to have understood anything. And if they do come up, he or she is practising theology.

Likewise, there are events in our lives that lead us not only to pray, but to wonder what this event has to do with our faith in God, or how this conjugates this with divine goodness. This question is practising theology. The believer who is clear about this has, in fact, stopped believing. In some way or other, every believer is a theologian, even though many are not aware that they are.

This first spontaneous way of practising theology, although sufficient on some occasions, is not at all the ideal manner. The ideal way in the life of the faith is maturity. True, the gospel praises those who are like children, because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. This praise has nothing to do with living the faith like a child, but with the freedom with which one should embrace the Kingdom of God. Moreover, one thing is being like a child and quite another being childish as an adult. If I had to take a provocative stance, I would once again cite François Mauriac. "Those who say God prefers imbeciles are the real imbeciles." In err of being more accurate, we would do well to remember that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews complained that its receivers were still like children although they should have been adults in the faith: hence they needed to be instructed in the elementary rudiments of religion and needed milk instead of solid food, more appropriate for adults (HB 5, 12-14; cf. 1 Co 3,1-2).

Thus, the need for this reflection, aroused by the faith, to be undertaken using a methodology matching the cultural level of the believers or those who must be led to the faith. Today we live in a secularised society in which it is very difficult to feel the appreciation of transcendental values. Pastoral work has to face a hostile environment. The environmental

culture does not value religion; it considers it something immature and infantile, incompatible with science. This requires good education and training to respond to the difficulties coming from the surrounding environment. And for this, spontaneous reflection is not enough; it requires critical reflection, its requires theology. And that requires study.

Today's society, in addition to being secularised, is critical. Hence our religious explanations or our reading of the Scriptures should take this situation into account. By way of an example: It is possible to read the Scriptures in a naïve and childish way. But when we pay a little attention when reading the Bible, we realise that this naïve reading is at loggerheads with the reading palaeontology or science gives of the origins of mankind; we realise that a series of characters and situations come up in the text, which if taken literally make the text ridiculous (snakes that talk, angels that eat, going up to the heavens without an aeroplane), we can even appreciate quite a few contractions in the text itself. This text, in which believers recognise the Word of God, needs a well read reader and deep theological reflection to overcome the problems it throws up. If God, in the Bible, talks for the present I am living, I need to attain a good understanding of the text to learn what God is trying to tell me. Theology helps us in this task.

The same is true of the Church's teachings. Many of its doctrines are expressed in a language, a culture and a mentality that no longer belong to us. Today, moreover, culture uses some of these teachings to make them say other things than were originally intended (today, for example, the topic of Satan is in vogue). To understand the Master's doctrine properly, to know to what level it is compulsory, to translate and adapt it to the different situations people find themselves in today, it is necessary to know theology.

3.- Attitude is not enough

There is something that always accompanies and precedes education and training, and that is attitude. The catechist and the religious education teacher are the first to be convinced of the truth and goodness of Christianity. This attitude differentiates them from other teachers and animators in the Centre. It is possible to explain a philosophical theory perfectly without being convinced of the truth or goodness of that theory. It is possible to direct a ballet class or teach IT thinking that these activities do not offer anything to those learning them. Said attitudes are impossible for those involved in pastoral work. If they do not feel involved in what they are teaching, they cannot transmit the life underpinning their teachings. The pastoral worker and the religious education teacher, are above all, witnesses.

However, while attitude is necessary, it is not sufficient. Competence and knowledge are also required. Because faith is not merely a question of good will, or being a good person. It is an exercise of intelligence. It seeks to get to know and understand better the Mystery of God Who is totally kind and always surprising. And the Mystery arouses questions, one's intelligence is stimulated. We never completely penetrate the Mystery of this God that Jesus has introduced us to. But as it is an attractive, seductive Mystery, which lets itself be loved, believers are always wanting to further get to know the object of their attraction.

However, the culture and environment around us today give rise to a series of difficulties that do not foster belief, but rather question the seriousness of believing, and they criticise arguing many of the faith's postulates and contents. This means we have to answer the questions our pupils ask us and clear up many misunderstanding arising from an environment that is hostile, or at least unfavourable, towards religion. Today the pastoral agent and the religious education teacher come up against a series of obstacles that do not facilitate their task. Many of these obstacles are of an intellectual kind, such as novels, reports, films, which are showered on our pupils from the communications media. The topic of religion is of greater interest than would seem at first sight. And it arouses a lot of morbid fascination and great passion. A balanced discourse is required, which is able to discern what is fair in the criticisms and at the same time offer serious reasons for not accepting what is unfair or inaccurate .

Even the obstacles deriving from bad examples or attitudes against religion which reign in this society are underpinned by ideological reasons. Hence the need for good education and training, because in the end the world is governed by ideas as our pupils lives are governed by ideas. The gospel invites us all to convert, to refocus our lives in the direction of the God of Jesus. This conversion involves changing our lives, but it also involves a change of mindset, something we sometimes forget. "Renew the spirit of your mind," St. Paul said to the Ephesians (4,23). It is in our mind, the seat of our thoughts, is where this change has to take place. It is not just a question of a Christian living in a different way, for example not stealing, not taking advantage of a customer's naivety or ignorance to charge more than he should; it is a question of the Christian thinking that that is not good, and that it is not good, firstly for himself. And therefore, as it is not good, it does not occur to him to do so, because he, like everyone else, always seeks what is best for himself. The easy way is to tell our pupils that they should not steal, they should not fornicate because it is prohibited or because it is a sin. The difficult thing is to explain that they should not do so because it is not good for them. If we know how to explain that it is not good, it will never occur to them to do so, even

though no-one is watching over them or punishes them, because nobody does what is bad for them. With answers like “it is a sin” or “it is prohibited” we only manage to avoid “these things from happening” in the short term, as long as the fear lasts. With reasons like, that is not good or good for us, we manage to convince and above all we offer a serious basis for permanently avoiding evil.

A change of mindset is required, not just a change of heart. However, changes of mentality require reasons, arguments, motives. They require answers to many questions, explanations of things they do not understand. People today, and well trained people like our pupils, want to know why things are so. Authority is not reason enough. They need to be convinced of the goodness of the Christian faith and morality. If they are convinced, they will then be able to keep up their faith amid the multitude of obstacles and respond to the questions, criticisms, difficulties and discredit in the environment. A pastoral agent cannot respond to questions saying what doctors there are in the Holy Mother Church. This person performs the role of doctor of the Church before his or her pupils. And as a good doctor he has to offer light and contents, which are, in the end, one and the same. He has to offer an adult faith and to do so, he has to offer a thought-out faith. Otherwise, our pupils will think that religion is something childish and they will abandon it when they stop considering themselves children.

4. Education and training to “talk about God”

The title of this article speaks of education and training to talk about God. But before we talk about God, and to talk correctly about God, we need to talk to God. Theology is necessary not only to talk about God, but also to talk to God. The idea of education and training to talk about God is understandable. But, how do we conceive education and training to talk to God? Before going any further on the topic of talking about God, I would like to clear up this idea of education and training to talk to God. I hope my explanation helps you to find new, surprising and personal reasons for pursuing your education and training.

Theological, catechist or religious training not only has utilitarian purposes. We do not study only or mainly because we have to transmit. If theology is a requirement of a mature, adult and responsible faith and that is the kind of faith which is expected of all those responsible for pastoral work, it therefore follows that the reasons for studying theology, at least at ground level, cannot be utilitarian. This does not mean that it is not legitimate that those who have studied theology cannot take advantage of those studies to perform tasks,

even remunerated tasks, such as delivering ethics and religious education classes. All of these are appendages that come when one is truly searching for the Kingdom of God. But the important things are not the appendages, but rather the search for the Kingdom of God.

If the reasons for studying theology are not utilitarian, what kind of reasons are they? People study theology for vocational reasons, because one feels the vital and personal need to study it. The reasons for studying it are theological. As theology sprouts from the faith, it leads to a better understanding of the Revelation and eventually, to God's friendship.

I have already said that the faith gives food for thought, arouses questions, seeks a better understanding of the Mystery of the God it loves. Hence the encounter with the loving and kind God makes us think of Him in complete seriousness and to search for all kinds of reasons to understand His love better and to increase our own. Theology not only broaches a faith that seeks to understand, it also broaches a faith that seeks to love.

It may prove surprising, above all for those who do not value thought and even consider it contrary to prayer, to what is spiritual or to the faith, but theology aims to cover a path that leads to the only thing that can fill a person's heart, a path that culminates in friendship.

Thomas of Aquino has a marvellous article (*Summa contra gentiles*, book 1, chapter 2) in which he explains that the study of theology is the most perfect, sublime, useful and joyous of anything man can study. The most joyous because it never tires us and studying it fills us with happiness and enjoyment. The most perfect, "because man, when he applies himself to the study of wisdom, already possesses the true blessing in a certain way;" utility is also related to perfection, "as wisdom is the path to reach the kingdom of immortality." And the most sublime, "as through it, man largely resembles God, Who created everything wisely, and as similarity causes love, the study of wisdom joins man to God through friendship." Thomas of Aquino finds a good grounding for this statement in the Holy Scriptures. In effect, the Book of Wisdom (7,14) says that those who acquire wisdom earn God's friendship. In short, by studying theology we already possess happiness, God's blessing puts us on the road to eternal life and we eventually resemble God (nothing less!) and this leads to friendship with Him, because, as St. Thomas says in the *Summa* (II-II, 15, 1 ad.3), understanding a truth is to love it.

Therefore, if we study theology for vocational reasons, it is clear that it should interest any Christian, although only those who have received the vocational calling can cultivate it in depth, just as Eucharist interests all Christians, although not all are called to be ordained. And if one studies for vocational reasons, we must clearly differentiate between the various

vocations. One thing is a theological vocation and quite another a vocation to the ministry. Sometimes various vocations may coincide in a single person, but this is not necessarily the case.

A pastoral agent, a catechist, a religious education teacher is not necessarily called to enter the priesthood, but he/she is vocationally called to study theology. If that person does not feel this need, this is a very strong indication that he/she has mistaken his/her pastoral vocation.

Now we are clear about the idea that the reason for studying theology is vocational, personal, let us look at some other reasons for studying this that have to do with pastoral work.

5.- Education and training to speak to the God of Jesus Christ

Jesus of Nazareth is a character that always arouses interest. He has never been an exclusive asset of the Church. It is therefore not surprising that novels, films, television and press reports have recently been appearing about Jesus of Nazareth. These novels, films and reports are normally not sufficiently accurate in their historical or theological aspects, because they are produced for commercial purposes. Hence they offer a striking, sensationalist and unfortunately warped image of the real Jesus. Real Jesus - this is, moreover, the attraction usually put forward to present such novels and films. Real Jesus, who the Churches would supposedly have hidden. And that they take on the task of offering: A Jesus who lived and died in Kashmir, who had children and was married to Mary Magdalen, who was a revolutionary Jew and many other things besides.

All of this should make us think that if we do not speak of Jesus, other people do speak of him. Hence the surprise one gets when looking at the approaches to pastoral work in which the Word of God and Jesus Christ do not openly and cleanly occupy all the predication, liturgy, worship and catechism.

For Jesus and the Word of God to be the centre and the key of our catechism and to provide both the Jesus of the history books and the Christ of the faith, which are blended into the same person, Jesus of Nazareth, one needs to know theology. Otherwise, we will be offering pious considerations, we will not know how to respond to the challenges laid down by the novels, films and reports in vogue, or how to explain to our pupils the problems that are always aroused when one approaches Jesus Christ, problems of a historical and theological nature. Jesus is a historical character, therefore it has to be possible to take a

historical approach to Jesus. And what is being said about his marriage or his celibacy, his predication, his activity, his death, has to be backed up with documentation and historically guaranteed. If we do not know the abundant, and in any case, sufficient documentation available to us, we will have little basis to argue when we come across those novelistic statements, that are so commercial and so deceptive.

As regards this historical figure of Jesus, we Christians, on the other hand, make a statement of faith: He is Christ. This also gives rise to a series of issues which require explanation. Jesus was not a good person, someone who gave good advice and told tales about God. That was undoubtedly part of him. But one must eventually say he was Christ, the Messiah, and if that is clearly understood, the question immediately comes up of how this is possible. How can a human being express the Verb of God in the present? How can God be left at the mercy of a historical event? How is it possible that Jesus is the true God and a real man? How to explain his real depth without blotting out his humanity and his divinity? All of this requires theology.

6.- Education and training to avoid fundamentalist positions

One of the most important problems facing us today on the religious plain is fundamentalism and this furthermore has social and political consequences. All religions contain fundamentalist currents. Their main mistake is to confuse God with the book, with the dogma, with the formula, with the rite, with prayer. And to think that the book, the rite or the dogma are holy, when in fact they are historic and they should serve the faith. A rite or dogmatic formulas never serve a purpose of their own; they have a purpose when they help me approach God. Moreover, they are human not God's creations. Fundamentalists consider that the human "text" (the Bible, the Koran) is nothing more and nothing less than the "very word of God" (and not a word of God in human form) and they understand that a certain group's penitence (with their rites and costumes, etc.) assures salvation and replaces love. The worst aspect of fundamentalism is that it considers that it must defend its convictions by force. Fundamentalists appeal to the name of God, but ruin the beauty of what is religious. As far as a pastoral worker is concerned, fundamentalism is confusing the word of the Pope or the bishop with God's word and God's will; or considering that the Catechism of the Catholic Church should be taught exactly as it comes, with no adaptations or commentaries, all over, or that this Catechism is the only thing that should be taught; or considering the least disagreement with the hierarchy or a criticism of any of its positions as an attack on the

Church or on God. Fundamentalism is mixing up words with what underlies them, taking what the Bible or Tradition says absolutely literally, forgetting that if the Bible requires interpretation, Tradition and Ecclesiastical Magisterium require hermeneutics.

The difference between faith and fanaticism (or fundamentalism) lies precisely in the order of knowledge. And hence of study. The believer knows he believes. The fanatic believes he knows that his formulations are absolute and that they must therefore be imposed on others. The believer believes that the only absolute fact is that God revealed himself through Jesus Christ, that no culturally conditioned formulation can exhaust. As he knows what he believes, he knows that his knowledge is never clear and that it never exhausts what can be learned about the reality he believes in. The fanatic, as he believes that he knows, has nothing to listen to. Neither does he consider it necessary to reflect and to interpret. The believer, as he knows that he believes, is always restless and lives his life in tension, moving towards a clarity he still does not possess. Religion converted in fundamentalism ends up by believing that it knows everything and everything is clear. The true faith knows that there are always many unanswered questions. While the believer is aware of what he knows and that this is a lot, the fanatic believes he knows it all, when in fact he is ignorant.

Fundamentalisms take root in environments poor in thought and where there is contempt for intelligence, where there is no research or information, or better, where information is biased and false, where where it is only possible to hear a single voice, where the living quality of the feeling is confused with the clarity of the concepts, where there is talk of blind loyalty which impedes analysis and thought. Fundamentalism is sustained by blind obedience, by thinking a little as possible, by fanaticism, lack of dialogue and not wanting to listen. Theology and dialogue are the best antidotes to fundamentalism.

7.- Education and training to understand the core book of the faith

This book is the Holy Scriptures. But these Scriptures are historic books. Their origin, authorship and structure are human and divine. They cannot therefore be read as if they were dictated by the Holy Spirit. In composing these books the Holy Spirit has employed human authors, who used their faculties and talents. Hence to understand what God wants to tell us through these books, we need to know the ways in which these authors expressed themselves, conditioned by a culture, an environment and their capacities. Ecclesiastical Magisterium and of course theology are clear about the fact that the books of the Scriptures use human and historical language; and precisely for this reason their ways of thinking and expressing

themselves are not ours. To understand the Scriptures we must contextualise the book, in order to know what the human authors say and wanted to say.

Alternatively, through this human language the Scriptures offer a theological message; they aim to arouse and transmit the faith. In order to correctly understand the message they aim to transmit, one firstly has to understand the human language that transports it; but we also have to place the texts of the Scriptures within an overall context of the book and of the context of the whole of the Scriptures, to thus learn the reading that the Church has made of these texts over history.

These books, furthermore, contain different theologies. It is possible therein to find apparently contradictory positions and even expressions, lessons and messages that seem incompatible. We cannot read them without exercising interpretation and theology. To do so we need a minimum of education and training.

8.- Education and training to converse with culture

Many complain today that the faith does not dialogue with culture. But to undertake this dialogue requires theology.

If a theological problem involves data that are the object of scientific study (for example, the origin of man and of the world; issues of a moral and pastoral order) when it comes to giving explanations based on the Catechism, we have to take account of what the sciences are certain to say on this subject. Otherwise, we ridicule the faith and offer an unsuitable or even false answer.

Alternatively, we must dialogue with culture applying our critical capacity. As we cannot assume just like that the theories current today which aim to explain the world and man, because they are neither harmless nor neutral for religion. When faced with systems whose aim is absolutist, it is necessary to reveal the falsehood of such an aim and defend the authenticity of religion. But to do so, we need to know the issues well and not limit ourselves to giving superficial answers that demonstrate our ignorance. Dialogue with a culture requires an open mind, the ability to detect the culture's positive values. But also a critical spirit, knowing how to offer reasons when in disagreement. And to likewise be able to explain the incoherence of certain apparently obvious positions or those which no-one discusses because everyone accepts them but which are, nevertheless, incompatible with the Christian faith.

It is truly surprising to read the religious considerations of some good philosophers who are surely taught and read in our Schools. They do not go much beyond primary,

simplistic arguments when it comes to discrediting religion, those typical of people who experience the faith in an infantile way. Classifying the figure of Jesus of Nazareth as legendary or continuing to present religion as the outcome of man's frustrated desires (forgetting the transforming dimension or the demands every true religion demands, amongst other things), at this point in history and culture, only evidences the lack of training of those who write such things. The bad thing is that such authors are studied even in our Schools, without enough critical dialogue with those positions. If the philosophy teacher does not undertake this dialogue, it will be up to the religious education teacher to do so. But to do so he/she needs to be trained, to possess the best human, cultural and theological knowledge.

9.- Education and training to offer a faith full of grace and compassion.

Lastly, training is important to offer a faith which rewards compassion over punishment, grace over law. Christian life is not morality, although it makes moral demands, demands based on love, oriented towards growth of the person.

In topics dealing with morality, we sometimes conform ourselves with offering recipes. That is the wrong path to take, because there are no prefabricated solutions valid for all cases. In truth, each situation requires its own particular solution. Because there is no marriage, but rather there is "my" marriage, with its own different, unique characteristics and circumstances.

When we offer solutions we have to be aware many problems do not have a single right answer. The Vatican II said that the very concept of life held by Christians can lead to divergent solutions. And likewise the Church does not have all the answers. In many cases we will have to consult profane scientific experts. The important thing in these cases is to locate the problem clearly and formulate the question well. Better an unanswered question than a bad answer; better a well formulated problem than a closed answer. The more we come down to concrete solutions, the more likely we are to find pluralism and the more we must respect the answer that the person involved should always give. Where there is no moral training, we give set answers, lightweight in understanding and often counterproductive.

10.- To finish

The ideal situation would be for all God's people to become increasingly more convinced of the importance theology has in their lives. Theology is more necessary today than ever in the face of so much discourse only intended to spur the heart, and which in the extreme leads to fundamentalism. Today the need to dialogue with culture, ecumenical dialogue and dialogue between religions, the need for a non-authoritarian morality, based on love; the difficulties of living in the faith in a secularised world, under attack from indifference and agnosticism, of living a convinced and convincing faith, of overcoming inferiority complexes before thought and the modern world all make the study of theology more necessary than ever. Would it that more Christians were aware of this. But at least let us who have a pastoral responsibility be aware. And let us not forget that when we study theology, we do so for vocational reasons.