INTERRUPTING MORAL TECHNIQUE, TRANSFORMING BIOMEDICAL ETHICS:
READING KARL BARTH AGAINST THE ‘SIN’ OF THE COMMON MORALITY
AND FOR THE POSTURES OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

by

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DISSERTATION

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Declarations

Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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9 August 2013
Date: ___________________________ _____________________________

Ashley John Moyse
To Aime
Any ethical system, which is settled and stereotyped, uniform and preclusive, neat and predictable, is both dehumanising and pagan … inflating the role of the principalities while vitiating the human vocation.

—William Stringfellow, *Conscience and Obedience* (1977)
Acknowledgements

Barth’s anthropology might well be summarised by the Latin phrase located in the middle of the third volume of his Church Dogmatics. It reads as follows: *Si quis dixerit hominem esse solitarium, anathema sit.* That is to say, for Barth to think of a human being as a solitary individual is to not think of a human being at all. Rather, being human is realised only in communion with God and one’s fellows. This is what Barth means when he says that we are human in the indissoluble correlation with other humanity. Nevertheless, in the academic study of theology, there has been a great deal of time spent in solitude, reading, writing, and drinking too much (coffee). However, the retreat to solitary labour is only made possible due to the countless hours spent alongside my mentors, my family, my peers, and the many others who have interrupted my thoughts and transformed my capacity to think about, to reason through, and to compose this present work. Simply put, I could not be who I am today, nor could I have accomplished this work, without the many companions, comrades, and colleagues who have been with and for me throughout this undertaking.

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Abstract

Interrupting Moral Technique, Transforming Biomedical Ethics: Reading Karl Barth Against the ‘Sin’ of the Common Morality and For the Postures of Human Flourishing

Ashley John Moyse

The evolution of modern biomedical science and practice has forced many to grapple with difficult ethical questions. The advent of such novel questions has demanded that moral discourse in medicine adapts and changes to solve the problems introduced in our brave new world. What was once the charge of the physician is now a public discourse involving a number of relevant constituents and decision-makers. Accordingly, leaders in the discipline of bioethics have sought to articulate a particular grammar that might help to guide and direct the on-going discourse while providing the systems necessary for making morally efficient decisions. Thus, the lingua franca of bioethics has pushed steadily towards philosophically neutral terms and the accompanying generalities of the common morality. In this way, the grammar of bioethics has functioned much like a moral technique. It has not enabled us to speak well with and for persons embedded, rather embodied, in community gathered about the peculiarities of biomedical crises. Against such moral techne, the aim of this research has been to explore an ethics that might interrupt and transform the contemporary and abstract modes of moral discourse determined as universal, while challenging one to take seriously the concrete tasks and processes of real human life. It has been my aim to reimagine the common morality theologically, such that we may learn to be an authentic means of hope, to help resolve problems, to assist in the free response to dilemmas
raised by the science and practice of biomedicine, and to provoke human decision towards human flourishing. Thus, the purpose of this research has been to explain Barth’s moral theology as that which not only grounds human being as ontologically relational but also to argue that such correlation is what might stir human responsibility to, with, and for our near and distant neighbours. Accordingly, for Barth, what is common is the provisional, public, and interpersonal character of moral conversation, discernment, and decision.