

Educating Between the Times: Postmodernity and Educational Leadership

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Introduction

Diogenes Allen believes that a “massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages” (Allen 1989:2). I believe that the revolution is much deeper; it is at the level of fundamental cultural beliefs, religious commitments, or worldview. It is a revolution that has been described as the movement from a modern to a postmodern worldview. But worldview must be understood as more than a framework of propositions that articulate our fundamental beliefs; those religious commitments become embodied in the institutions, forms, and practices of the culture. James Hunter argues that “the ideas . . . of the modern age are not only intellectualized but they are embedded in powerful institutions” (Hunter 1994:20). In other words, a worldview will always be concretely embodied in the institutions of a society. Hunter names the “knowledge sector” which includes educational institutions, as one of those institutions that is a “carrier” of modernity (*ibid*). If there is a shift in fundamental beliefs taking place in our time, and if fundamental beliefs always take institutional form, then we can expect revolutionary changes in educational institutions. If the religious commitments of modernity that have shaped the educational enterprise for several centuries are being replaced by a new set of fundamental beliefs, what does that mean for the school? In this climate of dramatic change how are educational leaders to respond? I begin by developing five thesis statements about the way the Christian community is to relate to postmodern culture in general.

A. Relating to our Culture in Revolutionary Postmodern Times

1. The revolutionary changes in our postmodern times will enable educational leaders to see their conformity to the world in educational practice as shaped by the modern worldview.

A Chinese proverb states “if you want to know about water don’t ask a fish.” For so long it could be said, if you want to know about the modern worldview that has shaped the western world for centuries, don’t ask a western person. For many years the modern worldview has been the unquestioned environment in which we have lived. It is our normal human situation to be thoroughly conditioned by the foundational beliefs and worldview of our culture so that we are unaware that this is simply one way of understanding and living in the world. We simply assume that the way we see the world is the way things are. Yet it can happen that a radical shift can shake that certainty and give us some historical distance enabling us to gain a critical perspective on our situation. We are given the gift of new eyes. It is as if we are taken out of the water and are able to look back with a fresh perspective on the water that makes up our environment. Lesslie Newbigin puts it this way: “We are not intended to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. God uses changes and chances in history to shake His people from time to time out of the conformity with the world . . .” (Newbigin 1962:2). I believe that this is what is happening in our postmodern times; we are able to gain a degree of critical distance that enables us to step back and assess the foundational beliefs that have been shaping us for centuries. In the process as Christians we are able to see the extent to which we have been conformed to the modern world.

For many the way we have educated children for the last two hundred years is simply the way it should be done, the way it always has been done. Haven’t there always been schools, teachers with classes of more than twenty all about the same age, curriculums with arts, natural and social sciences? The answer is, of course, no. Our present educational system has its roots in the Enlightenment when the modern worldview came to maturity. Consequently our schools have been deeply shaped by the modern worldview. In fact, education has played a key role in modernity. The foundational faith commitment of modernity is that science and technology will enable us to progress toward a more rational world that will bring material prosperity, truth, freedom, and justice.

It was this overarching cultural story of progress toward a more rationally ordered world that shaped the whole educational system. Jean Francois Lyotard was commissioned by the Council of Universities of Quebec and the Quebec government to assess the shift taking place in our postmodern world, and its effect on education. The driving question was: If (in modernity)

education was guided by the story of progress toward a better society by science and technology but we no longer believe that story, and if education was to pass along a unified body of universal knowledge (called curriculum) but we no longer believe that such a thing exists, then what is the purpose of education? The Quebec government was very aware that education plays a role in society according to a reigning worldview. If there is a shift in foundational beliefs then there is a need to re-evaluate the role and purpose of education. Education has been shaped by modernity; if modernity is failing then questions about every aspect of education must be raised.

This issue is all the more serious for the Christian. We believe that humanity is at the deepest level religious. We are created to serve God and if we don't, our faith will be placed in idols. As Dan Beeby puts it: "... the question is not 'to believe or not to believe' but rather in whom or in what to believe." Paul analyzes the Roman empire and points to idolatry as the root: "They exchanged the truth of God for lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised" (Romans 1:25). Modern western culture is no different; idolatry underlies the formation of contemporary society. This means that to the degree we have uncritically adopted the educational practices of modernity, we have been shaped by idolatry. Put in Paul's language: we have been conformed to this world (Romans 12:1,2).

The radical changes of postmodernity offer Christians an opportunity to step back and assess the degree to which we have been conformed to the world. For visionary educational leaders, the question is how far have our schools been shaped by the idols of modernity.

2. Nostalgia for modern forms of education or conservatism, and fear of the future are equally out of place for educational leaders.

We might say that living between the times of modernity and postmodernity presents a crisis situation. The Japanese character for "crisis" is a combination of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity" (Koyama 1980:4). A common response of Christians to the dangers that postmodernity presents is fear of the future and a longing for the good ol' days, an attempt to hold on to the past. In education, it is a nostalgia for modern forms of education. Yet this kind of conservatism is the wrong stance for visionary educational leaders.

I was once invited by a principal to speak to a group of teachers about the Biblical teaching

on authority. I was rather naive about the politics of the situation and unaware that there was an unexpressed agenda, a sub-text in the invitation. The principal identified me as theologically conservative and assumed I would also be historically conservative. He assumed that I would translate his request into a strong hierarchical view of authority. He believed that the growing egalitarian, democratizing, (and even anarchist) ways of thinking within postmodernity needed a response – and he was right. But the response he sought was simply to resurrect old authoritarian forms of leadership characteristic of modernity. I'm afraid I failed him; I interpreted his request in a way that spoke of authority in terms of Christ's authority over all of life, and alas, my effort disappointed him.

The problem with returning to the past and modern forms is that it risks conforming to the idols of modernity. But this is not to say that idolatry is the only word concerning modernity. As is always the case, along with the idolatry (or perhaps better, precisely in the idolatry) modernity offers insight into the world in which we live. The discerning educational leader will not simply trash the educational patterns that we have inherited from the last centuries. There is plenty of insight to be gained from our history and a revolutionary dismissal of our inherited structures is ingratitude to the insights God has given in spite of our idolatry.

3. The task of educational leaders is not to shape educational practices that simply conform to postmodern winds.

There are two dangers for Christians living in a time of radical change. I have just described one: to long for the past and cling to old patterns. The other is the opposite: insight into the idols of modernity and the terrible effects of that idolatry can make us flee uncritically into the arms of postmodernity. In May when our family toured London, we visited Buckingham Palace and saw the changing of the guards. In postmodernity we are witnessing a changing of the gods. Modernity is polytheistic: we have been ruled by a host of gods – reason, science, technology, freedom, efficiency, among others. In postmodernity those gods are seen to be no-gods; they are idols unable to deliver what they promised. Yet in postmodernity new gods are filling the space that has been swept clean: gods of plurality, relativity, difference, community, ecological harmony, among others. To push over the tiller and simply sail before the winds of

postmodernity would be simply to exchange idols, to continue to be conformed to the world of idolatrous culture.

God has made the world a cosmos: there is diversity and harmony. The creation is like an orchestra that has many different instruments but there is harmony as each instrument plays its unique part contributing to the whole. When one aspect of creation is idolized or absolutized, other aspects of creation are suppressed. When the rational aspect of human beings is idolized (as happened in modernity), the non-rational aspects are suppressed. Feelings, imagination, the body, sexuality, passion, are all denigrated. When the individual is absolutized, community is suppressed. But suppressing aspects of creation is like pushing down a tightly coiled spring. It will eventually force its way back. Our postmodern gods are often the good dimensions of creation that modern idolatry has neglected and suppressed. They are forcing their way back and becoming the new gods of our age.

Thus it is not surprising that in the last few decades many educational theorists of our time are attempting to recover things that have been neglected by an educational system that has been shaped by modern idols. Kenneth Bruffee is an example. He rightly identifies the rational individual as the root of modern education. At the foundation of modern education is a metaphor of learning in which the individual “human mind is a mirror of nature” (Bruffee 1982:98). Pedagogy, structures, curriculum all reflect this idolatry. Bruffee wants to recover the communal dimension of education as a collaborative learning process. Knowledge is a “collaborative artifact” that “places the authority of knowledge in the assent of a community of knowledgeable peers” (:103, 107). Science is not the individual mind mirroring the world but rather the construction of a human community. Knowledge does not take place as the individual scientist interacts with nature but rather as a community of scientists collaborate together. Knowledge is not mirroring reality but a matter of socially justified belief. Clearly Bruffee has seen the idolatry of rationalism and individualism and its effect on education. He rightly sees that the communal dimension of learning has been eclipsed. He wants to recover that dimension but in the process creates a new idol. Knowledge is separated from the creation we are called to know and understand.

As Christians we rejoice at the downfall of modern idols and the recovery of suppressed dimensions of God’s creation. But this does not mean allowing ourselves either to lose the

insights of modernity or fall into new forms of idolatry. Again along with new idolatry postmodernity brings new insight into God's world, often precisely at the point of idolatry. Educational leaders will want to critically examine new educational insights that arise with the fall of modern idols and look for ways to embody these fresh insights in the educational process.

4. The way ahead is to subvert contemporary educational forms giving them new shape and meaning by the power of the gospel.

If we reject the idolatry of both modern and postmodern forms of education, what is the way forward? Do we create *ex nihilo* new educational forms that are Christian? Is there a specifically Christian pedagogy, curriculum, leadership pattern, biology, and mathematics that somehow rises above our cultural struggles? Do these Christian forms come down out of heaven or straight from the Bible? Do we create these *de novo*? How do we relate to the long western tradition of education? These kinds of questions raise the whole issue of the relation of the Christian community with its culture – an issue I believe we need to return to in our postmodern times.

A full treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this short paper. Yet brief reference to a New Testament model will offer insight into the way we should approach and interact with the forms of our culture. The early church was born into the cultural milieu of the Roman Empire. The primary social institution that held the Roman Empire together was the *oikos*. *Oikos* is normally translated 'household' but it was a very different institution than what we call a household. We normally refer to the nuclear family. In the Roman Empire the *oikos* was the extended family but moved well beyond the family. It also incorporated economic relationships and political authority in an undifferentiated way. Like all institutions of the Roman Empire, the *oikos* was deeply shaped by the idolatry of that culture. Authority was lodged in the father or *paterfamilias* and he held absolute power. He was the *kurios* or lord of the home. The entire *oikos* was shaped by this abusive and hierarchical view of authority and by the sinful oppression that accompanied this power. The father maintained the right of life and death over all in his household. Clearly this social institution was a twisted and corrupted entity – probably even more twisted than schools shaped by the idolatry of the Enlightenment!

What would the early church do with this fundamental institution that they faced – this

foundational building block of Roman society? Would they simply *reject* it and invent new forms of marriage, family, and economic practice? No, their desire was to be *at home* in the culture and embody good news in the normal relationships of life. Any attempt at withdrawal or ghettoization would cripple the good news; the good news would not come in familiar forms. Then the early church would be irrelevant. Would they simply *affirm* and *adopt* it? Would they accommodate themselves to this social institution? No, that would be to compromise the gospel to idolatry. The early church recognized that they were not only to be at home in the culture, but also *at odds* with the controlling faith assumptions that undergird and shaped that culture. The early church was very aware of the idolatry that shaped the Roman Empire. There was tension between the life the gospel called for and the controlling idolatrous faith assumptions of the Roman culture. And it is precisely this tension that was the source of faithfulness.

If they did not reject nor affirm the household, what did they do? They subverted it. They discerned the creational relationships within the household – husband-wife, parent-child, boss-worker, etc. They transformed those relationships. They uprooted them from the soil of Roman idolatry and transplanted them into the soil of the gospel. The creational structure was recognized and affirmed; the idolatrous twisting of those relationships was rejected. Reread Ephesians 5 in this light. Paul’s exhortation to husbands to love their wives sacrificially, to nurture their children lovingly, and treat their slaves with respect was radical. Dignifying women and slaves with the responsibility of submitting *themselves* for the sake of the Lord was revolutionary. Those relationships were transformed. Insofar as the early church was obedient, a very different kind of *oikos* appeared. It was an institution recognizable to the Roman contemporaries of the early church, but fundamentally transformed. The father now used his authority to serve sacrificially rather than lord it over others. Wives, children, and slaves were raised to a new level of dignity.

I suggest that the same sort of thing needs to happen with schools. What educational forms does our culture present to us? What insights into the creation do these forms have? How have they been twisted by the formative idols of our culture? We must then grow in our ability to discern the difference between what is creational and what has been twisted by sin. Educational leaders need to develop a growing dialogue between the gospel and western culture about current educational forms, a dialogue that affirms the creational and rejects the idolatry. The goal of this

dialogue is the emergence of faithful and relevant educational models.

B. Educational Leadership in Postmodern Times

In this second section I would like to kill two birds with one stone. First, I want to offer an example of the kind of subversion about which I have been speaking. Second, I want to address the issue of educational leadership. I will interact with a paper Lee Hollaar wrote for the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities in June of this year entitled *Educational Leadership is Community Building: A Postmodern and Independent School Perspective*. I believe Hollaar is doing the kind of thing I am suggesting. Let me draw out his main point and alert you to the worldview and philosophical context.

Hollaar rightly points to two features of our postmodern condition: pluralism and the recovery of the communal dimension of human existence. Hollaar quotes Charles Jencks who says that “*pluralism* is the leading ‘ism’ of postmodernity, and a condition which most critics agree underlies the period” (Hollaar 2000: 6; cf. Jencks 1992:11). He also quotes Daniel Bell with respect to the recovery of community: “The postmodern industrial society . . . is a ‘communal’ society in which the social unit is the community rather than the individual” (*ibid*; cf. Bell 1992:264). These two features are closely related. Postmodern society is made up of a plurality of communities that share differing values, hopes, and interests. There is no way to adjudicate truth claims between communities; all voices have equal right to be heard. Each community is formed by its own common vision, commitment, and values.

This growing plurality of communities has implications for leadership. Leaders within these communities cannot be those who force a vision from the top down; postmodern people are suspicious of all truth claims. In postmodern sensibility, truth is considered to be a social construction for the sake of maintaining power. Claims for truth must be deconstructed to expose underlying agendas and grabs for power. Therefore, leaders must find a *modus operandi* that is sensitive to this situation. Leaders can no longer be hierarchical and autocratic but rather participatory and dialogic. The task of the leaders is, as the subtitle title indicates, community building – building communities with a common centre. Educational leaders must nurture a community that shares a common vision and understanding of the task of education. The leader

is no longer the expert but the facilitator. He or she encourages and facilitates a dialogue in which a common vision will emerge forming an educational community. To quote Hollaar: “The emphasis of leadership is upon shaping a common circle of values where others in the community share these values and feel compelled to pursue them. . . . In the postmodern context leadership then is **community building**. *Leadership is the process of learning together in such a way that enables participants in community to construct meaning toward a shared purpose*” (Hollaar 2000:8).

Does not this kind of language demonstrate a capitulation to postmodernity? Has Hollaar simply accommodated himself to the egalitarian, constructivist, and communitarian ways of thinking characteristic of our postmodern culture? Has Hollaar rejected the modern gods of bureaucratic hierarchy, objectivism, and individualism only to replace them with new postmodern gods? I don't think so. A few pages later Hollaar puts his finger on the idolatry present in postmodernity when he quotes Parker Palmer: “When a community attaches ultimacy to its ordained leadership or to the mass mind of its members, it will fall into idolatry *until it turns to a transcendent centre that can judge both parishioners and priests*” (Hollaar 2000:10; my emphasis; cf. Palmer 1998:117).

To understand the way this statement subverts postmodern idolatry, we must back up in history. Rene Descartes typifies the way one comes to know the truth in modernity. Descartes lived in a world of change and uncertainty. The scientific revolution was eroding both the authority of the church and ancient Ptolemaic science. How could one find certainty? Where could one find a solid foundation? His adage ‘*Cogito ergo sum*’ is well-known – ‘I think therefore I am.’ The rational individual was the basis and foundation for truth. Descartes made a rigorous distinction between the knowing subject and the object to be known. All the cultural, historical, and personal relativity of the knowing subject must be purged in an act of intellectual purification and methodological doubt. All subjective factors in knowing would lead one away from the truth and so the knowing subject must somehow be disinfected of this subjective corruption. Descartes sought to employ a method to enable him to rise above historical and cultural relativities, and all subjective ‘pollution.’ Only the rigorous use of reason guided by a method would enable him to transcend subjectivity, gain a neutral and dispassionate standpoint outside the relativities of history, and thus come to know the truth. This whole knowing process

was a solitary activity; Descartes retreated to his study to think, not the pub to discuss. The rational individual was the Archimedean point or foundation for all true knowledge; only if reason was purified of subjectivity by a method could truth be attained by the solitary knower. A leader, of course, would be the one who could best employ this process of methodological reason and become an expert. That person was to be trusted by others as one who obtained deeper insight.

Postmodernity has challenged Descartes at every point. Many academic disciplines have highlighted the many subjective factors that shape our knowledge: social factors like tradition, community, language, culture, history, faith, and personal factors like feelings, imagination, subconscious, gender, race, class, and so on. When one sees the power of these subjective factors to shape our knowledge, it would seem that relativism is the only option. No one could possibly know the world objectively. Not only is Descartes objectivism a hopeless illusion, so is his individualism. All knowing takes place in the context of a socially-embodied tradition. Knowledge is a social construction formed in a dialogical process within a community. While postmodernity has rightly called attention to the influence of social and personal factors in knowing, and that knowing is a communal process, autonomous humanity remains at the centre. The process of social construction, an important factor in knowledge, has been absolutized and idolized. Idolatry remains at the heart of postmodern epistemology. Listen again to the subversive words Hollar quotes: “When a community attaches ultimacy to its ordained leadership or to the mass mind of its members, it will fall into idolatry until it turns to a transcendent centre that can judge both parishioners and priests” (Palmer 1998:117; quoted Hollaar 2000:10). Neither the autonomous rational individual of modernity nor the autonomous hermeneutical community of postmodernity can be the centre. That transcendent centre must be found in God’s revelation.

What Hollar has done in the area of educational leadership is the following. First, he has rightly recognized the sensibilities of postmodern people – a fear of arrogant claims to know the truth, a knee-jerk rejection toward autocratic and top-down styles of leadership, an appreciation for the communal dimensions of knowing, and so on. Thus there is relevance; there is an attempt to employ postmodern forms that connect. Hollaar employs several vivid images worth repeating. “A bend in the road is not the end of the road unless one fails to make the turn” (:1).

The Hausa proverb: “If the music changes so does the dance” (*ibid*). He quotes James Russell Lowell: “There is no good in arguing with the inevitable. The only argument available with an east wind is to put on your overcoat” (:14). If Hollaar means by this, as I understand him, that we must be faithful in our culture, in the present, and not try to preserve antiquated forms, I agree. This, of course, does not mean a simple acquiescence or accommodation to the idolatry of our postmodern culture. In that case, we are called to walk against the east wind.

Second, there is an appreciation for and an attempt to embrace the creational insights of postmodernity. Postmodernity has rightly rejected domineering forms of leadership, the rational individual as the Archimedean point for knowledge, the importance of a community of interpretation, and so on. These are genuine insights into the creation, and Hollaar has attempted to honour and employ these insights.

Third, there is an attempt to subvert the idolatry that comes with those insights. The relativism and autonomy of the dialogical process within the community are rightly rejected with the recognition of the need for a transcendent centre. Human beings cannot construct a centre but must find it in God’s revelation.

I believe Hollaar’s method of dealing with postmodern forms of educational leadership is sound, the kind of subversion I believe needs to take place in every area of education – purpose, curriculum, pedagogy, structures, disciplines, and so forth. Perhaps I would have been a little more critical of postmodern forms of leadership and a little more appreciative of modern forms. It seems to me that the autocratic hierarchy of modernity is a twisted version of the fact that God gifts people differently and graces His community with insightful people who can do more than simply function as the facilitator of a dialogue. Nevertheless, these are questions of emphasis and strategy and not of foundational content.

C. Educational Leadership as Community Building Around a Worldview Centre

If leadership in a postmodern climate is nurturing a centre around which an educational community can carry on its task, the question is what kinds of issues need to be tackled in shaping that centre. I am sure that there are many but I believe that the starting point should be a shared worldview. This will include at least the following three dimensions.

1. Biblical Story

As Christians, we would all agree, I think, that the Bible must be the starting point in nurturing a common vision. Yet questions come up – questions that sometimes are assumed and their foundational importance unrecognized: What is the nature of Scripture? How should the Bible be used to shape an educational vision? How should the Bible function in shaping the educational process? I cannot tackle these critical questions here but let me suggest three things.

First, we must understand the Bible as one unfolding story of redemption against the backdrop of creation and sin, that is the true story about the world. The Bible tells us where universal history is going and how it will end. All human activity will be judged in that light. Breaking the Bible into theological, moral, or devotional bits limits the power of the Biblical story to shape our lives, including our educational practices. Biblical bits are easily absorbed into the idolatrous story of our culture. Nurturing an understanding of the Bible as the true story of the world should be the starting point for an educational community.

If the Bible is to function authoritatively in our educational institutions, secondly, we must understand our place in the Biblical story. We are living in between the times – between the coming of Jesus where he gained the victory of the kingdom, and his return when he will complete that victory. Why has God delayed the final judgement and the consummation? For the purpose of witness! The church is constituted as a preview of the coming kingdom of God. How does the call to bear witness to the kingdom of God shape the school? I believe we need a far deeper understanding of our call to make visible the victory of the cross in every aspect of life *for the sake of the unbelieving world*.

Finally, we need to nurture a vision where the light of the Bible is actually brought to bear on the task of education in specific ways. In the use of the Bible in education, the Reformation tradition has rightly attempted to avoid both Biblicism and dualism. Biblicism asks direct questions of the Bible and expects direct answers about all kinds of issues in life; it expects the Bible to tell us what God meant us to find in the creation in the light of the Bible. Dualism, on the other hand, excludes the Bible from consideration in all matters which are not termed ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ (Goheen 1996a, b; Greidanus 1982). The Bible offers many specific

themes important for our educational task. On the one hand, we must beware of illegitimately using the Bible in ways it was never meant to function. On the other hand, fear of Biblicism ought not to drive us to neglect specific Biblical teaching important for our calling.

2. *Western Story*

A second important factor in forming a worldview centre is concerned with knowing the western story that is shaping our culture generally, and the educational enterprise specifically. It seems to me that much contention and acrimony within the Christian community – from education to worship – comes because we don't recognize the worldview roots of the disagreement. Our foundational beliefs are changing. Conservatives often don't recognize the formative effect of modernity; progressives often don't recognize the formative effect of postmodernity. Recognizing the worldview foundations of many of these issues will ease some tension and open up the possibility of discussion. Furthermore, if an educational community does not want to be blown about by modern or postmodern winds, an understanding of the western story is essential. Educational leaders can nurture a worldview centre by fostering a growing recognition of the western story that shapes education. Let me again briefly allude to three aspects important for understanding the western story.

First, analysis of our cultural situation must drive to the religious beliefs that lie at the foundation or core of our culture. We might define culture as a common way of life rooted in a shared story. This story is shaped by the religious convictions that are collectively held. As Johann Bavinck says: "Culture is religion made visible; it is religion actualized in the innumerable relations of daily life" (Bavinck 1948:57). Or as Harvie Conn puts it: "Religion is not an area of life, one among many, but primarily a *direction* of life . . . Religion, then becomes the heart of culture's integrity, its central dynamic as an organism, the totalistic, radical response of man-in-covenant to the revelation of God" (Conn 1980:149-150). What is the religious story driving the formation of our culture?

Secondly, tracing the historical development of those religious beliefs will enable us to gain critical distance as we see that they are the product of a long process of cultural formation.

Thirdly, this analysis of the idolatrous and creational currents of our culture should lead to a

discussion of the way that our educational endeavours have been shaped by this religious core.

3. Living at the Crossroads Between the Two Stories

The Christian is a member of two communities: the church that embodies the story of the Bible and the cultural community that embodies the story of modernity collapsing into postmodernity. We live at the crossroads between two stories. Our embodiment of the gospel is always shaped by our culture. This includes, of course, our educational embodiment of the good news of the kingdom. We cannot, nor should we want, to escape the culture in which we live. If our cultural story is shaped by idolatry the question arises as to how we can embody a different story, the story of the Bible. What kind of strategy should be employed in regards to the forms of our culture as they have been shaped by idolatry? That question is important for any Christian community struggling with a worldview centre. Educational leaders will want to nurture this discussion. Let me make three brief comments, again with little elaboration.

First, there is a need to sense the tension between the Biblical story and the western story. We have been led astray by conceiving of our culture as either a secular neutral culture or a Christian culture. This releases the tension and sets us up to be syncretistically accommodated into the idols shaping our culture.

Second, three options ought to be excluded for resolving this tension: withdrawal, accommodation, and common ground. To deal with the tension we cannot withdraw from our culture; neither can we accommodate ourselves to the idolatry of the foundational beliefs of our culture. A third common approach must be avoided as well: a dualism which sees common ground in many areas of life (usually in the public life of culture, mathematics for example) and conflict in others (morality, for example).

Third, a Biblical cultural strategy will be both affirming and antithetical: affirming the creational insight and structure, and rejecting the idolatrous twisting of that insight. The gospel speaks both its 'yes' of grace and its 'no' of judgement on all cultural forms. Both of these words are important for faithfulness.

Conclusion

We live in a time of revolutionary change. Central to the postmodern situation is a rejection of all big stories that shape the world. However, the Bible tells the true story of universal history. That is the story that must shape our educational endeavours. If that is to happen leaders must nurture educational communities who know that story, who know the formative story of our culture, and know how to live at the crossroads between the two. This means, obviously, that educational leaders themselves must have a firm grasp on these issues. However, this is far more than a battle of perspectives. Education like all of human life, is caught up in that great cosmic battle between God's kingdom and the kingdom of darkness. Spiritual battles are not won by worldview analysis alone. Educational leaders in our postmodern setting will need to be men and women of prayer who are deeply rooted in Jesus Christ.

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