

EDUCATIONAL REMIX

A Dialogue Between a School For DJs and a School For Pastors

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“DJ-ing is a learned skill, one that requires practice. The DJ needs to search old record shops, looking for rare labels. She needs to pay attention to sound bites and the messages of her community. She needs ears to hear and eyes to see. These are like the skills of exegesis. As DJs, we must become adept at appreciating the unique contours of biblical literature, at accessing the resources of other church communities throughout history.

The DJ needs to learn what makes the community dance. These are the skills of pastoral listening so that the right track is playing. These are the skills of seeing the world around us, reading the issues, hearing the rhythm of the heartbeats...

This is the role of the pastoral leader in a post-modern world. She leads by example, remixing gospel and culture so that people dance to God’s beat. She teaches the community members to DJ for themselves, to handle text and culture in their work places and social spheres. She gives feedback, nurturing young DJs and extending experienced DJs.

I dream of seminaries as DJ schools, culturally engaged centers of remixing. Their role is to teach DJs to DJ, and to teach DJs to teach others to do the same...Encourage one another to become faithful DJs of the gospel and the culture.” (Taylor 2005:153)

--Steve Taylor

The Out of Bounds Church?

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Today someone asked me why I decided to go to seminary. I told them that anyone can make the Bible say whatever they want it to say, and I wanted to learn what it actually says firsthand. That seemed to appeal to my interrogator. It is true that I came to seminary with a hunger to know more about the Bible, and particularly to know how its messages applied to the urban context that I lived and worked in. What I did not anticipate, when I came to the theology classroom, was that I would also learn about music as well. I do not think that this is a typical seminary experience, but it has been mine.

I came to school not knowing much about music. I could appreciate it, but was always too intimidated to develop my own musical tastes.^[1] At one point, in an Old Testament theology class, it occurred to me that in the same way that I am intimidated by music, some of my urban friends are intimidated by theology. I figured that if I entered into their musical world, I would have some idea of what is like when I ask them to enter into my theological world. It was at this point that I started making connections between theology and music.

Even though my seminary classes were not explicitly focused on music, when I really listened, I could hear it described. My musical exploration brought me to the LA Scratch Academy, a school for those wanting to learn how to be DJs, and I found a similar phenomenon happening. As I sat in on the DJ classes, I could not help but hear theology described in musical language. Both the seminary classes and the DJ classes emphasized similar things: the need to

know your history, the importance of knowing the details of the material, listening for the underlying beat and flow. In each classroom the teachers offered tools for students to go deeper. I could not help but think that the same breath and heartbeat that is expressed throughout the Scriptures can be also found within music. Perhaps this is why music and theology have the ability to touch people's souls.

As I entered into the music world, I found that the DJ has the role most like the pastor. The DJ is not the disc jockey of the 1970s who played tracks of music. "Rather, he or she is a creative artist who takes segments from songs and arrangements and mixes them together to create new music" (Gibbs and Bolger 2005:25). A DJ has a set of music that he has to know really well so that he can mix it together and offer it to his audience. [2] DJ Hapa, the executive director of the LA Scratch Academy said in an interview, "I mean, one thing we preach over and over again here is, as a DJ, because you're not composing music and because the music that you're playing for audiences isn't your own, you really have to know that music even more than anyone else would" (Hapa 2008).

The DJ has to be very familiar with the material he works with, but he also has to feel the crowd and take them on a journey. A good DJ knows when to pick up the pace, when to slow it down, knows when to provoke people, when to introduce them to something new, or remind them of something from their past. Good theologians need these same skills of awareness and discernment.

A Pastor has a set of books in the Bible that she has to know really well so that she can mix it together and offer it to her congregation. Like the DJ, she also must balance the tasks of communicating information and responding to her congregation's needs. While DJs and pastors have different messages (i.e. they want people to hear the music/hear the gospel), and different means of communicating (i.e. behind the turntables/behind the pulpit), they also have much in common.

The classroom is a place where both DJs and theologians can come to learn about themselves, their material, and how to share their messages with their audience. What could these two schools learn from one another? Right now Fuller is in a season of evaluation and restructuring. The culture has changed from when Fuller first began, and the DJ school is very much responding to the contemporary culture.

It is hard to put two schools with such different values and purposes in conversation. Besides their obvious different objectives, Fuller is an established institution and Scratch is a young academy responding to the relatively new Hip Hop movement. Yet I believe this conversation could be very beneficial. As long as the Church has existed it has had to wrestle with how to interact with those who profess a different beliefs. Sometimes these differences are within the church (i.e. different denominations), and sometimes they are with other religious movements. Throughout its history the Church has developed various responses to New Religious Movements. [3] My thesis is that the interactions between the Church and New Religious Movements indicate how Fuller Theological Seminary and the LA Scratch Academy, despite having different objectives, can be in dialogue and learn from one another. [4]

STANCES TOWARDS THE "OTHER"[5]

Let us first look at some of the interactions that form the conversation between the Church and New Religious Movements. There have been some significant shifts in history that affect how the Church has responded to the “other,” or those who do not profess their same beliefs.[6] Reading accounts of both the Old and New Testament, very rarely do you find anyone questioning if God exists. People question suffering, they wonder if God is angry with them, at times if he has forsaken them, but it is always with an assumption that God is there and involved in their lives. It was not until the mid 1600’s, during the Age of Reason, that this came into question. Bruce Shelley, in his book *Church History in Plain Language*, describes the spirit of the Age of Reason as “nothing less than an intellectual revolution, a whole new way of looking at God, the world, and one’s self. It was the birth of secularism” (Shelley 1995). The Church has had various responses to secularism.[7]

POSTMODERN INFLUENCE

The challenge of the Church today is to contextualize the gospel in a postmodern culture.[8] Where it used to be the role of the church to help people understand their questions about God and the spiritual life, in today’s postmodern context some see the Church as irrelevant.[9] Peter Clarke, in his book *New Religions in Global Perspective: A Study of Religious Change in the Modern World*, observes that those in New Religious Movements are prepared to discover answers in secular interests and pursuits, including philosophy, art and music, rather than religious organizations and institutions. Of the role of the church he says:

“While traditionally this was to give legitimacy to society’s norms, values and goals, and to provide believers with a set of ready-made answers to questions of ultimate concern and with fixed, unalterable rituals to go with them, it now becomes one of creating the context in which individuals can arrive at their own solutions” (Clarke 2006:354).

The role of the church has shifted. How have Christians responded to this role of creating a context in which individuals can arrive at their own solutions? And how can Fuller Seminary prepare students to take on this task?

DIFFERENT RESPONSES

As boundaries and roles have shifted Christian mission organizations and denominations have both been open to new ways of contextualizing, as well as determined to hold on to traditions and values. In light of the Pastor/DJ conversation we will briefly explore three responses to this tension: that of missiologist Donald McGavran, a brief look at an Evangelical response, and the response of the Emerging Church. This will help me develop my own posture as I enter into the DJ culture.

McGavran

Missiologist Donald McGavran, in his book *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions*, emphasizes the need to contextualize the gospel. McGavran’s focus is on creating People Movements by building relationships with a significant amount of participants in a particular people group, and allowing them to remain immersed in their own culture (McGavran 2005:88). This is in contrast to the traditional missionary model of creating “Mission Stations” that require people leave their context in order to be introduced to the gospel. McGavran says, “Peoples become Christians where a Christward movement occurs *within that society*” (McGavran 2005:10). From McGavran’s perspective I recognize the importance of building relationships with DJs, as well as seeking to understand and enter into their DJ culture.

Evangelical

It is important to look at an Evangelical response because Fuller Seminary is an evangelical seminary (Fuller.edu 2008). Evangelicals are open to different perspectives and at the same time want to hold on to their creeds and confessions.[10] The Christian creeds and confessions emphasize that Jesus is the only way of salvation. This has typically defined the posture that evangelicals have in conversations with others. While all evangelicals affirm the uniqueness of Christ (Karkkainen 2003:148), beginning in the 1990's some evangelical theologians began to challenge this traditional exclusivism (Karkkainen 2003:149).[11] Two of these contemporary Evangelical theologians are Vinoth Ramachandra and Harold Netland.[12] Evangelicals are moving towards learning how to embrace what they believe while having even more openness and respect to other perspectives.

One example of this movement is identified by John W. Morehead, in a chapter entitled, "Where Do We Go from Here? Transforming Evangelical Responses to New Religions," Morehead describes a shift from respondent-oriented evangelistic models to speaker-oriented apologetics (Hexham, Rost, and Morehead II 2004:279). This means that instead of the traditional evangelical focus of how many people respond to a gospel message, the focus is on the ability of the speaker to express his or her beliefs. This means that as I enter the DJ culture my focus is not on converting DJs, but fully being who I am in that place and not shying away from expressing what I believe.

Emerging

It is also important to briefly note the Emerging Church perspective. This is a Christian perspective that has been born during the postmodern context. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger study Emerging Churches in *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Gibbs and Bolger define the Emerging Church as, "missional communities arising from within postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus who are seeking to be faithful in their place and time" (Gibbs and Bolger 2005:28). Those in Emerging Churches are eager to incorporate ways of being in community and following Jesus, while they are at the same time engaging in the cultural context. Some emerging churches even directly engage with and draw from the DJ culture.[13]

MY RESPONSE

It is important for me to develop my own theological perspective as I enter into the LA Scratch Academy. What are my own objectives? What does it mean for me to be a Christian and to interact with those who think differently than I do? What can I learn while holding on to what I believe?

I believe that Jesus is the way, but I'm not in a hurry for people to "get there." I trust that God is actively at work in every person's life. I also know that people's understanding of faith is a lifetime journey, one marked with significant moments and confessions, but also filled with many daily decisions in between all those significant ones. It has been through my own experiences of joy, brokenness, seeking, growth, questioning, and tragedy that I have become aware of God's presence in my life. Sometimes I experience this presence in the moment, sometimes it is through hindsight, and sometimes I am left still confused as to how God was at work, but my overwhelming experience has instilled me with a hope and a trust in Jesus that is the foundation of my faith.

As I interact with others, some who are wrestling with their understanding of God, I cannot hand them my hope or my trust in Jesus. I can be a witness to what I have seen and heard. I can offer them a listening ear and space to wrestle with their thoughts. I can even hope and believe *for* them if they are unable to do it for themselves. However, I cannot hand them what I have been given. I cannot make anyone believe. It is God's responsibility, not mine, to call out to his children. It is my responsibility to love with the love that I have been given. To be a witness and guide to what *I* have been given to share with my fellow pilgrims. This is the perspective I bring as I enter into the Scratch Academy and as I facilitate this conversation between Fuller and Scratch.

A LOOK AT EACH SIDE

Both Fuller and Scratch are voluntary schools. Their students come with some sort of desire to specialize and learn about a specific topic. You can ask students, "Why did you come?" and they will have some sort of reply. McGavran emphasizes the need to enter into the culture of the people group you are involved with. Therefore, let us now look at the objective of each of the schools we are interacting with.

FULLER

Fuller Theological Seminary is located in Pasadena, CA. It was established in 1947, and is made up of the School of Theology, the School of Psychology, and the School of Intercultural Studies. According to Fuller's statement of purpose it is "an evangelical, multid denominational, international, and multiethnic community dedicated to the equipping of men and women for the manifold ministries of Christ and his Church" (Fuller.edu 2008). Fuller's purpose is to equip men and women for ministry.

Fuller was established during the modern era. While classes and curriculums have continually been evaluated and improved upon, the core of how the school was established was rooted in this frame of thinking. Much of what is offered in the classroom is based in logic and theory. Students who are now coming to the classroom now are often thinking in a postmodern way. They are yearning for experiential and practical knowledge.

I have been told that, in the life of the seminary, there are times when the classroom is filled with second-career students, and then there are times when the majority of students are straight out of undergraduate school. Currently, Fuller has many younger students. Many of these students have less of a framework in which to evaluate the data they are given in the classroom than those who already have significant ministry experience. So instead of trying to work with text and context they are already familiar with, students are trying to build a framework from the information they are given in their classes.

In the classroom I feel this pressure that comes from trying to make sense of what is being taught. So much of the content is theoretical. I think there are often assumptions that the professors make about the student's spiritual maturity, knowledge and worldview. For example, I was the Teaching Assistant for two classes entitled "Spirituality and Mission." Each of these classes had sixty students in them. When reviewing reflections and autobiographies regarding the student's spirituality while here at seminary, many students said it was difficult and they were struggling. Out of 120 students there were probably only ten that said they felt encouraged and that they were growing in this place.

There seems to be somewhat of a disconnect between Fuller's purpose to be a community that equips students, and what is actually happening in the classroom. Before Fuller can expect students to be creative and innovative with the tools that they are given in the classroom, students need to either have a framework for what they are learning about or be comfortable with holding tensions. [14] It may be beneficial for Fuller to examine ways they can equip their students, not just with creeds and theories, but also with spiritual practices and tools to contextualize their education throughout their studies. [15]

In some ways Fuller's Pasadena campus is set up like McGavran's mission station model. Many of the full-time students have left their contexts in order to learn. This can emphasize the disconnect they feel between their cultural context and their classroom experience.

Fuller is a member of an organization called the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which is responsible for setting standards for theological institutions. In the ATS's Standards for Accreditation, article 3.2.1.3 states:

“Collaboration and communication extend beyond the theological school's immediate environment to relate it to the wider community of the church, the academy, and the society. Theological scholarship is enhanced by active engagement with the diversity and global extent of those wider publics, and it requires a consciousness of racial, ethnic, gender, and global diversities” (ATS 2007:138).

According to ATS, Fuller is committed to collaborate and communicate *beyond* the theological school's immediate environment. Dialogue with the Scratch Academy could be a way that Fuller is open to living out this commitment.

SCRATCH

In order to understand the Scratch Academy's purpose it is important to have some background of the Hip Hop movement. [16] Hip Hop is a musical genre that began in New York City in the late 1970s. It was the era of rock and disco, neither of which resonated with the young people who lived in the Bronx (Jay 1998). Many say the founder of this type of music was DJ Kool Herc who was from Kingston, Jamaica. Herc began to notice a specific section of the song, named the “bridge” or the “break,” which the audience seemed to really connect with. [17] So using multiple record players he found a way to continuously loop the breaks of songs together to create a new song. [18] Herc had found a way to create music by using other people's songs. Jam Master Jay, the founder of the Scratch Academy, says that “Hip hop was the funk and the soul of anybody's music” (Jay 1998).

It used to be that in order for aspiring DJs to learn the trade they had to find experienced DJs to teach them. Over the years, as DJing has become more popular, it has also become a lot more accessible. According to DJ Hapa, the Executive Director of the LA Scratch Academy, many DJs now enter in without knowing the art and culture of DJing, which is why the Scratch Academy was created in 2002 (Hapa 2008). Hapa sees part of the task of the Scratch Academy is, “to elevate the DJ as a musician and the turntable as an instrument. We also aim to educate our local community about hip-hop culture. Up until recently, people saw DJs as jukeboxes. There's so much more than that in the art form” (Sonksen 2005). According to the website the mission of the Scratch DJ Academy is to offer “education and access” (Scratch.com 2009).

The format for the classes are “half lecture and lab” (Scratch.com 2009). Michael Cannady, who is now the Chief Strategy Officer for the Scratch Music Group, says, “Our curriculum was designed to help students learn both correctly and quickly. It’s true that you can learn a lot of these skills from a friend who DJs or maybe even on your own, but learning from Scratch is quicker and [we] make sure you learn the right way” (Courtney 2007). Both Fuller and Scratch are focused on equipping their students with tools.

This winter I sat in on one of the six-week DJ101 classes at the LA Scratch Academy. I noticed that in the classroom students were given background and theory, but it was integrated with learning practical skills. Throughout most of the time the students were in the classroom they stood behind their turntables training their hands to properly master the art of manipulating the records. I honestly do not think aspiring DJs would sign up for classes that were all theoretical.

In some ways Hip Hop has similar characteristics to a New Religious Movement.^[19] According to Clarke, one of the characteristics of NRMs are that they have an, “experiential approach to spiritual understandings and ultimate truth, and this sets it apart from creedal based religions” (Clarke 2006:10). The Scratch Academy emphasizes the importance of an experiential approach to learning in the classroom. This is different than the way the Evangelical seminary focuses theory and teaching creeds.

One of the most interesting contrasts I noticed between Scratch and Fuller is the way that Scratch was so comfortable with working with fragments. At the core of the Hip Hop culture is an ability to play with the pieces of songs and fit them together in new ways. Where the students at Fuller are challenged as they try to build a framework and hold information in tension, the students at Scratch are encouraged to seek out the “breaks.”

In a way Scratch functions like McGavran’s People Movement Model. The Academy is a hub for the Hip Hop people group. As students enter in, they are introduced to the culture and are connected into a larger network of DJs. Some of the teachers at the school helped start the movement. For example Grand Wizard Theodore, who invented the “scratch”^[20] says that he, “jumped at the chance to teach.” He said, “I didn’t have anyone to teach me. It feels good to give back and [Scratch has] become like my second home” (Coffey 2007:110). Another teacher DJ Evil Dee, of the Beaminerz and Blackmoon, refers to the students as the “DJ’s of the future.” He says, “I mean, if they're not spinning with me in a few years, they'll be replacing me!” (Scratch.com 2009).

DIALOGUE

Despite having different objectives, Fuller Seminary and the Scratch Academy can be in dialogue with one another. From the interactions between the Church and the New Religious Movements we are reminded by McGavran to build relationship and seek to understand the culture of the other. The evangelical conversation reminds us to seek a balance in holding on to what we believe while we learn to be open to the other, as well as the importance of speaker-oriented apologetics. And the Emerging Churches model for us ways to engage in different cultural contexts.

Philip Johnson, as he engaged with “New Age and Do-It-Yourself Seekers” through his booth ministries challenges us to remember that our ministry, “is not a monologue; instead, it involves dialogue – a two-way process of communicating and understanding” (Hexham, Rost,

and Morehead II 2004:240). In a dialogue between Fuller and Scratch, the pastor can learn how to be an artist, and the DJ can learn how to be a pastor.

The skill that both DJs and pastors are attempting to develop is to find select material and mix it together into an appropriate presentation that connects with the emotions and circumstances of the audience in front of them. The difficulty comes in both knowing a broad framework for the material that is being mixed, and knowing the specific elements that make up the larger parts. Both DJs and Pastors take up this challenge. For example, some Christians can only refer to the Bible as a whole. They flippantly make statements like “The Bible says...” without knowing any of the details within the book. This would be the equivalent of someone saying, “Country music is like...” and then not being able to give the names of any country artists. As both music lovers and God lovers go to school they begin to build a framework for mapping the internal structure of songs and the books of the Bible. An expert DJ/Pastor is someone who is able to use a tiny snippet of a song, or quote one verse while they know how it fits into the larger structure. This is a difficult thing to be able to do; it takes a lot of commitment and study to know material so well. A fake DJ/Pastor will try to use a snippet or a verse without knowing the larger context. It can sound like an expert, but it does not carry the same authority.

Steve Taylor, founding pastor of Graceway Baptist Church in Ellerslie, New Zealand, also utilizes this analogy between pastors and DJs in his book, *The Out of Bounds Church? Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change*.^[21] Taylor explains that, “The practice of separating a piece of music from its original context and setting it in a different musical context can create a range of new meanings. The sample can reinforce or amplify a message. It can ironically subvert or it can clash with an ideology, opening up new meanings in that juxtaposition” (Taylor 2005:139). Our ability as DJ/Pastors to move within our material and make new connections is what conveys the spirit and the life the material holds. Our goal is not for our audience to focus on us, but instead on what we are presenting.

LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER

Even though our schools have different objectives we are still able to learn from one another. In class, on February 13, 2009, Dr. Bolger talked about an emerging leader who was asked how his movement could be recreated. He said, “It can’t” (Bolger 2009:Feb 13). This is an important reminder as we look to what we can learn from one another. We are not trying to mimic each other, but be who we are and still gain insights from one another.

FULLER FROM SCRATCH

A few things that Fuller could learn from Scratch are how to engage with context in the classroom, and how to encourage students to be artists. Scratch is very comfortable working with fragments, a skill in this postmodern context. Henry Jenkins, a scholar at MIT, defines why this is important in what he calls “media convergence.”

“We are living in an age when changes in communications, storytelling and information technologies are reshaping almost every aspect of contemporary life - - including how we create, consume, learn, and interact with each other. A whole range of new technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content and in the process, these technologies have altered the ways that consumers interact with core institutions of government, education, and commerce” (Jenkins 2009).

DJs are actively thinking from this contemporary configuration of culture.

Scratch is also encouraging their students to be creative. They are able to learn concepts in the classroom by working with material that they already love. Fuller could find ways to encourage creativity in all of their classes, rather than specific ones. Sir Ken Robinson, in a talk entitled, “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” challenges the way academic institutions emphasize “correct” answers, rather than encouraging students to take risks and being willing to make mistakes. He says that the classroom should draw out the gift of the human imagination, and teachers should “see our creative capacities for the richness that they are” (Robinson 2006).

I do not think Fuller should make rules and requirements for students to contextualize information in the classroom, but I do think they can make decisions and commitments that exhibit these values. For example, Fuller could focus on offering housing options in downtown Los Angeles. Fuller could encourage professors to share teaching techniques with one another and reward professors who find creative ways to ground their information in context and helpful frameworks. Fuller could challenge students to be in dialogue with “the other” in natural and organic ways. This could even take the form of a retail job viewed in a missionary context. Professors from different schools could be encouraged to teach together.^[22] These are just some ideas. In order for me to develop more concrete examples of what Fuller could learn from Scratch I would have to spend some more time immersed in the Scratch culture.

SCRATCH FROM FULLER

Just as Fuller can gather some insights from Scratch, Scratch can also learn from Fuller. I have been surprised by how welcoming the DJs have been to me as I have spent time at the Academy. In my very first interview with DJ Hapa we talked for three hours about what we could learn from one another. It was such an exciting conversation. I had gone into the interview knowing what I was hoping to learn from him, but it had not occurred to me that I would have something to offer him as well.

As we started talking about a variation of “pastoral care” for DJs, Hapa said, “I mean, there is so much material here that I think a lot of people need to hear, and need to be, you know, kinda woken up to. Especially in our world” (Hapa 2008). Hapa said that for a DJ to be really good at what he does he has to really know himself well, so that he would be willing to take risks (Hapa 2008). This is how we started brainstorming ways that the DJ school could help people get in touch with their “core selves.” Hapa said it was helpful to have someone outside of the music scene come in to have the conversations he would not be able to have with the DJs. He said, “If I try to sit down with someone to talk about their ‘core self’ we will just end up talking about music” (Hapa 2008).

CONCLUSION

There is still so much more to discover from this connection between DJs and pastors. To begin, the interactions between the Church and the New Religious Movements have been able to inform how Fuller Theological Seminary and the LA Scratch Academy, despite having different objectives, are able to dialogue and learn from one another. The difficult balance in a conversation like this is in holding fast to what you value and believe, and at the same time being open to the other.

From the history of the Church and New Religious Movement conversations we are able to learn the importance of developing a theological posture of approaching others. When we look at Fuller and Scratch independently we see how they are unique, but we also begin to see some things they have in common. The focus of our dialogue is that it could go both ways. Together we can have a vision for encouraging one another to become “expert” DJs and “expert” pastors. We are just beginning to brainstorm about the ways that Fuller can learn from Scratch and Scratch from Fuller, though we recognize the more we can learn, the more time we spend with one another. Just like a DJ mixes together two songs on the turntable to create a new sound, putting Scratch and Fuller in conversation with one another will allow a new “song” to emerge.

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A: *Brief* HISTORY OF INTERACTIONS WITH THE “OTHER”

Foundational in the understanding of the people of God is what it means to be “holy,” or set apart. With this comes both pride and complications when interacting with others. For the ancient Jew there were certain assumptions that would not be questioned. God exists. God is involved in his people’s daily life. God has chosen the Jewish people. These assumptions greatly influenced the Jew’s interactions with other cultures.

With Jesus came a major shift in the Jewish understanding of what it meant to be included in the people of God. For Christians it became necessary for one to confess with their mouth and their lives that they were committing to the way of Jesus. Therefore, Christianity was founded in a posture of evangelizing others to follow Jesus.

A significant shift in Christian’s interactions with others came in the eighteenth century, at the time of the Enlightenment. Stemming from the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment “transformed the ethos of the theology of religions, especially with regard to Christology, the focus of the relationship between Christianity and other religions” (Karkkainen 2003:89). This was a shift to valuing logic and reason, which completely changed the questions people were asking about God. At this time Christians, instead of inviting others to choose the way of Jesus, were challenged to prove God’s existence.

An inability to resolve a coherent understanding of something beyond anyone’s description led to Postmodern fragmentation. This is the backdrop for any interactions we have with others today. In the Postmodern context people want to know, “Does God exists?” “Is God involved in our daily lives?” and “How is one included in God’s people?” Much of Christian’s responses to non-Christians rests upon their understanding of these questions.

B: PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS

Harold Netland (Evangelical)

Netland’s most compelling point for me is that a genuinely pluralistic position on religions is incoherent. While I am passionate about learning from others and being open and graceful, I recognize the need to have a rock that I hold on to. If I deny that Jesus is unique, then I loose my solid footing and have nothing to stand on.

Netland says there are three foundational subjects that must be addressed: “soteriological question of destiny of unevangelized, theological explanation for the phenomena of human religiosity, the Missiological question of the extent to which we can adapt and build on aspect of

other religious traditions in establishing the church in various cultural contexts” (Karkkainen 2003:331).

“I do believe that as followers of Jesus we are to treat followers of other religions with respect and dignity, and we should develop bridges to other religious communities. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and in today’s world our neighbors include religious others” (Netland and Knitter 2008).

“Should a follower of Jesus Christ be a religious pluralist? I think not, and for two major reasons. First, because being a committed follower of Jesus Christ, as I understand it, entails accepting beliefs that are incompatible with religious pluralism. And second, I do not think that a genuinely pluralistic position on the religions is coherent” (Netland and Knitter 2008).

Vinoth Ramachandra (Evangelical)

I appreciate how Ramachandra is so willing to embrace the suffering of others and to engage Christianity in all the areas of his life. So often Christians shy away from ethics and politics, and others notice this. If we cannot show others how we are reconciling Jesus in every area of our lives, then we bear witness to a faith that is not compelling to those in the many facets of the world.

“My fundamental conviction remains the absolute lordship of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ over every area of life. My second conviction is that we cannot bear credible witness to this truth without entering, imaginatively, into the pain of those who suffer the consequences of the worship of lords other than Jesus Christ. Such false lords—idols, ideologies—need to be unmasked in every age. I try to use my speaking and writing gifts to do that, but I find myself coveting other gifts—music, novel writing, filmmaking—which may be more effective in this present age. I have discovered that it is by embracing the suffering of others—in my case, remaining in a war-torn, poverty-stricken nation rather than seeking security in the rich West—that one is given insights and sensitivities that may elude others. Another conviction is that faithfulness to Christ requires constant openness to others, even our fiercest anti-Christian critics, to see how our own faith and lifestyle may themselves be redolent with idolatry. The biggest objections to Christians and Christianity are ethical, not intellectual. I have little time for the kind of apologetics that is divorced from ethics and political life.” (Keller 2009)

Paul F. Knitter (Christian Pluralist)

I was challenged by Knitter’s perspective. I appreciated some of the ways he graciously viewed scripture in order to allow him to interact with others who have different beliefs. I felt like he articulated the stance that I can sometimes live out in my words and actions. Yet I feel like there are holes in his argument as well. I cannot confidently say that his perspective is mine, because I do believe there is something unique about Jesus.

“I suggest that the ability to commit ourselves to a life of orthopraxic following of Jesus requires that we know he is truly Son of God and Savior; it does not require that we know he is only Son of God and Savior.

Using the analogy of marriage, in order to make a decision to marry someone, we have to have reliable assurance that s/he truly possesses the qualities of honesty, integrity, goodness, etc that we feel are essential to a committed relationship; we do not have to know that s/he is the only man or woman who possesses such qualities, the only possible person whom we might marry. I believe it is possible—indeed, I believe this is a central challenge to Christian identity today in this world of pluralism—that we be fully committed to Jesus and the Gospel and at the same time that we be truly open to what the Spirit may be revealing to us and challenging us with by means of the other religions.

We must learn how a genuine openness to the universal Spirit does not jeopardize our total personal commitment to the Word incarnate in Jesus (any more than the full divinity of the Spirit does not diminish the full divinity of the Son within the life of the Trinity)” (Netland and Knitter 2008).

“Please note here: the relativity of truth-claims does not mean the relativism of truth-claims. Just because it is impossible for anyone to know “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” does not mean that we cannot affirm the “real truth, the binding truth, and the truth for which we are ready to give our lives.” (Netland and Knitter 2008)

Makes an interesting point, from The New Testament scholar, Krister Stendahl, that all the “one and only” language is “love language” “The early Jesus-followers were speaking about the Jesus with whom they were in love, who had transformed their lives, whom they wanted others to know about. People in love are passionate about what they feel and exuberant in how they speak. They naturally use superlative language: ‘you are the most beautiful, the most adorable, the one and only’” (Netland and Knitter 2008).

“Missionaries are those people in the Christian community who go forth to let others know about Jesus and the Kingdom in order to convert them to that Kingdom (not necessarily to the Christian community). But missionaries are also those people who go forth to listen and to learn in order to enrich the Christian community.” (Netland and Knitter 2008)

There are two proclamations that missionaries have to deal with: the incarnate Logos and the universal spirit, “In their difference and in their relatedness, they enhance each other. Ancient Christian theologians have called this mutual enhancing perichoresis—dancing together. Missionaries “dance” between their dual responsibilities of proclaiming and listening. And through this dancing, both the Basileia of the Spirit and the Ekklesia of the Christ become greater realities in our world.” (Netland and Knitter 2008)

C: WHAT ARE THE TENSIONS IN THE WRITINGS?

(This is an excerpt from a paper I wrote for *OT504: Writings* for Dr. Goldingay on March 20, 2008 at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA.)

Throughout this course I have come to recognize that the Writings offer a wide variety of ways for people to tell their stories, express their feelings and face their questions. [\[23\]](#) I feel

like this challenged my assumptions of how God interacts with the world and individuals, and how I interact with God and the world.[\[24\]](#)

In the Writings God seems to be clearly orchestrating what is going on in the world in some accounts (Daniel visions), and is not even mentioned or obviously involved in others (Esther). At the same time that the Writings offer the perspective that God is working things out in the end (Daniel visions), there is also an insistence that God is present and is to be worshiped right now (Chronicles). In some books there is an emphasis on understanding the history of the people of God (Narrative books), while others do not mention the history at all (Wisdom Books). In the Writings, God is King of the world (Daniel stories), but the kings of the world have authority too (Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel).

God interacts with individuals in a variety of ways in the Writings. The Writings show God responding to the faithful (Nehemiah, Chronicles, Daniel, Psalms), but also working through coincidences (Esther, Ruth, Daniel). God sometimes reveals hidden things (Daniel stories), and in other cases does not reveal what a person really wants to know (Ecclesiastes). In some instances God responds to prayers of lament (Job, Psalms), and other times He does not (Ecclesiastes, Psalms). The Writings offer warnings about sex (Proverbs), and at the same time are also enthusiastic about sex (Song of Songs). We are taught that God wants us to live differently than others in the world (Ezra-Nehemiah), and also that God likes life and worldly things (Proverbs, Song of Songs). The Writings show God's people are to be separate from others (Nehemiah), and that outsiders are welcomed into His people (Ruth).

Through the Writings we are encouraged to interact with God with all of our humanity. The Writings offer us vocabulary for worship and praise (Psalms, Chronicles), but also a vocabulary of lament (Psalms, Lamentations). At times we are to accept that we are guilty (Psalms, Lamentations), and in other moments we can insist to God that we have been faithful (Psalms, Job). The Writings remind us we cannot know the big picture (Ecclesiastes), and also offer to show us the big picture (Daniel visions). In the Writings we are shown how to live (Proverbs), but also discover this does not always work out for us (Job, Ecclesiastes).[\[25\]](#) What I learned from these tensions in the Writings was to read every word and look at what the text actually says. I was reminded not to focus on one part of scripture, but to take in as much as I could to gain a better understanding of who God is and what it means to be faithful. In general, in this course it was not so much "what" I studied, but "how" Dr. Goldingay encouraged us to study that really affected me. He pointed out that we often ask questions of the scriptures that they are not answering, and challenged us to leave those questions unanswered.[\[26\]](#) In this class I was challenged to let the Truth be complicated.

D: START OF HIP HOP

--DJ KOOL HERC ON HOW HE STARTED USING THE BREAKS OF SONGS
(Some call the founder of Hip Hop)

“Every Jamaican record has a dub side to it. So I just tried to apply that. As the years went along I'm watchin people, waiting for this particular break in it, the rhythm section. One night, I was waiting for the record to play out. Maybe there are dancers waiting for this particular break. I could have a couple more records got the same break in it - I wonder, how it be if I put them all together and I told them: "I'm going to try something new tonight. I'm going to call it a merry-

go-round.” The B-Boys, as I call it, the energetic person, they're waiting just to release this energy when this break comes in.’ Herc saw a ready-made audience for his 'breakdowns'” (Channel4Books 1999).

--JAM MASTER JAY ON START OF HIP HOP
(DJ for Run DMC and Founder of the Scratch Academy)

“At the time in 79, 80, Disco was really big in America. So how Hip Hop really got big, the kids rebelled. The kids of the ghettos of America rebelled on disco. Like, you had the rock and roll kids saying disco sucked. And you had the black kids saying, you know that wasn't into rock and roll, we had no music. You know, we had no real music to get into. R&B, the Motown scene had died down in the late 70s, and it was like disco, I can't think of the names of the songs, but it was just a big disco scene going on and we really hated disco.

So that's when everybody just really got into hip hop. Because hip hop tapes were going around. We were getting hip hop tapes from everyone in the city, like Grand Master Cash and Grand Wizard Theodore, and you know that's the Cold Crush Brothers...all these tapes would come out of the parks. So that was the biggest form of music to the urban youth in America. We were chasing after - how can we find these tunes? How can we find these beats that these guys are rhyiming over? How can we find out how we can be a part of what is going on?

...So that is how hip hop, the vibe of hip hop really started. It was disco, forced us into hip hop. Hip hop don't really have a sound, because we weren't really making records back in these days. We were just taken people's records and rapping over their records...Hip hop was the funk and the soul of anybody's music” (Jay 1998).

--AFRIKA BAMBAATAA ON THE PURPOSE OF HIP HOP
(Founder of the Zulu Nation)

"When we made Hip Hop, we made it hoping it would be about peace, love, unity and having fun so that people could get away from the negativity that was plaguing our streets (gang violence, drug abuse, self hate, violence among those of African and Latino descent). Even though this negativity still happens here and there, as the culture progresses, we play a big role in conflict resolution and enforcing positivity" (ZuluNation.com 2009).

E: CASE STUDY: STEVE TAYLOR

(Founding pastor of Graceway Baptist Church in Ellerslie, New Zealand)

As I was writing this paper I came across a chapter of Steve Taylor's book, *The Out of Bounds Church? Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change*, that eloquently put to words so much of what I have been trying to say. It is equally encouraging and humbling when you find another who is echoing your sentiments. On the one hand, you want to shout, “YES! This is *exactly* what I've been getting at!” And find a way to ring the author to celebrate. Yet, at

the same time it comes with a little nudge of disappointment that you weren't the first and only one to put these two pieces together. The following are some excerpts from the chapter entitled, "Culture Samplers."

ture Samplers." "Some excerpts from the disappointment are equally encouraging and humbling when you find another who is echoing "...just as a music DJ samples from other sources to create something new, we were working out a way of thinking about church that involves sampling from the culture to create new understandings of God."

I should have told him there are dimensions of Moby—his strong environmental concern, his spiritual seeking—that are consistent with the gospel and well worth sampling as we seek to follow Christ" (Taylor 2005:137).

"The world we live in is inviting us to find fresh ways of thinking about the relationship between gospel and culture. Jesus, the Word became flesh, lived and loved in the midst of his culture. He routinely used the common, the familiar, the cultural to help the gospel connect with those who listened to him" (Taylor 2005:138).

"...neither isolation (the tendency of conservative Christianity) nor accommodation (the tendency of liberal Christianity) is the answer. It is the willingness to remix the culture that will allow us to be the missional church we are called to be" (Taylor 2005:144).

"The relationship between gospel and culture is one of plurality, bite-sized sampling from everyday life. The image of DJ-ing provides a way to access this bite-sized culture" (Taylor 2005:149).

"The community provides instant and direct feedback. If the tunes are bad, the clubbers stop dancing and find something else to do. The smart DJ pays attention to the dancing crowd and adjusts accordingly. Effective DJ-ing means allowing our church communities to give us feedback on how well we DJ and on how true we are to gospel and culture." (Taylor 2005:152)

"The ethical question I ask myself when I DJ is, 'How would I feel if the original author of this sample was present today?' This question keeps me ethically honest." (Taylor 2005:154)

[1] I downloaded my very first CD off of iTunes last May (Common's "Be"). Then, when my best friend told me that downloads "didn't count" and informed me that I had to go to a record store and get an actual hardcopy for my first CD, we took a trip to Tower Records in Hollywood. There I purchased a collection by Sam Cooke. When I told the guy at the register the significance of my purchase he said, "Welcome to the 21st Century."

[2] Both men and women are excellent pastors and DJs. For consistency in this paper I will refer to DJs as men and pastors as women in my examples. I am by no means limiting these particular roles to these particular genders.

[3] According to Peter Clarke, who writes on New Religious Movements or NRMs, “The term ‘new’ is used here in preference to such terms as ‘cult’ or ‘sect,’ both of which have not only a descriptive but also a normative use, in the sense that they not only refer to empirical phenomena but also have acquired a negative value connotation” (Clarke 2006:9-10).

[4] There are two perspectives that I feel are important to understand in the way that I am approaching this paper. The first, is that I have had a wonderful experience at Fuller and I desire for this school to excel in what it sets out to do. At times I may offer critiques and challenges about what I have noticed from my time here at school, but they must be heard with an understanding of my care and concern for Fuller. I am excited about this time of restructuring and evaluation. My hope is for Fuller to be a nurturing environment that teaches students to dynamically look at themselves, Scripture, and the world in a way that enables them to recognize, discern, and respond to the Spirit in any context they find themselves in.

The second perspective I have for this paper is that I want pastors to be pastors, and DJs to be DJs. I understand that they are different roles with different objectives. I am not trying to convert DJs and I do not want pastors to run out and become DJs. My hope is that pastors and DJs offer who they are and what they do to a dialogue, so we can learn from one another.

[5] This section is taking on a huge topic that cannot be addressed adequately in such a small space. My intent is to familiarize the reader with some of the perspectives and insights into this conversation.

[6] See “*Brief* HISTORY OF INTERACTIONS WITH THE ‘OTHER’” in the Appendix.

[7] Richard H. Niebuhr in his book entitled *Christ and Culture* describes five possible responses Churches can have when responding to culture (Niebuhr 2001). In response to Niebuhr’s book Leonard Sweet pulled together *The Church in Emerging Culture*, which articulates five contemporary paradigms the Church can have to culture (Sweet 2003).

[8] According to Jeffrey Burkhardt, a secularist and Professor of Ethics and Policy Studies in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida, “Postmodernism has been defined in many ways, and not always consistently; but one steady theme is that contemporary society is marked by the absence of a single, unifying philosophical foundation on which objective truths can be based. There are no grounding principles that govern values; in other words, no foundation for Truth and Good” (Burkhardt 2008:160). Burkhardt assesses that at some time between the 16th and late 20th century, with the assistance of certain veins of philosophy and the mass media “the Enlightenment project was either rejected or simply abandoned.” He goes on to say that from his perspective neither science or religion can provide an adequate base for people to develop a collective understanding, resolve problems, or form consensus (Burkhardt 2008:162).

[9] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, in their book *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, recognize that postmodern generations have “simply chosen to ignore the organized church as irrelevant to their spiritual quest” (Gibbs and Bolger 2005:21).

[10] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, in his book, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, says that the term evangelical lacks clarity. He defines it as, “various (mainly Protestant) Christian traditions that are open to the dialogue with all other Christians and want to cherish classical Christianity as explicated in the creeds and mainstream confessions, and yet also remain open to recent developments in theology and other academic fields” (Karkkainen 2003:145).

[11] According to Evangelical Christian, John Sanders, this shift began to happen because, “The church, through biblical teaching and missionary experience, has encountered evidence of God’s redemptive work in cultures not

previously exposed to the preaching of the Christian message. Indications of an implicit knowledge of God can be found in many cultures at numerous times” (Karkkainen 2003:149).

[12] For excerpts on Vinoth Ramachandra and Harold Netland’s perspectives and my response to their views see “Perspectives of Contemporary Theologians” in the Appendix. I also included some of Paul F. Knitter’s Christian pluralist perspective from a debate between Netland and Knitter on “Can a Christian be a Pluralist?” (Netland and Knitter 2008).

[13] Later we will look at an example of this from Steve Taylor in *The Out of Bounds Church?*

[14] In some classes, more than others, I have found professors to be comfortable with encouraging students to allow the material they are working with to be complicated. One example of this would be Dr. Goldingay’s class on the Old Testament Writings. For more reflection on this see an excerpt from a paper I wrote for his class “What are the Tensions in the Writings” in the appendix.

[15] At Fuller there are classes available on spirituality, and there are also internships and practicums that are required in certain programs. This is not what I am referring to. In my degree program I was determined to translate what I learned in each classroom back to the urban setting. During the course of my studies I was surprised at how much work I had to do to contextualize the material given to me in the classroom. I was constantly asking how what I was learning was relevant and applicable to the urban environment. It helped that I lived in an urban community most of the time I studied at Fuller. Often I felt a disconnect between what I was learning and how I was being prepared for ministry. I found myself working hard to make those connections for myself. It was as if it was so obvious to the professors how the information was useful that they did not focus on making these connections for the students. Some professors would not have been able to make these connections because they have only had experience in academia, or in ministry contexts that are so different from the ones students experience today.

[16] For more information see “Start of Hip Hop” in the Appendix.

[17] In an interview, Herc describes how he noticed the break, “So I started playing from a dance floor perspective. I always kept up the attitude that I’m not playing it for myself, I’m playing for the people out there” (Channel4Books 1999).

[18] This is where we get the concept of “break-dancing.”

[19] I recognize that NRMs are directly relating to spiritual movements and Scratch in no way claims to be a Religious institution.

[20] Scratching is a specific way of moving the record to produce certain noises. Grand Wizard Theodore discovered the Scratch one day when his mom was telling him to turn down his music. In response to his mom, he moved the record in a way that created a sound from the needle that he thought sounded interesting. You can see Grand Wizard Theodore describe this in Doug Pray’s documentary, *Scratch* (Pray 2001).

[21] For more excerpts from Taylor see “Case Study: Steve Taylor” in the Appendix.

[22] Throughout my time at Fuller I have taken three classes on sexuality, one from each of the three schools. Fuller could form one class on sexuality, drawing on information from all three schools, and require all students to take a class on this important topic.

[23] John Goldingay, OT504 “Syllabus and Course Notes,” 22. Winter 2008.

[24] Some of the following tensions were identified throughout the course and some were pointed out in the “Intertextual Nature of the Writings” in OT504 “Course Notes,” 153. Winter 2008.

[25] David Hubbard on Wisdom: “Proverbs says, ‘These are the rules for life; try them and you will find that they work.’ Job and Ecclesiastes say, ‘We did and they don’t.’” OT504 “Syllabus and Course Notes,” 153. Winter 2008.

[26] John Goldingay, T504 Class notes, January 10, 2008. Winter 2008.