Truths, Trends and Traditions in Lutheran Education
Taking a stand

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Introductory

This is a paper on Authority: who has it, who should have it, how we grant it, lose it and misuse it and why it matters. The issue of Authority is really about what we consider to be of ultimate importance. That to which we grant authority determines the values and measures the worth of our actions.

Who or what has Authority? Who or what should have it? I am going to suggest that it has never been more difficult to discern answers to these questions and never has it been more important for us to do so.

I want us to step back from the swirl that is our daily life and examine the values and forces at work in an attempt to identify the Authorities that lay claim on our lives and our practices.

Why? Well, simply put, I have Luther-like concerns about current educational trends; concerns that arise from my understanding of core educational truths. Like Luther, I can't seem to remain quiet about these concerns. Unlike Luther, my life is not at stake for voicing them, although as I was preparing this paper, I came across the phrase "heresiarchs". This was the term given to early voices of dissent at Catholic excesses (Peter of Bruys was one). Perhaps I will be seen by some in education as a heresiarch. That could be seen as a compliment.

What does Luther's own example teach us about Authority? And how is Authority connected to the relationship between truths, traditions and trends? What was Luther really doing when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church? He was questioning and challenging the *traditions* of the Catholic Church in the light of the '*truths*' of Christianity as he had come to understand them through Scriptural encounter. These traditions, in particular, the selling of indulgences, praying to saints, salvation by works, belief in purgatory etc., had clearly evolved from a variety of factors but most telling was, no doubt, the pressing of worldly *trends* and the need to maintain structures of power and control over the faithful masses. One does not have to be ungenerous towards the people involved in these corruptions. Like us, they were people of time and circumstance. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

The challenge of Authority and knowing to whom or what it should be granted is related to the task of knowing which 'trends' one should respond and adapt to and which ones should be resisted because they challenge one's core Truths. This poses a real dilemma because all institutions do need to change with the times. Luther famously and rightly claimed that the church should constantly be renewing and reforming itself. Schools, too, of course. What is renewal and reform? It is a

commitment to the 'life' of the truth and the ability to communicate it in changing contexts. The difficulty of course is that in the process of 'reforming', we must maintain a delicate balance between preserving our truths and making the changes to our traditions (or practices) necessary for those truths to find life in a new context, a setting which is sometimes downright hostile to them or too eager to water them down to make them more palatable

Luther's challenge to the Church was obviously a mighty episode in religious history, without which none of you would be sitting before me today. What Luther helpfully showed was how easy it is for traditions to break away from truths and to take on a life of their own, but because they have been cut off from their source (the truth that gives them life) they end up being dead-ends, substitutes for truth rather than protectors and preservers of it.

What was the essence of Luther's critique that we can 'buy' forgiveness, that we should pray through 'saints' and so on? I am going to suggest that Luther was reclaiming the *Authority of Being*, that it is directly encountered, that it is personal and hidden, and that it can be known by all who seek it, without special status or intermediaries. He was also showing that human inventions and constructs can very easily become impediments to True Encounter with Being.

Put simply:

> **What Luther saw was that the invisible world is more important and more real than the visible one. What goes on inside us, which can't be seen, the 'within of the world', is the essence of spiritual reality. Faith, the experience of grace and love, trust and growth within – these are the things to be protected and preserved.**

Practices connected to Living Truth preserve the inner, hidden world of being. Those disconnected from it serve the outer world and the outer life of appearance but leave the inner world in darkness.

Indulgences, works, worldly external measures (human inventions, as Luther saw them) were masquerading as spiritual truths. So entrenched were these practices that late medieval religion has been described as a religion practised by the living on behalf of the dead. 16th Century Europe was suffering, not from too little religion but from too much. It brought not satisfaction and comfort but anxiety and toil. Not salvation in terms of the unconditional love of a covenant but the conditional acceptance of a measured, monetary contract

How had the medieval church moved so far as to lose sight of the essential truths of the Gospel? How had Authority shifted so significantly from the inner world of faith and meaning to the outer world of commerce and measurement?

I am going to suggest that Trends are most attractive and most dangerous when they promise 'short cuts'. When they promise to make something that is, by its nature, difficult, easy, or to secure in an instant that which by its very nature takes time. In other words, the attractive and most dangerous trends promise to make things 'easier', 'more efficient', 'better' 'more fun'. They invariably promise a *short cut* to

'salvation'. But I am going to suggest that in the realm of being, in the world of spirit, there are no short cuts. At the end of that road, there are only substitutes.

Because substitutes are not always easy to spot, we must ask critical questions about the trend and the authority that lies behind it. We must, as Luther recommended, 'stay close to the Gospel' and test out the trends in the light of our Truths. And we must always have in the forefront of our minds the knowledge that there are no shortcuts to Being. [1] [Work of the spirit cannot be bought or sold]

My contention is that in educational terms, true teaching and learning is today threatened by similar 'short cuts' – promises to secure 'educational salvation' in the form of 'outcomes' by measures (works), promises to ensure 'happiness' for our young people via slogans, clichés and clinical drugs, and the prevalent and deeply mistaken belief that information is communication.

I am going to argue that like Luther, educators need to reclaim the Authority of Being. We, too, are surrounded by practices that promise salvation but lead spirits into darkness.

When it came to 'staying close to the Gospel', Luther had the luxury of the written word, his 'truths' were preserved and available and, leaving aside issues of interpretation for now, uncontroversial. Our task today is to uncover the Truths that might form part of an Educator's Gospel, truths to which we must 'stay close' when we undertake reform in our schools and decide which trends to follow and which ones to resist.

What would you identify as such truths? What are the fundamentals of true Education? I realise that in asking this question I am addressing Educators who operate against the backdrop of Faith. This is of crucial importance. We have a Gospel to guide us, a Gospel that tells us something about the nature of fundamental reality, of our place within it and the call to be true to it.

[3 minutes to talk with their neighbour about what 3 truths would form their educator's gospel]

The Core Truths of the Educators Gospel

I don't know what you came up with when you exchanged thoughts with your neighbour. I wish I had time to ask you (but urge you to consider the question seriously and perhaps post some suggestions on the post-it board). It doesn't matter at this stage whether we agree absolutely on what they are. What matters is that we have a robust and rigorous discussion in our own schools about what they are and then allow them to be the informative Authority for our educational decisions. I do know that if I was speaking to state school teachers, the response (and indeed my talk) would be very different. Those of us entrusted with the deepest of deep truths have added responsibilities, I'm afraid.

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[1] Those of you who are perhaps tempted to think that 'salvation by faith' is surely just such a 'short cut' might like to think further about the spiritual processes involved in truly presenting oneself as naked and fallen before God. 'Buying' something is much easier than 'becoming' something.

The Gospel in education, is, I suggest, comprised of three key aspects:

1. Imaginative possibility (a call to a deeper encounter with Being)
2. Self-identification (development of individuality and uniqueness with a moral compass)
3. Social interaction (authentic communication and encounter)

In secular terms, this might be put as "fulfil one's potential, live out one's dreams and make a difference". But those of us who have encountered deeper reality must remember that our potential is infinitely greater than this. C S Lewis once described it thus: "If we let Him – for we can prevent Him if we choose – He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though of course on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less." (*Mere Christianity*)

Education in schools like yours is not merely a matter of passing on human knowledge. All true teaching and learning sets knowledge and skills against the backdrop of Faith and the possibility of human fulfilment and, which, therefore expands humanity (understood with transcendent reference), facilitates self-understanding (of a created being as opposed to a self-creating one) and enhances relational capacity (the ability to love others).[2]

Our context and our challenge

I believe there are three quite distinct challenges to our Educational Truths and their Authority in the form of contemporary trends. The three trends are quite distinct but I believe they are all related to each other and have their origin in the fact that culturally we have lost Faith in Being.

True faith is a kind of inner comprehension, the poise of being[3] graced in a relationship constituted by obedience, conscience and love. Whilst it is at its heart, a mystery, it is also that which provides bearings for being.

The challenge we face in the 21st century was forecast by Nietzsche when he rung the bell that signalled the death of God, the loss of a divine and transcendent horizon: in effect, *the loss of bearings for our being*. In order to prevent a kind of spiritual free-fall, humans reach out for alternative bearings, they turn to substitutes. You may recall that Jung's hypothesis was that when the gods are killed they are reborn as diseases. In order to give shape to what they do, individuals without belief (or faith) will find themselves trapped in self-absorbed compulsions, depressions and anxieties. I am going to suggest that the most powerful trends of today can be understood as

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[2] I have taken these three aspects from a helpful paper by Frank Smith, *When Irresistible Technology meets irreplaceable Teachers*, in <u>Language Arts</u>, Vol.76, No.5 May 1999. I have spoken of this in terms of 'becoming capable of God'. See keynote address, "Education as a Humanising Activity" Dialogue Australasia conference, NZ, 2006
[3] An expression used by John Carroll in *Ego and Soul*, p.85

measures to regain or reclaim bearings for beings without reference to transcendence and which are, therefore, ultimately doomed, or at least seriously inadequate to the task.

What are the trends of our time and why are they to be resisted? I think we can identify three clear trends which present a different set of truths to rival the Authority of the Truths of Faith.

Trends:
1. Authority of Science/Measurement (if it cannot be measured it does not exist)
2. Authority of Ego/Individualism (when spirit or soul recedes, ego becomes dominant and needs new bearings and controls – normally in morally neutral language, like 'that's inappropriate' or 'that's normal')
3. Authority of Information (to disseminate is not to communicate)

These three trends form a kind of Secular Trinity of Truths. Because there is no interior world and no transcendent horizon, the self needs constructing and constraining and because there is no 'being' seeking 'meaning', information in the form of 'data' replaces understanding and communication between selves.

1. Authority of Science/Technological Measures

Science has stepped up to provide new bearings for being. Its creed is essentially this:

Where do we come from? Random evolutionary mutations
Why am I here? To preserve my life, to reproduce, seek pleasure, avoid pain
What happens at death? Rotting stench and nothingness.
What should I do? Whatever will make you happy and/or live longer[4].

Most people today look to scientists, doctors, psychologists, or indeed any kind of 'expert' for something that will provide bearings for their being. The problem here is that empirical data, research and statistics, are all focused on the outer life, the health of the body and the chemistry of the mind. If this domain was adequate to the task, we would surely have nearly eliminated depression and mental illness, whereas we are clearly only seeing it rise.

This will not surprise those of us who have transcendent bearings for our being. How could the expansive possibilities of spirit not be distressed by the thought that all there is to being is what science tells us.

Jung: "the soul that fails to find its own meaning goes mad".
The Authority that has been granted to science is well expressed here:

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[4] John Carroll (already cited)

What can the latest research tell us about human fulfilment? Why does science know nothing about the ultimate fulfilment of being? Of the kind of creatures Lewis wrote about? Because science proceeds by a method that rules the reality of being out from the very beginning. Being is not found under a microscope or at the end of a telescope, it is not discovered via experiment, or abstracted into universal laws of predictive behaviour. Being seeks meaning not measurement, it desires intimacy and belonging not abstraction and theorising. It is the deep of the person, seen only by the eye of God and those who love. Science can't help but ignore it. This is not a weakness of science but merely a comment on the nature of science. The problem is not with science but with the granting of absolute authority to science (and by association, technology).

All spiritual traditions and the best philosophical traditions agree that 'happiness' or wholeness, fulfilment, goodness, (dare I say, 'salvation'?) is to be found by going on a journey within. What hope has anyone got if they are encouraged to become dependant on the 'latest research' which by definition will keep changing and keep disorientating them, whilst maintaining them in this relationship of dependence. It is, of course, the secret to the success of any lifestyle magazine.

If science is your only Authority, the latest research will be compelling (where else could you turn?). But some of us have a higher Authority and we must put research and scientific findings in their proper place, understanding what they can and cannot tell us, how they can and cannot help us.

With the Authority of Science, comes the Authority of its twin, Technology. Here, the shift from one Authority to another is often more subtle and tends to go unnoticed.

Let me give you an example. When I was working as a consultant, I visited a school in which the junior school staff were most distressed. It turned out that a new computerised reporting program had been implemented which, for some reason or another, had meant that a group of teachers (let's say, year 5s) had been forced to

abandon their favourite unit, the one they loved teaching, the one they said had the most pedagogical gain for their students, the one that used more of their creativity and spontaneity as teachers and as human beings than anything else they did. In short, a wonderfully successful educational experience was abandoned, eliminated from their curriculum, because it did not produce the outcomes that could be 'measured' by the new reporting program.

Now of course it is inevitable that decisions will be made in the workplace that we don't agree with or which we find irritating or inconvenient. We learn to accept them, adapt and move on. But some decisions are different, as was this one. These teachers were distressed at a deep level and their acceptance of the new system required more than simply an act of acquiescence. It forced the issue of authority and this simple decision, as it turned out, told the teachers that contrary to what they believed, their judgement, expertise, their *pedagogical authority* was not what ultimately mattered. The new reporting system (and its radically different values) had greater authority. Notice here how subtle the shift between authorities actually was. A new computer program is implemented, seemingly innocuously until the impact is felt at the level of *being* and the teachers, the preservers and defenders of creativity, of human sensibility, of sense-making, of education as the expansion of the inner-world, go into crisis.[5]

There are of course reasons for implementing new reporting programs. I am not arguing that we should resist all change. But we must understand what we are doing when we grant Authority to technological measures without preserving and defending spiritual realities.

C S Lewis, writing 60 years ago of his concerns regarding educational trends, spoke powerfully of "the trees of knowledge and life growing together"…Lessons with blood and sap" (Lewis, Men without Chests, p.6)

The problem with lessons that have blood and sap is that it is so much more difficult measuring outcomes devised by a system that knows nothing about either. The danger of giving authority to such systems is that increasingly, we learn to teach without blood and sap. It is a gain for the system (which does not want and cannot compute anything as messy as blood and sap!) and a loss for humanity, who are essentially, creatures of blood and sap. The teachers in the Junior School I spoke about earlier literally felt as if their teaching life blood had been drained from them. If we go too far down this path we will find our teachers becoming lifeless and bloodless. Indeed, the prevalence of computers in schools rather ominously suggests that life (flesh) and blood are already being replaced as the Authority shifts from human communication to technological information. The triumph of the visible measure blinds us to (or effectively hides from us) the invisible spiritual and intellectual black hole. [6]

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[5] Personal anecdote: taking philosophy classes to the Observatory Café in the Botanic Gardens., one of the privileges of our location at MGS. But just this year we have adopted online reporting, forcing me justify this time which has no 'measurable' outcome but which has immeasurable benefits for the boys and their beings.

[6] You may think I am exaggerating but I know from my own case, as well as from talking to many other teachers, that with the increasing emphasis on statistical data and the complete refusal to allow for 'context' in determining the meaning of that data, spiritual distress, which is the right response from authentic teachers to this mandated compromise of the truths of their Gospel, is on the rise.

> When the human capacity and sensibility for joy, wisdom and love is diminished in favour of measurement and technique, we have moved away from our Educators Gospel – and this is not Good News

Bad news is often dressed up and made to look like good news. We might, for example, have a more 'efficient' reporting system, we might have more precise 'measures' or 'outcomes' which for the Authority of Technology, is a kind of Heaven. The problem is that the Truth hasn't changed. The fact of the matter is that the invisible is more real than the visible, and there will be cosmic stirrings as a result of this deep unhappiness. I think we can directly connect the rise of workplace stress and perhaps even the global rise in mental illness to this shift in Authority, from the inner and the meaningful, to the outer measurable.[7]

What happened to the Educational Authorities of Joy, Wisdom and Love?
In communities and classrooms where visible measures have gained ultimate authority, we will inevitably find a forsaken humanity; teachers with crushed spirits and dulled minds (and from my experience, broken hearts) and students in a kind of wasteland of assessment and meaningless information.

"When we become overly means, methods and measures oriented, it is possible to forsake or recast the 'project' without paying attention to soul-oriented work of awakening students' potentials, as persons; facilitating their autonomous formation; and supporting their best interests, as aligned to their deepest longings and aspirations" (quoted in Keith Walker's 'Fostering Hope', 2005, ACEL monograph series, 37, p.12)

> Faith is a kind of poise of being. When we deny the validity and authority of the world within, we have forsaken both our students and ourselves

Why is it so hard to counter and combat trends and how do we become better at staying close to the Gospel and granting Authority to its Truth?

Trends are difficult to counter for two reasons. First, they offer something we find attractive, and second, they often do not notice them until it is too late. We must understand why technology is so irresistible. Anything that increases our power and control is irresistible and technology surely does that. The problem is that our educator Gospel maintains that love, truth and faith are more important than power and control. Our voracious appetite for Technology must therefore be curbed. Every child in the playground knows that if you do not say 'no', you mean 'yes'.

This is difficult for another reason. To counter a trend we must remain conscious enough to recognise it as something worth countering. That is to say, we must be aware of it as a phenomenon in the first place. And consciousness requires effort. Effort is discomforting. It causes conflict, brings uncertainty and presents us with real decisions to make. It is demanding. This is partly why we find rules and procedures so attractive. They tell us what to do. They promise an outcome (salvation) without us

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[7] Teachers want to teach lessons with blood and sap. The more they are asked to provide lifeless documents and data, the more lifeless they become. If the only explicit value given to what teachers do is that they become better at 'administration' and 'disseminating information', we have left the Gospel.

having to do anything truly difficult. I think of the rich and religiously serious young Jew who asked Jesus what he needed to do to enter the kingdom of God. So much easier to follow the ritualised laws of the tradition than to actually have to look and see who was before him. To see who needed him. To know how to give, when and to whom. That is why we find rules and procedures so attractive. They take away the need to think about what we are doing. To understand why we are doing it. To become capable of something more than we currently are. In other words, they promise a short cut to salvation. "Better teaching", "improved learning". It's a modern form of magic. Just invest in some interactive white boards, some lap top computers, wireless your classrooms and poof, magically, the rabbit of understanding will come out of the hat!

Technology perpetuates passivity at its best and confusion at its worst (think Brave New World or 1984). Passivity prevents true encounter but promises spiritual fulfilment. It is a powerful lie. But it is a shortcut to a substitute. Wittgenstein once wrote: "if you use a trick in logic whom can you be tricking other than yourself" (*Culture and Value* 24).

Good teaching and real learning cannot be achieved with gimmicks and tricks, machines or measures[8]. It will always depend on the mind and heart of the teacher and the learner undertaking the slow and difficult process of applying their minds with discipline in order to master material.

 The danger of short cuts and substitutes is well expressed by O'Donohue
"Traditionally a journey was a rhythm of three forces; time, self and space. Not the digital virus has truncated time and space. Marooned on each instant, we have forfeited the practice of patience, the attention to emergence and delight of discovery. The self has become anxious for what the next instant might bring. This greed for destination obliterates the journey. The digital desire schools the mind in false priority. There is no sense of natural sequence where an image is allowed to emerge from its background and context when the time is right, the eye is worthy and the heart appropriate. The mechanics of electronic imaging reverses the incarnation of real encounter. But a great journey needs plenty of time. It should not be rushed; if it is, your life becomes a kind of abstract package tour devoid of beauty and meaning. When you accumulate experiences at such a tempo, everything becomes thin. Consequently, you become every more absent from your life and this fosters emptiness that haunts the human heart".
(John O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty*, p.37)

Authority. Who or what has it in technologically driven classrooms and schools?

If we are to take Luther's advice and stay close to the Gospel when making decisions about trends and changed practices we must ask questions about the trend in order to discover its intentions, whether it will shift our fundamental values or enhance them. Only then are we in a position to know what we are doing, to know which god we are serving. In the religious life it is called 'discernment'.

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[8] Magically, by granting every child access to a computer, we will have solved the education crisis in Australia? By implementing tests and measures, we will magically have raised standards?

The shift in Authority from spiritual to technological values can be terribly difficult to detect. This was perhaps why Heidegger spent so much of his philosophical energy exploring ways in which 'beings' might gain a free relation to technology – a way of living with technology that does not allow it to 'warp, confuse and lay waste our nature'.

If, like shoes that are too tight, the implementation of a technology will cripple the hearts and minds of teachers and learners, diminish the capacity for spiritual, authentic encounter but provide great looking documents for our files, I suggest we know something has gone wrong. Those Junior school teachers about whom I spoke earlier knew something had gone wrong. The problem was that no-one in Authority cared.

When it comes to asking questions about technology, I can think of no better advice than that given by the late Neil Postman. Here are the 6 questions he thinks we should ask before we introduce or adopt a new technology

1. What is the problem to which this technology is a solution?
2. Whose problem is it? (Will the people who pay for it be the people who have the problem? Concorde example)
3. What new problems will be created as a result of solving the old problem? (motor car, clocks and monks)
4. What people/institutions will be harmed by this technology? (Luddite example)
5. What language and communication will be changed by this technology?
6. Which people/institutions will gain new power through this technology (and which will decline i.e. how will it shift power and authority?)

We could apply these questions to interactive whiteboards, laptops, digitalising newsletters, even things as basic as templates for reports etc. (Online reporting is now apparently mandatory in the UK. Did anyone discuss or consider what the gains and losses of such a decision were going to be?) We could even ask these questions of the 'latest research'. You will be amazed at what is revealed about the actual effects of a decision like changing a reporting system which seemed so innocuous. Will we have Lutheran-like courage to stand by our findings?

We may not always be in a position to prevent the implementation of the technology but we can always attempt to understand (remain conscious about) the decision being made and its relevant impact on the question of Authority.

We obviously cannot live without technology and I am not advocating such drastic measures. Luther did not discard the sacraments but demanded they be more closely linked with the Living Word. Most importantly he urged us to identify and eliminate the inventions and constructs which are impediments to true encounter. We must always remember that Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath was made for Man.

2. Self-Identity (Integrity/Conscience/Wisdom)

Our Gospel tells us that our fulfilment, our identity, the possibility of Life depends on acknowledging our Source, having a transcendent reference point which grants us our

nature and our place in creation. Without this kind of inner bearing, when we are left in an egoistic, relativistic free-for-all, it is not surprising to find outer measures of control being imposed.

Hand in hand with the loss of transcendence and the rise of the technological is its psychological counterpart – modelling human beings on information processors. Resilience and well-being are the trendy new terms but take a look at the programs designed to help young people cope with the trials of life and you find documents full of mantras and slogans that do not invite or encourage depth of spirit or an encounter with being (imagine Jesus teaching 'BOUNCE BACK' to those suffering from a loss of meaning, from a sense of incompleteness, to the bullied and outcast and to those suffering from an inability to walk through life with a straight back.)

 The rise of resilience, happiness, wellbeing, life skills programs is testament, I think, to an environment without bearings, without any sense of reality having a structure in which suffering can be meaningful and without any sense of spiritual purpose. The default position for a self that does not have a 'determining centre' or inner bearing, is the residual Freudian 'id', the anonymous 'it' that unleashes itself on the world, expecting to get its own way, expecting instant gratification, expecting to avoid all pain and unpleasantness. On the surface it can appear quite 'tolerant' and accepting. But inside it is often rigid and inflexible, and when given the opportunity, it shows its true colours.

It is no wonder that programs that promise direction and happiness proliferate. I consider these programs a classic example of taking a short cut to 'emotional salvation' and whilst they certainty can serve a purpose, they surely cannot provide the spirit with what it truly longs for. And an unforseen consequence of applying outer measures (like mottos and mantras) to the inner life is that the authority shifts from the spiritual to the behavioural.

Resilience programs:
Strategies and skills
Behavioural management
Slogans
Instructions
Normalise/depersonalise

Encounters with Being
Understanding
A 'heart-felt' response
Joy
Wisdom
Love (to love is to consent to suffering)

When outer measures gain control and Authority over inner ones, we deny being and devastate Identity.

Systems must serve something beyond themselves.
If we don't claim the Authority of the inner, we grant authority to the outer.
"If not within, then without".

3. Information as Communication

The proliferation of programs, the retreat of the deep self and the rise of ego chatter has gone hand in hand with the third person in this Unholy Trinity – the belief that information alone can solve problems. Now of course, information matters and it can be extremely useful but on its own, it does very little. For example, I cannot think of one major problem in the world today that is caused by a lack of information. The global economic meltdown, the Middle East crisis, global warming, terrorism, poverty and so on. None of these problems are caused by a lack of information and none will be solved by having more information.

As soon as language loses its connection with inner-meaning (and what other kind is there?), it becomes meaningless. There are two kinds of noise to be identified I think. The first is the chatter of distressed and fragmented identities, lost in the world of outer sense; the second is the rise of what I will call technological rhetoric. Both are manifestations of the disconnection from the anchor of the silence and authenticity that is characteristic of Being.

Neither offers the soul sustenance in the form of meanings to live in or the comfort of true communication, of being known, trusted, heard, understood and loved. The best example of the first is the kind of ego-chatter you witness on reality TV shows and which was beautifully described by Thomas Merton who lamented the rise of noise and the loss of silent communication.

"Where men live huddled together without true communication, there seems to be greater sharing and a more genuine communion. But this is not communion, only immersion in the general meaninglessness of countless slogans and clichés repeated over and over again so that in the end one listens without hearing and responds without thinking…Each individual in the mass is insulated by thick layers of insensibility. He doesn't care, he doesn't hear, he doesn't think. He does not act, he is pushed. He does not talk; he produces conventional sounds when stimulated by the appropriate noises. He does not think, he secretes clichés.

Merton goes on:
"There is actually no more dangerous solitude than that of the man who is lost in a crowd, who does not know he is alone and who does not function as a person in a community either. Yet he is by no means free of care. He is burdened by the diffuse, the anonymous anxiety, the nameless fears, the petty itching lusts and the all pervading hostilities which fill mass society the way water fills an ocean". (Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p.56-7)

Notice here Merton's description of the invisible world. On the outside all seems well. On the inside, quiet despair and chaos.

In a fractured world of data-overload and endless identity reconstruction, communication struggles to be authentic. Worse, authentic communication becomes threatening (have any of you dared ask of a curriculum document or a policy decision:

'what exactly does this mean?") John Ralston Saul[9] argues that the sign of an operative ideology is that no-one asks what the language means, nor whether it makes sense or whether it is true.' Syntax masquerades as meaning. Obscurity suggests complexity. But what does it actually say and whom is this language supposed to serve?

Communication might properly be thought of as an exchange of personal meaning, not merely the posting or passing on of information which, in the digital realm, renders everyone anonymous. Information will not fix communication problems (to think like this is to imagine that in order to reveal himself all God needs to do is to send everyone in the world an email.)

When we fall for the lie that information can save us, we are complicit in shifting Authority from the Relational to the Impersonal. And we are well on our way to disconnecting our practices or traditions from the truths that give them Life.

Conclusion

I said at the start that Luther's discovery was essentially that the invisible world is more real than the visible one. But in an age of 'if it can't be seen – or measured it doesn't exist or matter" it is terribly difficult to remember this.

Have a look at the following contrasts:

Efficiency is not the same as Effectiveness
Information is not the same as Communication
Measurement is not the same as Meaning
Psychological constructs are not true Identity
'Being normal' is not what it means to have Life to the Full
Science and statistics do not tell us about Soul

Remember we are interested in what has ultimate Authority, not whether there is any value in information and measures at all. Of course these things are of value! My argument is that they must serve something beyond themselves or else spirit will serve them. Look at the list on the right. Aren't these things really in danger of being taken captive by those on the left?

Educators in religious institutions, whose Authority Life and Love, need to stand up for and defend their core values and beliefs. Collaboration with those who want to regulate, standardise, monitor and depersonalise should only be done under protest. Ensuring that people have priority over technology should be overt. Only people can have life and have it in abundance.

The idea that we live in a world of people, of spiritual beings and not a world of machines and systems must not die. If it dies, God truly dies and the nihilists will have triumphed. I said at the start that I did not think any lives depended on what I have to say. Perhaps I was wrong about that. The possibility of a deep, authentic spiritual life that receives grace, lives in faith and knows the joy of salvation *is*

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[9] See "*The Unconscious Civilisation*"

perhaps at stake for our students. Like Luther, I believe that those of us who know this, whose conscience troubles us at night, must have the courage to take a stand and put forward the theses to be debated. Personal Authority is the Authority of the living Word, not the impersonal dead syntax we become accustomed to at our peril. When our educational practices are designed to serve systems and not people, we are back in Luther's world where religion (or education) is practised by the living on behalf of the dead. How much of our teaching and educational administration is already performed by the living on behalf of the 'dead' – the recorded data, the files no-one reads, the increasing paper work, all which serve a 'system' but rarely enhance persons or life. Every time we defer to measures over the meanings, we move away from the truth of the Gospel and we buy or create a substitute in place of the real thing. But the real thing is surely the reason we are all in education and we must therefore, like true Lutherans, stay close to the Gospel and where necessary, take a stand.

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