

J.A. Daley, PhD Candidate

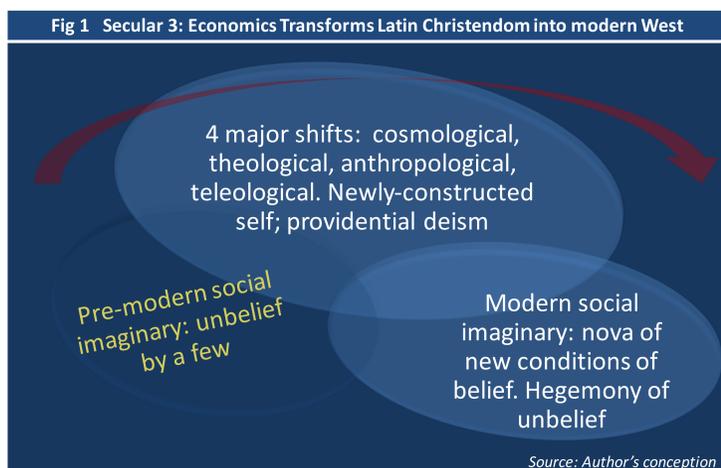
### Thesis Statement & Introduction

In order to meet the challenge to engage the secular with the gospel, Christian theology should reflect sensitivity to conscious and unconscious hermeneutical choices of secular society by leveraging the way people understand their identities and the way communities construct themselves.

Against 'subtraction stories', Charles Taylor (2007) posits that we live in a Secular 3 age (cf. pre-modern secular 1 & 2) distinguished by new conditions of belief and made possible by a legitimizing modern social imaginary (MSI), "exclusive humanism". Social imaginary is "the way in which contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain". The MSI was catalyzed by economics (see Fig 1), when 'fullness' in the form of human flourishing redefined a replacement *telos* for humanity amidst cross-pressures to revert (Taylor).

### Theoretical Background & Hypotheses

Taylor's social imaginaries adopt Castoriadis: social imaginary significations create the social-historical world. Hence, the MSI is a social construct but possesses "a greater reality than the real itself" (Castoriadis, 1987). Figure 1 shows changes in the background to lived conditions and fullness.



Evidently, theology's challenge is with the self-sufficient immanent social order of the West as the buffered and closed MSI relegates God to superfluity. Economics has increasingly "immanentized" the MSI since the 18<sup>th</sup> century via Natural Law theories of Grotius, Locke and Smith. The self-understanding in the MSI results from Reform: shifts and "reconfiguration in meaning" (Taylor).

How theology tackles the church-society impasse in a way that is intelligible contemporaneously might mean employing borrowed concepts from secular culture (Green, 1998; Tracy, 1981). The current context justifies a model for engagement with society that addresses the critical dimensions of the MSI in this "new harmonious economic-centered order".

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### Conceptual Methodology

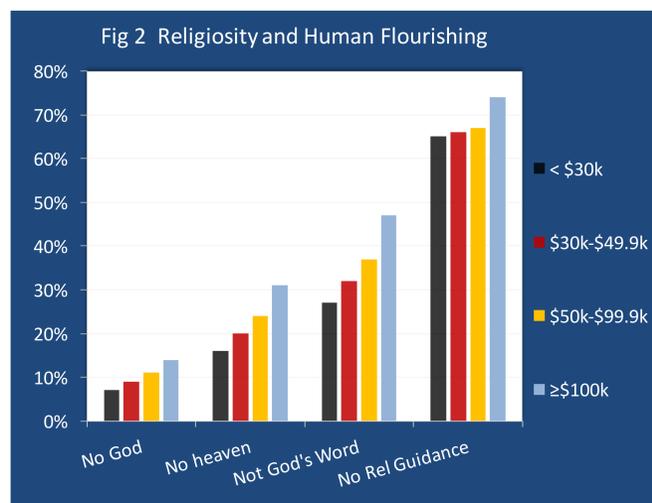
Philosophical phenomenological hermeneutics to analytically describe and evaluate Taylor's economic social imaginary as communicating the contemporary self-identity and therefore suitability for use as method to communicate to society.

Tripartite biblical hermeneutics—systematic theology, *sola-tota-prima-analogia Scriptura* with spiritual discernment, and narrative analysis with close reading of the text—to identify principles for theological method from the apparently analogous imaginary of the rich young man (RYM) of the Matthean narrative.

Hermeneutics generally founded on a commitment to a biblical conception of God, human nature and *telos*, and knowledge that seeks to uphold faithfulness, coherence and correspondence to divinely revealed precepts of the biblical canon as evident *in* the text.

### Results

The analysis produced some basic insights and fairly convincing support of the thesis to utilize economics in theological method for engaging the secular. Figure 2 shows % of adults responding for different ranges of household income. The US is proxy for the West. Income is proxy for human flourishing.



Increasing income correlates with decreasing belief in God, in transcendence, in the Bible as the word of God and reliance on religion for guidance in choosing right and wrong. An economic social imaginary appears plausible.

Table 1 shows a striking profusion of economic imagery extracted from the Gospel of Matthew. Prevalent themes in the Jesus' lesson about money and salvation to the RYM regarding selling, exchange, rich, poor, possessions, treasure and rewards reflect a general ethos of the Gospel.

### Select References

- 1.Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.
2. Crosby, Michael H. *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.
3. Green, Garrett. *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998.
4. Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

\*Title adapted from Johnson, Ronald W. *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen?* Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 1994.

Narrative analysis of Jesus with the RYM suggests "cross-pressures" analogous to those apparently present in the MSI.

"[A]cceptance of Jesus' message had economic implications ... for the ... social order" (Crosby, 2004).

Indicative biblical allusions of a relationship between theology and economics in the narrative about Jesus and the RYM.

Words associated with economic activity	References of words associated with economic activity in the Gospel of Matthew
Sell	πωλεῖ 10:20; 13:44, 46; 19:21; 25:9; 21:12 πέπρακεν 13:46 προσθῆναι 26:9
Buy	ἀγοράζει 13:44, 46; 14:15; 21:12; 25:9, 10; 27:7
Possessions	πάντα ὅσα ἔχει 13:45, 46; 18:25 τὰ ὑπάρχοντα 19:21; 24:47; 25:14 κτῆματα 19:22
Poor	πτωχοῖς 19:21; 26:9, 11
Treasure	θησαυροὺς 2:11; 6:19, 20, 21; 12:35; 13:44, 52; 19:21 μαμωνᾶ 6:24
Rich	πλούσιος 19:23, 24; 27:57
Hundred-fold	ἑκατονταπλασίονα 19:29
Merchant/merchandise	ἐμπόριον 13:45; 22:5
Price (value)	πλούτιον 13:46 βαρυτίμιον 26:7 τιμὴν 27:9 (2x)
Profit	ὠφέληθῆς 15:5; 16:26
Exchange	ἀντάλλαγμα 16:26
Tax (tribute)/tax collector	διδραχμία 17:24 (2x) κῆνσον 17:25; 22:17, 19 τελώναι 5:46; 9:9-11; 10: 3; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31, 32 χρυσὸν 2:11; 10:9 κοδράντην 5:26 ἀργυρον 10:9; 25:27; 26:15; 27:3, 5, 6, 9; 28:12, 15 χαλκὸν 10:9 ἀσασπίου 10:29 στατήρα 17:27 ταλάντων 18:24; 25:15-28 δηνάρια 18:28; 20:2, 9, 10, 13 ἐργάτας 9:37, 38; 10:10; 20:1-14; 21:28
Workers/work	μισθὸς 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2; 10:41 (2x); 10:42; 20:8
Reward/Wage	ἀγορᾶ 11:16; 20:3; 23:7
Market(place)	τραπέζιταις 25:27
Banker	τόκῳ 25:27
Interest	πάντα ταῦτα 6:25-33
Material things	

Rich Young Man Narrative Source: Author's analysis

### Discussion

Taylor's conceptualization of "secular" has intuitive appeal and significant inherent utility as it is, apparently, a plausible framing of contemporary society taking into account the philosophical, historical, sociological, theological and economic dimensions. However, it might be the case that such a move, *by the same token*, would involve misconstructions.

Minimal interpretative correlations from the biblical clues indicate how a model might be constructed to address the contemporary church-society impasse and complement and reconstruct Taylor's secular social imaginary for use as theological method.

### Conclusions

Increasing secularization seems to fly in the face of Adventist proposals for a Scripture-only principle for theology. The church's imperative is to identify creative theological method to embrace the relationship between economics and theology and yet—within the constraints of her rules of engagement—provides a biblical paradigm for efficaciously engaging secular society.

Systematic theology renders the extra-biblical MSI not incompatible with *sola Scriptura*. Theological method should "listen" and leverage Taylor's broad, deep, multi-faceted and historically-constructed MSI to 'preach the gospel in all the world' and engage the secular for "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never [really] heard?" (Rom 10:14).