

# A THEOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT

Ian S. Markham





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*I dedicate this book to my three sisters:*

*Rosemary Sowden*

*Jacqueline Draycott*

*Debbie Markham*





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advice (often unasked for), the support in the difficult moments, and many a smile and a laugh thanks to shared recollections. It is to my three sisters that I dedicate this book.

Ian Markham, Hartford Seminary

# INTRODUCTION

It must not be forgotten that reason too needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

Faith needs reason and reason needs friendship explains Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*. Theology needs both faith and reason because it is in the truth business. Our task as theologians is to build on the experience of God's people and arrive at better understandings of God and God's relations with the world. And this needs the friendship of our fellow truth seekers. Given our subject matter (and God is about as big as you can get), it is madness to believe that we can "go it alone." And the best theologians in the Christian tradition have recognized this. Their theology was an engaged theology. It was a theology ready and willing to learn from non-Christian sources.

This seems so obvious yet it is today so contentious. For some, the problems are philosophical: different traditions, explain Milbank, have incommensurable rationalities that make engagement very difficult.<sup>2</sup> For others, it is a matter of fidelity to the tradition: Karl Barth talks of secular philosophy as the "classical point for the invasion of alien powers."<sup>3</sup> This book does not simply want to oppose these positions, it wants to claim that these positions are a betrayal of the tradition we have inherited and then demonstrate the alternative through a set of case studies that sees how engagement can shape positively our understanding of God and God's relations with the world.

We start our work in the opening chapter where engagement is defined and its implications explored. It will show that a theology of engagement

is an encounter that subsequently shapes the theology itself. It distinguishes itself from the approach of Stanley Hauerwas, where engagement is simply “location.” In the second chapter, the claim that this approach to theology is an act of fidelity to the dominant theological method of the tradition is defended through an examination of St. Augustine’s approach. Augustine has been an important battleground for theological method in recent years: and in this chapter, an attempt is made to demonstrate that he can be read as sympathetic to an “open” and “engaging” mode of theology. In so doing, those Christians who want to identify with such a disposition should not feel uncomfortable or awkward in so doing. In the third chapter, three ways of engaging are identified. These are “assimilation,” “resistance” and “overhearing.” Sometimes engagement requires the assimilation of an insight from a non-Christian source; at other times we must resist an idea; and sometimes we find our theology being shaped as a result of “overhearing” the argument between two or more non-Christian traditions.

In chapters 4 to 10, we have six case studies, each illustrating a different internal dynamic of engagement. We start with the ostensibly secular discourse of human rights; this is a language that we should not simply assimilate, but the case can be made that human rights language needs a theistic underpinning. In short it needs religion. We look at the different ways in which different branches of the Christian family have assimilated this discourse, from the Roman Catholic to the Orthodox. However, this exercise in assimilation generates an engagement dynamic of its own: it forces us to resist the equally modern discourse of “state sovereignty.” From Kosovo to Pinochet, human rights language undermines talk of state sovereignty, which is too easily a vehicle for oppression, and this the church should welcome.

In chapter 6, assimilation this time requires repentance and modification. We start a conversation with Feminist and Black theology. It is vitally important that Christian theology engages with the fact that for many it is an oppressive discourse. For feminists, it provided a justification for patriarchy; for African-Americans, it underpinned racism. If one is going to claim to be a methodological heir to Augustine, then the dark side of his theology needs to be confronted. The task, I argue, in this chapter involves repentance and modification.

In chapters 7 and 8, we embark on two exercises of “overhearing.” The first is the clash between conservative Hindus and the secular Indian state. The clash between a religious worldview and a secular state has been felt in many parts of the world. The second is the Hinduism of the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) and its arguments for toleration that take a form of strong inclusivism. I suggest as we embark on this task of overhearing, Christians might want to modify their enthusiasm for an inclusivist attitude to other religions.

In chapters 9 and 10, we mix modes. The focus is the twin issues of economics and globalization. On the former, I argue that the Christian tradition needs to “assimilate” the discovery of the 1989 Eastern European revolution that some form of “market economy” is an important part of any effective economic life. On the latter, we both assimilate and overhear (overhear the Marxists and the Muslims) on globalization and argue that the church must work to make globalization work for the poor in the world.

At the end of these case studies, we have a sense of the dynamic of engagement. We then have three concluding chapters that link this project with the projects of fellow travelers. In chapter 11, we look at the theological methodology of Keith Ward. This chapter is making clear that much of the methodology underpinning this book is learnt from his remarkable comparative theology. In chapter 12, we engage with Pope John Paul II. There are two reasons why he needs engagement: first, he is the single most influential religious leader in the world; and second, while he is in some respect an engaged theologian, his method does not acknowledge sufficiently the complexity and ambiguity of the world. In short, his theology is too rigid: it does not celebrate the grace that can be granted through the paradoxes of human life. An engaged theology must handle these complexities, which will inevitably arise.

This leads to the last substantial chapter: it makes explicit the theological assumptions underpinning the project. A theology of engagement is a perpetually relocating theology. We are not allowed to stand still or imagine that we have arrived. As we work within this framework, we need to see ourselves differently. This book is commending a theology of generosity;<sup>4</sup> it is celebrating the value of friendship and dialogue with those friends. We need to learn of God and we need to do so through engagement with each other.

All in all, this book is commending a certain vision of church. For many theologians today, the church is a self-referring, self-contained agent of God hope in a hostile world. I want to commend an alternative vision: the church should see God’s hope everywhere; we need to be connected and engaged with God’s grace wherever it is found. And perhaps it may help the reader to have a sense of my personal story underpinning my own commitment to this alternative vision of church. It was Graham

Greene who reportedly said “Childhood is the bank balance of the writer.” And my childhood is distinctive.

I was born into, what others call, “The Exclusive Brethren.” This movement has its roots in the nineteenth-century sect known as the Plymouth Brethren who in the 1840s had a schism over the issue of the autonomy of the local assembly. Two different groups were formed. The “Open Brethren” wanted each assembly to have its own jurisdiction over local membership. While J.N. Darby (1800–82 – best known for his views on dispensationalism) insisted that the all assemblies should “be of one heart, one mind, and one spirit.” And therefore the so-called “Darbyites” insisted all assemblies should recognize a national “leadership” (i.e., J.N. Darby), which became the seeds of the Exclusive Brethren.

By 1962, when I was born, the Exclusives were a small fundamentalist group, committed to separation from the world, and expecting its imminent demise. And over time the restrictions had gradually increased. They attempted to keep contact with the world to a complete minimum: so naturally television, and radio were all forbidden. No one outside the assembly was permitted to enter the home nor could we go to their houses (2 John 10). Therefore I never attended a birthday party of a school friend; we did not observe Christmas (it was an inherited pagan festival); and I had to eat apart from the rest of the children at school. Education was limited simply to that required by the law of the land: so it stopped with compulsory schooling. Therefore higher education was forbidden. As a result women married young, for example, my sister married at 17. And the men tended to work for other people in the assembly in small self-employed businesses.

The religious duties were intense. We would go to worship at 6am on Sunday morning (after all Mary was “up early” to seek her resurrected Lord). And then would be followed by a further four meetings on Sunday (9am, 12 noon, 3pm, and 5pm).

The assembly took the view that one could not belong to anything other than the “body of Christ.” Therefore all forms of association or organization were forbidden from Boy Scouts to trade unions. In the case of my father, legislation was introduced in the UK that meant that his profession as a pharmacist now required membership of the Pharmaceutical Society. (My father was trained prior to the restrictions on graduate education.) He stopped practicing as a pharmacist and attempted to become a supplier of chemist sundries to pharmacy shops. With a family that was growing (I was one of six children), he realized that he was not earning enough to support his family. After much agonizing with my



mother, he decided to leave the Exclusive Brethren in order to return to his profession and earn a proper living. I was eight when he made that decision. As a family, it meant that everyone we knew in our universe would never speak to us again. We all knew, that for the Exclusive Brethren, because we had “seen the light and then rejected it,” we became the most wicked of people and no one would have any contact with us. My father knew he would never see his father or siblings again; my mother made a comparable decision. So all the friends and relatives within the Brethren, I have not seen since.

Naturally one doesn't leave the Exclusive Brethren and simply move to a regular denomination. For my father, after 40 years in the Exclusives, he was still persuaded of the dangers of the world, the apostasy of the main-line churches, and of the fact that we living in the last days. So we entered a twilight world of ex-members of the Exclusives with whom we would meet in a brother's home for the breaking of the bread on a Sunday morning. We lived in that world for several years, before joining a small assembly, that was technically “Open Brethren,” in Bodmin, Cornwall (the southwest tip of England). Even amongst “Open Brethren” Assemblies this was a conservative group. They viewed with suspicion those Assemblies that were sympathetic to ecumenical evangelical crusades and the like. In many respects, they were similar to the Exclusives, save for the fact that my Father could work as pharmacist and we celebrated Christmas. In other words, they shared much of the theology, albeit not taking to such an extreme the injunction to be separate from the world. In this setting I became a boy preacher (it started when I was 12). My parents were wise enough to see the similarities with the damaging aspects of the Exclusive Brethren and moved to a Baptist Church, where evangelical religion coalesced in a healthy way with an affirmation of life. However, sadly, I was too involved with the Assembly in Bodmin and spent many of my teenage years at the heart of a deeply intolerant community. It took a sensitive Religious Education teacher – John Keast – and the superb faculty in Theology at King's College, London to show me how it is possibly to see the Gospel as a life-enhancing message.

The Exclusive Brethren accepted that there are different ways of reasoning and thinking and that the Scriptural mode of rationality is at odds with secular or worldly reasoning; they accepted that they must simply be church and provide a pacifist witness. They were completely persuaded of the cultural war: we are living in times comparable with those before Noah; there was no grace in the world or in modernity. Now it would be completely wrong to imply that the vision of church

advocated by contemporary postliberal, radical orthodox theologians corresponds to the Exclusive Brethren. However, I do invoke my story as a warning. I have lived with a vision of church that is strongly “against culture,” and sees engagement as betrayal of the gospel. It is both ugly and deeply destructive. For me, one aspect of the theological task is to make it methodologically impossible for our celebration of the Gospel to lead to such a damaging vision of church. The safeguard against an Exclusive Brethren tendency needs to be theological: a pragmatic sociologically dynamic is insufficient. The fact that, sociologically, many Christian denominations are much larger than the Exclusive Brethren and therefore are less likely to be so effective in seeking to be separate from the world just means that the damage will be reduced. It takes a theological shift to remove the damaging potential and ensure that our theology serves the goal of enabling human life to be lived in all fullness.

We need to have more confidence in the God we worship. The grace of God is at work everywhere. We need to live in a community of church that is connected, ready and willing to learn from those who disagree, deeply committed to pluralism, and persuaded that our capacity to do this is a vitally important witness to the gospel values of constructive peace making.

# ENGAGEMENT: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Most of the world is not Christian. Despite two centuries of intensive evangelization, backed with all the resources that the first world has to offer, we find that the percentage of Christians is stubbornly fixed at 33 percent.<sup>1</sup> And, of course, this percentage includes plenty of Christians that other Christians would not recognize as such. Some conservative evangelicals, for example, are deeply suspicious of Roman Catholics and suspect that they will not be keeping their company at the eschaton. So for many Christians this percentage is smaller. Beyond the Christian “family,” we find other forms of organized religious affiliation. We still have significant numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews, as well as a robust proliferation of new religious movements. Other more secular ideologies some with a “spiritual” dimension, others wanting to challenge the power of religion, such as certain versions of feminism and the lingering effects of Marxism in some nationalist movements, have arisen. And there are localized “primitive” religions of numerous kinds. It is an obvious key theological question how Christians relate themselves to such diversity.

One misguided answer that continues to dominate much theological analysis insists that such diversity of perspectives should have no impact on Christianity, save perhaps to stress the imperative of even greater evangelization. Christianity is committed to the revelation of God in Christ documented in the Bible and shaped by the tradition of the church. The task of theology is to explicate the truth within the tradition, live out that truth within the church, and preach it to the world. Karl Barth, perhaps unfairly,<sup>2</sup> gets much of the credit for this understanding of the theological task. So Karl Barth explains that the position of theology thus:

Behind it, theology has Holy Scripture as witness to revelation, and its attestation in the earlier confessions and knowledge of the church. Before it, it

has the church and the activity of proclamation. Thus placed, theology can reveal, unfold and shape itself in dogmatics as a characteristic branch of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

For Barth, knowledge is possible in theology by focusing the task of theology on the Bible within the church. He resolutely sets himself against any engagement with “secular” philosophy (and for secular philosophy also read any non-Christian religions) by explaining that “this is the classical point for the invasion of alien powers, the injection of metaphysical systems which are secretly in conflict with the Bible and the church.”<sup>4</sup>

This position is misguided (especially when grounded in a possible misunderstanding of Barth) for several reasons. First, it seems fairly clear that the cultural diversity of the creation is intended by God.<sup>5</sup> We believe in a God who is responsible for the vastness of space. A God who approximately 15 billion years ago, opted to create many potentially habitable planets, and allowed the diversity of life forms to emerge on earth. And as humanity emerged, a God who waited many thousands of years before revealing the truth of monotheism to Abraham. It seems an extraordinarily attenuated view of the cosmic God to insist that God’s activity is simply confined to the faith that emerged amongst the Hebrews some four thousand years ago and the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the development of the church in Europe. The God who cares for every sparrow that falls to the ground certainly cares for the lives of people in India, Africa, and Latin America. God was, presumably, at work in the lives of those who wrote the Upanishads or in the developing Native American rituals. To think otherwise is a fundamental denial of the God we worship as, in the state of modern knowledge, we must see God. It is not surprising that some “solve” the problem by refusing to accept modern cosmology and the like, on biblical grounds.

This position is also misguided for a second reason. The Christian Scriptures and tradition are clearly shaped by numerous non-Christian sources. The Bible was not written in a vacuum. It clearly spoke to the people living at the time: and it was clearly shaped by the narratives and traditions of the cultures from which the text emerged. The Christian tradition, inevitably, made rich use of non-Christian philosophy. As we shall see in chapter 2, Augustine of Hippo used Neoplatonism. In the thirteenth century Aquinas accessed the Islamic rediscovery of Aristotle and put it into imaginative conversation with the Platonism of the Augustinian tradition. And modern “critical” Christianity, harder to turn into a satisfactory synthesis, is a fruit of the Enlightenment. It is a distortion of the Christian

Scriptures and tradition to imagine that they come to us untouched by any other cultural influence or mode of thought. It is indefensible to insist that a tradition that has come to us shaped by non-Christian sources should now be fossilized. We are part of a living tradition: what Augustine of Hippo did in the past we need to do for the present. This theme will be developed at much greater length in chapter 2.

The third reason this position is bizarre is that its consequences are damaging. The world needs a positive relationship with diversity: in this sense Hans Küng is right when he states that there will be no peace among the nations without peace among religions.<sup>6</sup> To confine the engagement with other faith traditions to evangelization simply is not sufficient to bring about a stronger and more constructive set of relationships with other religions. However, this attitude to non-Christian sources (i.e., religious and secular sources) has other problematic effects. John Macquarrie speaks accurately of the “fragmentation of modern culture.” He writes:

We often hear it said that ours is a split culture, and nobody claims that this is a healthy state of affairs. The split is very obvious when we consider theology in relation to other disciplines, for often it seems to have lost touch with secular studies altogether and to have become compartmentalized and esoteric. We have, so to speak, a Sunday mentality and an everyday mentality. We may succeed in keeping them apart and in this way we prevent latent conflicts between them from flaring up, and this is done at the expense of restricting religion to a special and somewhat rarefied sector of life. To explore the borders between theology and other disciplines with a view not only to removing conflicts but, more positively, in the hope of gaining reciprocal illumination, is a task that cannot be avoided if we are dissatisfied with the fragmentation of life and culture.<sup>7</sup>

Macquarrie’s preoccupation, as was Barth’s, is the relationship of theology and philosophy. In Macquarrie’s case, it involved the attempt to restate the central themes of Christianity using the resources of existentialist philosophy. However, his point applies to the issue of cultural and religious diversity much more widely. The exploration of the borders between theology and other faiths also brings benefits: it removes conflicts; it might generate reciprocal illumination; and most important of all it helps us come to terms with the God-given diversity of creation, thereby healing that aspect of the fragmentation between our Sunday Christianity and our weekday awareness of enormous diversity.

This book is advocating an alternative vision of the theological enterprise. It is one that makes “engagement” the key term. Now at this point

many suggest that this is a “liberal” alternative to the conservative vision of Karl Barth outlined above. But, as just hinted, it is wholly traditional for the Christian tradition constantly to seek to make itself intelligible by entering into dialogue with contemporary forms of thoughts. However, before developing this point further, it is necessary for me to clarify precisely what is meant here by the term engagement.

## 1 Engagement as a “Changing” Encounter

Post-Wittgenstein, we have an appropriate sense of the problems involved in offering definitions. The dynamic nature of language often means that usage provides a better guide to meaning than the dictionary’s sometimes fossilized attempt to provide an all-embracing description applicable to every use of the word.<sup>8</sup> So, the word “engagement” is used in a variety of ways. Some we can exclude: the decision of a couple to get married, or an appointment, for example of a professional person with a client, are both irrelevant for our purposes. However, “an engagement in war” or a statement like “the children were engaged by the film” carries connotations that I am interested in developing.

“Engagement” has affinities with “involvement,” “participation,” “being engrossed,” and “being committed.” It may carry a sense of “opposition” (e.g., an engagement in war is hardly friendly) or “constructive change” (e.g., the children watching the film). So the attachments may carry a wide range of attitudes. It involves both positive participation and at the same time observation. A theology of engagement involves the following: **it is an encounter that subsequently shapes the theology itself.**

The word “shapes” is deliberately vague. The crucial point is that, as against Karl Barth, theology is not determined primarily and exclusively by the church and Bible. A “theology of engagement” sees theology as shaped, consciously and appropriately, perhaps inevitably, by non-Christian sources. However, the encounter may or may not be a positive one. A positive encounter, where Christian theology can appropriate an insight from another tradition, is good. But sometimes this will not be the case. In much the same way as a country engaged in war is shaped by the encounter, so theology might find itself shaped by the encounter with certain trends that are very antagonistic to theology and be modified by a kind of recoil, a negative reaction. The shape of such a theology might be in opposition to the previous trend. The encounter could also be “observational”: the wary observation of a disagreement between two

traditions might well shape subsequent Christian theology. So, for example, if certain forms of Islam were to engage with modern secular feminism, then the result might well provide illumination for the comparable engagement between conservative forms of Christianity and feminism.

Used in these senses, the term “engagement” overlaps with other terms such as “dialogue” or “conversation.” David Tracy, primarily in the context of the interpretation of texts, describes “conversation” thus:

It is a game where we learn to give in to the movement required by questions worth exploring. The movement in conversation is questioning itself. . . . A conversation is a rare phenomenon, even for Socrates. It is not a confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dia-logue.<sup>9</sup>

For Tracy, conversation, which is understood as involving questioning, is supplemented by “argument.” So Tracy explains:

As any of us become more conscious of other interpretations, we become more aware of the occasional need to interrupt the conversation. Argument may be necessary. Argument is not synonymous with conversation. . . . Rather, argument is a vital moment within conversation that occasionally is needed if the conversation itself is to move forward.<sup>10</sup>

The advantage of the term “engagement” is that it embraces both these elements, conversation and argument. The term does not commit us in advance to the precise form of engagement involved, but leaves it to develop as appropriate.

The related term “dialogue” itself has a variety of meanings. For David Lochhead, it simply describes, in this context, one form of approach to religious diversity, while for Leonard Swidler it is more positive and includes an expectation that it will bring about changes in the participants. In Lochhead’s thoughtful and engaging book, *The Dialogical Imperative*, he writes that “the concept of dialogue . . . is rich enough not only to support a theology of interfaith relations, but to support a theology of mission as well. The word ‘dialogue’ names the fundamental attitude with which the church is called to encounter the world. It follows that there is no need to move “beyond dialogue”. In this sense, dialogue is an end in itself.”<sup>11</sup> The focus for Lochhead is on the attitude prior to the dialogue itself, while for Swidler the dialogue has a potential to bring about change. Swidler makes the point thus:

Dialogue is conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow – of course, both partners will also want to share their understanding with their partner. Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes “this” rather than “that” changes my attitude towards her; and a change in my attitude is a significant change, and growth, in me. We enter into dialogue, therefore, primarily so that we can learn, change and grow, not so that we can force change on the other.<sup>12</sup>

Although Swidler is primarily preoccupied with individual Christians encountering individual adherents of other faith traditions, the sense that dialogue brings about change is helpful in wider contexts. The concept of “engagement” operating in this book, then, is closer to Swidler than to Lochhead. It is transformative of the current theological understanding.

Having outlined the meaning of “engagement,” it is now necessary to firmly distance this account from a usage found in the work of those sympathetic to a version of “postliberal” Christian Ethics. There are many possible examples, of whom I select two, Stanley Hauerwas and Michael Banner. Despite their having a theology that is manifestly preoccupied with the story of the church and largely confined to explicating its witness, they both resent the charge that they are not interested in “engagement.” However, I suspect they would both be happy to acknowledge that they are not interested in “engagement” as defined in this chapter. And the difference between us is illuminating.

Hauerwas has an extended discussion of this question at the start of *Christian Existence Today*.<sup>13</sup> Gustafson had accused Hauerwas of “sectarianism,” suggesting the following explanation for the latter’s theology: in an increasingly secular and pluralist age, the temptation for the church is to resort to some form of sectarianism. In its quest for a clear identity and distinctive beliefs, this sectarianism protects the church from the secular attack. For Gustafson, the steps in Hauerwas’s position are as follows: there is a move from philosophical fideism (Wittgenstein’s influence on Lindbeck is given the blame here), to theological fideism (the corollary of such a philosophy that stresses the distinctiveness of theology apart from all other subjects), then to a sociological tribalism (the distinctive narrative of the church needs to be articulated), which culminates in an impoverished and narrowly focused ethic.

To the charge of philosophical fideism, Hauerwas responds by insisting that he holds that “Christian theology has a stake in a qualified epistemological realism,”<sup>14</sup> and that the church’s “worship of God requires it to



be open to continual ‘reality checks.’”<sup>15</sup> So Hauerwas is conceding that he is critical of “foundationalism”; however, he wants to insist that a form of realism survives and that it is self-critical. Later in Hauerwas’s work, his philosophical framework is clarified. His enthusiasm for Radical Orthodoxy and the theological realism of John Milbank enables him to insist that the Christian tradition is both a metanarrative which is true although it is not to be evaluated by the rationality of liberal modernity.<sup>16</sup> (Just in passing, it is important to clarify the epistemological assumptions that makes engagement possible. This I will do later in this chapter. Suffice to note at this point the “engagement” advocated in this book depends upon a version of critical realism.)

Concentrating for now on Hauerwas, to the cluster of criticisms in relation to “tribalism” and the “lack of engagement”: he insists that he is committed to “engaging critically other perspectives as well as remaining open to the challenge of other perspectives.”<sup>17</sup> Hauerwas defines the core issue in the following way:

The core issue is how the church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation.<sup>18</sup>

For Hauerwas, this means that the “engagement” process starts with the church being clear about its interpretative categories for understanding society. This includes understanding the church as an alternative political community and recovering the sense of the integrity of the church. Thus equipped, the church can embark on engagement. From this perspective, Hauerwas believes he is very committed to engagement. He wonders how the term “sectarian” can be applied to him, when the following is taken seriously:

[T]he fact that I have written about why and how Christians should support as well as serve the medical and legal professions, Christian relations with Judaism, how we might think about justice, as well as an analysis of the moral debate concerning nuclear war seems to have no effect on those who are convinced I am a “withdrawn” sectarian.<sup>19</sup>

The difference with the account of “engagement” being commended in this book and Hauerwas’s account is that my model insists that engagement with non-Christian sources can and should actually shape the church’s interpretative categories for understanding itself. It is not that our

theology is determined and then we are in a position to engage, but that our understanding of God and God's relations with the world can itself be shaped by the engagement with non-Christian sources. For Hauerwas, the engagement is a form of "location." The church, having arrived at a clear self-understanding, is in a position to participate selectively: in other words, the church, secure in its own position, is able to affirm certain aspects of modern society and challenge others. It has the task of clarifying the appropriate relations with other movements within modernity. In other words it is an engagement that amounts to judgment. This I suggest is closer to "locating" rather than "engaging".

This interpretation of Hauerwas is confirmed when we turn to the work of one of his disciples in the United Kingdom, Michael Banner. Banner in his book, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, uses an overtly Barthian framework to shape his theology. He complains, in response to reviewers who thought otherwise, that his theology is deeply interested in building connections with non-Christian sources. So he claims that his critics (in this case Bishop Richard Harries of Oxford and Dr. Alan Suggate) are wrong when they suppose that it is not:

Contra the Bishop I do engage in dialogue with non-Christian traditions (and specifically enjoin it) and contra Dr. Suggate, nothing I say forbids the practice. In the book of essays to which they refer there are countless places where I acknowledge debts to thinkers of all sorts, some of whom consciously reject the Christian tradition, perhaps chief amongst them Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Indeed far from avoiding such dialogue I would contend that those amongst my colleagues (O'Donovan and Hauerwas) whose work I most admire as most thoroughly and consistently and properly theological, make a point, as I do, of dealing with a range of thinkers far more diverse and weighty than those who appear in the work of writers belonging to what Dr. Suggate stipulates to be "the mainstream Anglican tradition."<sup>20</sup>

What Banner actually offers in his book, however, is an "engagement" that really means location. Nietzsche is cited as a witness to a form of "Christianity which speaks from its unfounded givenness and not from supposed point of contact"<sup>21</sup>; and Marx and Engels provide an intellectual strand of thought partly responsible for "the transformation of children into 'simple articles of commerce' and a further step in the dissolution of the family."<sup>22</sup> His theology is not changed or shaped by this encounter. Instead one takes a position and to advance that position one then searches for similarities with and argument strategies from non-Christian traditions. So to take his