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Toward Engaging the Secular: Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries, Human Flourishing, and Theological Method

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ABSTRACT

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MODERN SOCIAL IMAGINARIES, HUMAN
FLOURISHING, AND THEOLOGICAL
METHOD

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

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Title: TOWARD ENGAGING THE SECULAR: CHARLES TAYLOR'S MODERN
         SOCIAL IMAGINARIES, HUMAN FLOURISHING, AND THEOLOGICAL
         METHOD

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Increasing secularization seems to fly in the face of Christian proposals for a
Scripture-only principle for theology. The question that this dissertation explores is "How
will Christian theology tackle the resulting church-society impasse in a way that is both
faithful to Scripture and intelligible contemporaneously without appearing to privilege
one aspect over the other?" That is, "What form should theological method take to
efficaciously engage the secular?" This study suggests that the answer might lie in an
innovative fusion of Scripture with borrowed concepts from secular culture. Thus, this
dissertation responds to the problem of the need for robust, multidimensional theological
methodology that seeks to enhance engagement with secular philosophy and culture.

In the wake of cultural shifts and secular dynamics, this dissertation draws from Charles Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries and the accompanying theses of secularity. This study shows how, in Taylor's view, secularists have derived their self-understanding and ethos of economic human flourishing by way of continual shifts and interactions in perceptions of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology (PAST). From this perspective, the dissertation demonstrates how the secular identity is entangled in economics (οἰκονόμος)—material aspects of human activity (wealth production).

Methodologically, utilizing a four-pronged approach, this dissertation examines these important concepts: first, by reading through lenses of selected genealogical dynamics of modern social imaginaries; secondly, via the contours of Charles Taylor's articulation of secularity; thirdly, via scriptural analyses of social imaginaries and human flourishing; and fourthly, by expanding their horizon of meaning by redeploying lessons, implications, and rereadings derived from applying a Spirit-directed Scripture-principle to propose a sketch of a multidimensional model toward secular engagement.

The chapters of this dissertation extend secular considerations beyond a social science perspective to the biblical canon allowing the new biblical lens to broaden the term "human flourishing" from economics to a more wholistic conception and producing new understandings of PAST and οἰκονόμος. Connecting the conversation about secularity, social imaginaries, and human flourishing with ongoing discussions about theological method, and articulating for rereadings, the dissertation concludes by proposing a three-dimensional model—secular, canonical, and stewardship (οἰκονόμος)—that appears as a potentially powerful response toward secular engagement. These tentative findings enhance the study's contributions: interdisciplinary, explicit

multidimensionality, explicit application of human flourishing as key to secular engagement, and an explicitly practical aspect in the form of a reoriented theology of stewardship as one's way of living in the world. By focusing on these complementary dimensions, the study seeks to create a sense of how they work together and how they produce a rich interdisciplinary reservoir which is key to a multidimensional strategy toward secular engagement.

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In loving memory of my father, Lascelles A. Daley (1944-1996)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LXX   Septuagint

NT   New Testament

OT   Old Testament

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Theology and Social Imaginary

There has been growing concern about the low rate of engagement that the church

has been able to secure with contemporary Western society.[1] Echoing the thesis of

Charles Taylor,[2] Christopher Ben Simpson suggests that the contemporary theological

situation is contextualized by "an immanent frame" in a society with "a purely secular

mindset"[3] and it is tempting to conclude that contemporary Western society is, ostensibly,

impervious to the Christian gospel. A prevailing "secular" mood is, in many ways,

accepted as the contemporary norm, predicated on a tacit understanding that "secular" is

"a foundational dimension of modern life"; it is "the water we swim in."[4] However,

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[1] The steady increase in the numbers in the West who consider themselves to be 'religiously unaffiliated' is of concern to many churches. See, for example, *Pew Report*, "'Nones' on the Rise," October 9, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/ (accessed June 17, 2016).

[2] Charles Taylor (b. 1931) is a self-proclaimed Catholic and a philosopher who is widely known for his work in political philosophy and the debate on secularization. His publications include *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), and his widely acclaimed tome, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[3] Christopher Ben Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 1.

[4] Charles Hirschkind, "Is There a Secular Body?," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 [2011]: 634.

because the notion of secularity is not monolithic, the challenges to the theological enterprise to identify its audience in this epoch are correspondingly increased.[5]

Unsurprisingly, there has been widespread interest in issues surrounding the secular, and a preoccupation among philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians, inter alia, with regard to issues of secularity and its concomitant influence in the various spheres of the lived experience. Consequently, the somewhat enigmatic and multifarious character of 'secular' has generated a significant amount of commentary as insights are sought into its nature and character and prescriptions are offered as to how it should be addressed.

The pervasiveness of 'secular' has resulted in a dichotomy: on the one hand it has served to marginalize 'religion,' as the latter dialogue partner is increasingly differentiated as the intellectually inferior binary polar opposite.[6] On the other hand, the ubiquity of 'secular' has served as a catalyst for cooperation among diverse religious traditions as each, whether independently or cooperatively, tries to come to grips with the challenge of secularity and how to fulfill the God-given mandate to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19).[7]

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[5] Chapter 3 presents a selected precis of alternative views of "secular" as part of the presentation of Charles Taylor's articulation, which represents the nucleus of this study.

[6] This strand of the literature also finds expression in the work of anthropologist Talal Asad (*Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003]), and political theorist William E. Connolly (*Why I Am Not a Secularist* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000]). In the light of what they consider to be intellectual marginalization of religion, David E. Klemm and William H. Klink propose the construction of testable theological models according to the order of those of the natural sciences ("Dialogue on Theological Models: Constructing and Testing Theological Models," *Zygon* 38, no. 3 [September 2003]: 495-528).

[7] Throughout the various epochs of history, the Christian church's missional strategies—the diversity of methodologies utilized by the church as a means of introducing people to God—have had to be pliable: preemptively or retrospectively (see, for example, Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity:*

One of the central tenets of this project is that 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 secularists, by leveraging the way people understand their identities and the way communities construct themselves. Recognizing the challenges faced in a society that boasts a complexity of pluralism and the primacy of the individual, one of the major assertions of this project is that if the Christian church is to fulfill her raison d'être in the twenty-first century, then she must understand the peculiarities of her audience, and appropriately craft and optimally deliver her message. The sensitivity that engaging secular society demands is partly the result of understanding the essence and genealogy of contemporary society. One example of such conceptualization is Charles Taylor's multi-faceted articulation of modern social imaginaries in which he defines social imaginary as "the way we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life in the contemporary Western world."[8]

Background and Context to the Problem

It is a central postulate of philosopher Charles Taylor that this is a secular age. Against "subtraction stories,"[9] Taylor distinguishes the secularity that dominates

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Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day [New York: HarperCollins, 2011]). Present peculiarities not only suggest a new approach to missions but demand firmer philosophical and theological foundations (see, for example, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* [Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003]). All quotations throughout this dissertation are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

[8] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 146. This dissertation contextually uses 'social imaginary' as a concept in place of 'social imaginaries' although both alternatives acknowledge the likelihood of multiple imaginaries.

[9] Taylor explains subtraction stories of modernity and secularity as those accounts which explain them as the result of a process "in terms of underlying *features of human nature* which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside" (*Ibid*., 22; emphasis supplied).

contemporary society as secularity 3,[10] fashioned by different conditions of belief than those prevalent during the pre-modern era. "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic."[11] Contemporary secularity is also distinctive due to "new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices."[12] In the commentary on Taylor's tome *A Secular Age*, James K. A. Smith summarizes the contemporary context as "a situation of fundamental contestability when it comes to belief."[13] This context, Taylor posits, has been made possible by a legitimizing modern social imaginary: "exclusive humanism."[14] That is to say, "exclusive humanism" describes the social imaginary in which the meaning, significance, and telos of humanity lie *completely* within the "immanent" and requires *absolutely* no assistance from the divine or from "transcendence."[15]

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[10] Taylor distinguishes secularity 3 from secularity 1—"secularized public spaces" displacing God as the center of social life—and secularity 2—"the decline of belief and practice" revealing the decline of faith in God (*Ibid.*, 20). A more detailed description of these is deferred until Chapter 3. However, it is must be noted here that it is evident that the shifts in secularity are centered around conceptions of God and God's relationship with the world. Not surprisingly, these shifts and their relationship with conceptions of the divine are inextricably linked with shifts in self-understanding. On Taylor's view, self-understandings themselves are sedimented in modern social imaginaries and are not simply intuitive; they bear historical relevance to established theories such as the Natural Law derivations, the "new twist[s]" of Hugo Grotius and John Locke, among others (*Ibid.*, 126). Taylor highlights the work of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) on Natural Law—binding laws in terms of what is rational and social (*Ibid.*, 126). John Locke (1632-1704) proposed an economic philosophy focused on defending private property, articulating the role of government, and maximizing utility for the greatest number of people. Both the secular self-understanding and its conception of God are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

[11] *Ibid.*, 3.

[12] *Ibid.*, 22.

[13] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 10.

[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 19.

[15] Taylor discusses this dichotomy (*Ibid.*). See, also, Smith, *How (Not)*, 23.

Taylor's conceptualization of modern social imaginaries as "the way in which contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain"[16] adapts the thesis of Cornelius Castoriadis that social imaginary significations *create* the social-historical world, and also reflects the ethos of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities."[17] On this creative view, modern social imaginaries as a social construct may, in the light of Castoriadis's influence, be understood to follow "from real conditions, and [fill] an essential function."[18] On Taylor's account, modern social imaginaries were catalyzed by economics, when 'fullness,' understood purely as immanent human flourishing, redefined a replacement telos for humanity and catalyzed a number of paradigmatic shifts amidst cross-pressures to revert.[19]

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[16] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 161. The centrality of the concept of imagination to the contemporary self-identity accords it a place of primacy in this project.

[17] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Verso, 2006). Interestingly, Castoriadis defines "imaginary" as "something 'invented' … ('a story entirely dreamed up'), or a slippage, a shift of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations than their 'normal' or canonical significations" (Castoriadis, *Institutions*, 127). For him, the imaginary "has to use the symbolic not only to 'express' itself … but to 'exist' … [and] symbolism too presupposes an imaginary capacity … to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is" (*Ibid*.). Theses on social imaginaries as proffered by Castoriadis and Anderson are discussed in Chapter 2 as a prelude to Taylor's articulation in Chapter 3.

[18] *Ibid*., 128.

[19] Taylor articulates changes in the background to lived conditions and fullness and a shift to a 'demarcated' and closed context. Having voluntarily buffered the self in 'immanence,' the secular individual faces constant pressures from 'transcendence' (see Chapter 3). The economic ethos of human flourishing of modern social imaginaries is a fundamental tenet of this project and the decisive radial from which the phenomena of modern social imaginaries are examined, and via which remodeling is proposed and re-presented. Economics as an academic discipline is a broad field with many sub-fields and legions of views. Hence, although the centrality of economics to social imaginaries is emphasized throughout, this dissertation does not engage with specific economic theories or economic systems. Instead, the engagement in this study is with economics in a broad conceptual sense in terms of the ethos of the discipline linked with the maximization of financial wealth. Although this study does not engage in a study of the discipline of economics, per se, it is useful to outline some basic principles. In this dissertation, 'economics,' 'economy,' or 'economic' when used in the context of the link to human flourishing is intended in a broad sense to connote 'in money terms,' 'exchange,' 'trade,' or 'material goods and possessions' within the even

"Cross-pressures" in Taylor's articulation is undoubtedly one product of a perceived disparity about human telos as between human flourishing and "some good higher than, beyond human flourishing."[20] On this view, this age of secular then, is "one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable"[21] particularly because of how human flourishing is imagined in contemporary society. This leads naturally to the questions: what really is the telos of humans and how is it related to human nature? What really is human flourishing?[22]

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broader context that economy is in reference to the system of production and trade. 'Economics' is the "study of how scarce resources are or should be allocated" (John Black, ed., "Economics," *Oxford Dictionary of Economics*, 135). Tracing the root of the term highlights the difficulty with identifying a universally-accepted definition. "The root of the word 'economics' lies in the Greek οίκονομία, meaning the management of a household, as in Xenophon's *Οίκονομίκος*, written around 400 BC" (Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume, eds., "Economics, Definition Of" in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, 720). Durlauf and Blume note that Jacob Viner's "'economics is what economists do,' reflects the difficulty of providing an unambiguous definition" but that Lionel Robbins's definition as "the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses," is one that "remains the most widely cited definition of the subject" (*Ibid*., 721-22). Economist N. Gregory Mankiw translates 'economist' from οίκονόμος as "one who manages a household" reflecting the concern with the *management* of scarce resources (*Principles of Microeconomics*, 8th ed. [Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017], 4). Economics is also understood more broadly in a Smithian sense as comprising "sympathy, moral rules, self-interested economic action, markets and legal social control" (Steven G. Medema and Warren J. Samuels, eds., *The History of Economic Thought: A Reader* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 57). Others define 'economy' as comprising "a system for production, distribution and consumption of scarce resources" (David J. Downs, "Economics, Taxes, and Tithes," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013], 156). Aristotle distinguishes *oikonomike* and *chrematistics*. He suggests that *oikonomike* is "the right act" that "can only be aimed at the good" as "it is essentially moral," and that "*chrematistics*" is a subordinate "technique" that is "not essentially oriented towards the good" and is therefore, also, potentially "wicked, unnatural, [and] unlimited" (Ricardo F. Crespo, "Aristotle's science of economics," in Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg, eds., *Christian Theology and Market Economics* [Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010], 13-14). Jacques Derrida notes that "[f]or Aristotle, it is a matter of an ideal and desirable limit, a limit between the limit and the unlimited, between the true and finite good (the economic) and the illusory and the indefinite good (the chrematistic)" in (*Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 158, quoted in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Zizek [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005], 190).

[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 20.

[21] *Ibid.*, 19.

[22] Douglas B. Rasmussen suggests that human flourishing is "a technical notion, and its exact

On Taylor's account, economics has increasingly "immanentized" modern social imaginaries since the eighteenth century via the increasing transformation progressively influenced by early influential thinkers Grotius and Locke (noted above) as well as Adam Smith.[23] One of Taylor's central assertions then, to counter "subtraction stories" and to delineate his peculiar understanding of "secular," is that the ultimate self-understanding in modern social imaginaries results from movements of "Reform": shifts *and* "reconfiguration in meaning" grounded in the overarching understanding of human

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meaning varies with different theories of the human good" ("Human Flourishing and the Appeal to Human Nature," in *Human Flourishing*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 2). Correspondingly, Thomas Hurka notes that it was Elizabeth Anscombe who introduced the term "flourishing" into contemporary philosophy in 1958 ("The Three Faces of Flourishing," in Paul et al., *Human Flourishing*, 44). Hurka notes that Anscombe and much of the literature since then have associated flourishing with three philosophical views: "that the human good consists in the development of properties fundamental to human nature, that the virtues can be identified as those traits necessary for flourishing, and that all a person's normative reasons for acting derive, egoistically, from his interest in his own flourishing" (*Ibid.*, 70). Hurka argues that the three views are logically independent but notes that they are nevertheless often combined "in the … literature on flourishing" on the assumption that "(1) each person's good consists in developing his nature, which (2) involves as an important element his acting virtuously toward others, and (3) is all he ultimately has normative reason to do" (*Ibid.*, 45). (For a sample of literature discussing this triptych, see *Ibid.*, 45n.3). Without endorsing Hurka's views on either side, this study notes the parallels between the combination and modern social imaginaries in what Taylor describes as self-interestedness and mutuality, respectively, and how both flow from an understanding of telos. It is also worth bearing in mind Hurka's view that 'flourishing' is a popular translation for Aristotle's '*eudaimonia*' and bears the nuances of the Aristotelian heritage (see *Ibid.*, 46). In the light of Taylor's articulation, what if the telos of humanity is indeed human flourishing but otherwise defined? Can theological method account for that and, if so, how? These questions are engaged in this dissertation, sometimes directly and sometimes obliquely. An exhaustive review of the growing literature on the topic of human flourishing will not be attempted here. Rather, the interested reader is referred to the following selections and their list of references: David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Miroslav Volf and Justin E. Crisp, eds., *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture and the Good Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015); Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

[23] "Immanentized" refers to the state of being enclosed within the natural material world, totally excluding the supernatural. Adam Smith (1723-1790) is known for his contribution to modern economics, especially the 'invisible hand' trope, as well as views on division of labor (see, for example, Medema and Samuels, *History of Economic Thought*, 57). Some elevate Smith as "the patron saint of the modern ecclesia of economic orthodoxy" (Devin Singh, Review of *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26, no. 2 [May 2013]: 254).

nature and telos.[24] Ultimately, theology's challenge is that everyone "now inhabit[s] this self-sufficient immanent order" of the West as the buffered and closed modern social imaginaries relegate God to superfluity.[25] Hence, it is imperative that Christians *qua* Christians are purposeful about how to inhabit these multifaceted social imaginaries. This dissertation questions and restates the secular understanding of human flourishing as part of the process of doing theology in secularity 3.

Arguably, because "secularization is a multidimensional phenomenon … it can not [*sic*], and should not, be measured by one or two criteria only."[26] Apparently, what is necessary to advance current efforts to engage society with the gospel is the development of a multidimensional model that is biblically-based, theologically sound, and intellectually appealing—to address theological as well as broad philosophical influences on missionary thinking and strategy within the church. Multidimensionality in philosophy, theology, ministry, ideology, and strategy to complement current efforts for engaging contemporary society with the gospel appears mandatory.[27]

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[24] Taylor discusses "Reform" at length in chapter 1 of *A Secular Age*.

[25] Smith, *How (Not)*, 93.

[26] Gottfried Oosterwal, "The Process of Secularization," in Humberto M. Rasi and Fritz Guy, eds., *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), 42-43. The secular is referred to as a "*largely overlooked class*" (*Ibid.*, 6).

[27] There has been, and will continue to be, considerable value in the strategies that the church has traditionally utilized to communicate the gospel message. This project therefore aims to impress the necessity and the urgency of a more philosophically robust, multidimensional, and complementary intent. The church's response to the prevailing ethos has, unfortunately, been lacking, and the results of church's engagement efforts have not been encouraging in some quarters, as noted above (see also, for example, Rasi and Guy, *Meeting the Secular*; and Kleber de Oliveira Gonçalves, "A Critique of the Urban Mission of the Church in the Light of an Emerging Postmodern Condition" [PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005]).

Precisely how theology tackles the church-society impasse in a way that is contemporaneously intelligible might mean employing borrowed concepts from secular culture. Jane Collier explicitly suggests that "the believing community in our culture … needs to be … creative, and to take advantage of the same channels of transmission by which cultural ideologies are transmitted."[28] The current context justifies a theological model toward engagement with society that addresses the critical elements of modern social imaginaries. If, indeed, economics has become, and continues to be, the defining element of social imaginaries, then the church's imperative is to identify creative theological method that embraces the relationship between economics and theology and simultaneously—within the constraints of the rules of her engagement—provides a biblical paradigm for efficaciously engaging secularity 3 with the gospel.

A simple test of the economic plausibility of Taylor's thesis was conducted using different levels of income as a proxy for wealth and economics and compared with select indicators as proxy for religiosity. Figure 1 (below) shows the percentage 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 heaven, in the Bible as the word of God and reliance on religion for guidance in choosing right and wrong. The analysis produced some basic insights and fairly convincing support of the thesis to utilize economics in theological method for engaging the secular. An economic social imaginary appears plausible.

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[28] Jane Collier, "Contemporary culture and the role of economics," in *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hugh Montefiore (London: Mowbrays, 1992), 125-26.
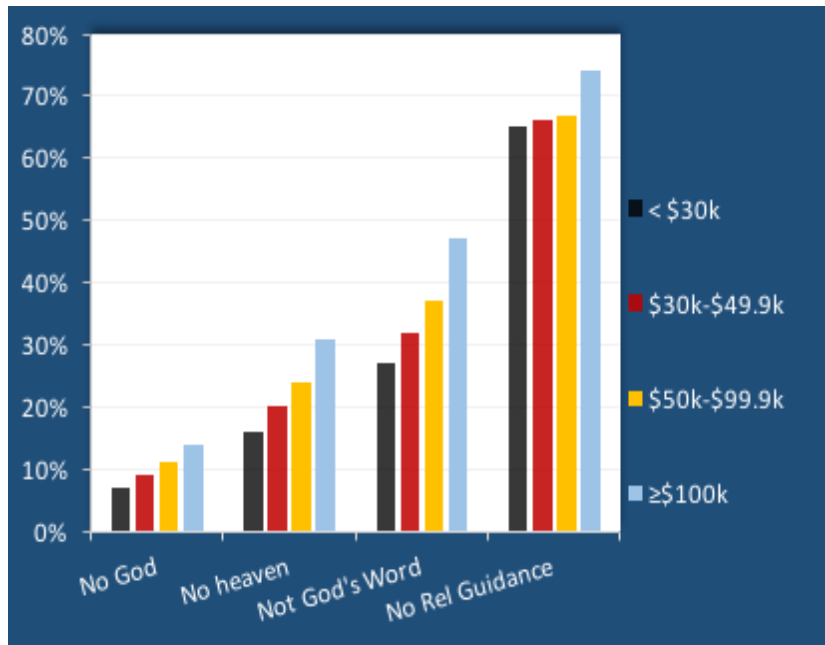
Figure 1 Religiosity and Economic Human Flourishing
Data source: pewforum.org 2014 RLS-II. Sample: 8,850>n>5,900

Interestingly, it seems possible to identify, in the Scriptures, analogues to the

apparent tension between economic-thinking and full commitment to the theological

enterprise that is evident in contemporary society.[29]

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[29] Absent anachronistic and Procrustean impulses, it seems plausible to identify statements in the biblical text that could properly fall within what has come to be categorized within the discipline of economics. A brief segue serves to highlight three examples: one from the Old Testament (OT) and two from the New Testament (NT). In Exodus 30:11-16, in the process of instructing Moses about the details for the construction of the tabernacle, God "said to Moses" (v.11) that each person older than twenty years should give "half a shekel" (v.13) "to make atonement" (v.15). Moses is to receive this "atonement money" (v.16). Evidently, the collection of this money, representing some sort of 'trade' as it did, bore great significance to the lives of the people, not for what it was, per se, but for what it symbolized. In Matthew 19:16-22 a man, eventually described as "young" (v.20), questioned Jesus as to how to "have eternal life" (v.16). Despite Jesus's response—or more likely, because of it—he walked away "sorrowful" because he had many "possessions" (v.22). It is clear that the young man was not willing to trade in Jesus's way with the gains of his earlier 'trade,' and the tension with Jesus's response is plain. In Revelation 13:11-17, the writer reveals his vision of "another beast" (v.11) who "causes all" to be marked (v.16) so that "no one may buy or sell" without the mark (v.17). Buying and selling were obviously important, such that not receiving the mark would have significant consequences. 'Trade,' 'money,' 'wealth,' 'possessions,' 'buy,' and 'sell' are all properly 'economic' words. In these three exemplars, they represent an apparent or potential tension with what might be regarded as God's will or God's evaluative point of view. The discussion in this

Taylor's taxonomy of "secular" has significant inherent utility as it is, apparently, a plausible framing of contemporary society taking into account the philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and theological dimensions. On the one hand, Taylor's articulation of social imaginary presents a potential strategy by which the church may address the perceived disconnect with contemporary society.[30] However, it might be the case that such a move, *by the same token*, would involve misconstructions that have been condensed in the shifts from secularity 1 to secularity 3, and which would obscure the God-world relationship and complicate contemporary Christian theology and method. On the other hand, this assessment may be viewed against the dynamism present in Scripture through one avenue whereby the Bible offers clues as to how a methodology might be constructed to address the contemporary church-society impasse and/or to complement Taylor's account of social imaginary. Evidently, there are biblical allusions of a relationship between economics, human flourishing, and theology to be teased out from the narrative about Jesus and the rich young man, which extend, in Jesus's *ex post facto* discussion with his disciples (Matt 19:16-29), to provide insights for engagement with, as well as answers to potential questions from, secular social imaginaries.[31]

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dissertation returns to these pericopes (and these words) at various points.

[30] For example, Jennifer Elisa Veninga strongly recommends the social imaginary as methodology for this secular age ("Theology for a Secular Age: The Danish Social Imaginary and the Cartoon Crisis of 2005-2006" [PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2011], 374).

[31] This study focuses on the Matthean account with awareness of other Synoptic accounts.

Problem Statement

The increasing divide between the church and contemporary secular society continues to stymie the church's efforts in fulfilling the gospel Commission. On the view of Charles Taylor's modern social imaginaries, the locus of the church's challenge to engage secular society with the Christian gospel message lies in the peculiar philosophical underpinnings that shape society's outlooks and attitudes. A model is needed for ecclesiastical engagement with society—to address the problem of the impasse between the church and secular society—that addresses the critical dimensions of the social imaginary, particularly the economic.[32]

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this dissertation is to address the problem of the impasse between the church and secular society by sketching a multidimensional model toward improving ecclesiastical engagement. In addressing the current lack of multidimensionality, the proposed model incorporates an evaluation and restatement of some of the most significant dimensions of Taylor's conceptualization of modern social imaginaries via biblical insights drawn from the Scriptures, primarily from analyses of the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man in Matthew 19.[33]

The principal aim of this study is to find practical and attainable improvements to the current theological methodology employed, particularly as it relates to doing theology

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[32] By focusing on the economic dimension of the modern social imaginaries, the other major elements (the public sphere and democratic self-rule) are automatically incorporated, as the economic "defines the way we are linked together, a sphere of coexistence" (Taylor, *Modern*, 76).

[33] The Spirit-guided application of the *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura* principle in this dissertation invariably results in an engagement with the entire canon, despite focus on a selected pericope.

within a generally "secular" context. Specifically, this study has four objectives. First, the study seeks to fill the void for a multidimensional model. Second, it examines the factors underlying the development of secular social imaginaries and reviews the theological (and, obliquely, ecclesiological) options that are available, or that may be designed, to engage the secular ethos and effectively share the gospel. Third, it reports the findings of analyses of Matthean social imaginaries as a reprise to respond to modern social imaginaries via the model construction. Fourth, it explores the development of an alternative or complementary theological model to aid in engaging the secular by utilizing information derived from social imaginaries. In seeking to achieve these objectives, this study aims to produce findings that are relevant and useful to both the theoretical discourse of theology as well as practical efforts aimed at engaging the secular.

Justification Statement

Although, on Taylor's view, the secularization of social imaginaries may have been theologically influenced and/or incubated, the church is undoubtedly challenged in her efforts to engage contemporary secular society. A study of the problem outlined above is apposite given the shortcomings of existing models, particularly their failure to integrate biblical hermeneutics with philosophical hermeneutics (as Taylor's articulation of social imaginary noted above). This project recommends, and contributes, a multidimensional model as part of a framework from which strategies may be developed to narrow the gap between church and society.

Taylor's work has been selected for three reasons. First, being distinctly multi-faceted, his discourse on secularity seeks to capture the complexities of contemporary

society. Second, because of its inter-disciplinary composition, Taylor's social imaginary model is eminently appropriate to any methodology aimed at unraveling contemporary society.[34] Finally, Taylor's thesis that economics has immanentized modern social imaginaries is intuitively appealing and justifies a model to support efforts investigating the relationship between economics and theology, and to leverage philosophical hypotheses which identify economic influences on theology in a society that reflects "the new harmonious economic-centered order."[35]

Within the context of the foregoing, use of the Matthean narrative of the rich young man exposes—via complementary analyses and inferences from Jesus's teaching—its potential utility for informing the crafting a theological model for secularity 3. The use of this narrative as a complement to Taylor's social imaginary model is apt at the level of the Gospel, the pericope, and individual verses. The Gospel of Matthew reflects a "striking preponderance of economic imagery" relative to the other Synoptics, "in every strand of tradition" in the Gospel.[36] Furthermore, economic imagery is pervasive "in passages dealing with sin, righteousness, and divine recompense,"[37] the

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[34] Despite expressing disagreement in some places and reticence in others, Graham Ward welcomes Taylor's focus on the changes to the social imaginary and his challenge to "unilinear" and "reductive accounts of secularisation [*sic*]" as one among seminal cartographies in an era when the church is trying to locate herself and the environment in which she finds herself ("History, Belief and Imagination in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 [July 2010]: 338-9).

[35] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 234.

[36] Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 196 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 1. Michael H. Crosby posits that "Matthew … knew that acceptance of Jesus' [*sic*] message had economic implications … for individuals … local economies … [and] the underlying social order" (*House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004], 3-4).

[37] Eubank, *Wages*, 1.

matrix from which "some of the Gospel's central claims about Jesus emerge."[38] At the

level of the pericope, Jesus speaks about money in the context of salvation as if to

suggest a link between human flourishing and salvation. At the level of individual verses,

several allude to economic phenomena. Table 1, below, shows a striking profusion of

economic imagery extracted from the Gospel of Matthew. Prevalent themes in the Jesus's

lesson about money and salvation to the rich young man regarding selling, exchange,

rich, poor, possessions, treasure, and rewards reflect a general ethos of the Gospel. Still, a

lacuna remains in extant discussions concerning parables about money as there is

apparent under-engagement with this enacted parable despite its noticeable economic

matrix.[39] Even some distinguished commentaries fail to acknowledge economic

phenomena.[40] Overall, the use of the narrative is justified by a commitment to Scripture

as *norma normans*, especially within the contemporary *milieu*.[41]

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[38] *Ibid.*, 12.

[39] For example, the narrative is conspicuously absent from David Cowan, *Economic Parables: The Monetary Teachings of Jesus Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007); and from Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood, eds., *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009). The use of "enacted" is to highlight that although the narrative does not present the usual story-type parable, it nevertheless bears other features of a parable. As exemplars of those who reference it as a parable, see C. Thomas Hilton, "The Great Reversal," *The Clergy Journal* 78, no. 8 (July/August 2002): 36-37; and Judith L. Hill, "Secularization: A New Testament Perspective," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 4 (October 1, 2015): 311-23.

[40] See, for example, Eubank, *Wages*, 91n.106. Although Eubank's focus on divine recompense takes the discussion in another direction, he strongly supports this point. He references "excellent commentaries … [that] simply pass over … in silence" the words of Matt 19:21: Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, *Vol 3*, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Düsseldorf, Germany: Benziger, 1985-2002), 123-26; Daniel J. Harrington, ed., *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 278-81; Donald Senior, *Matthew*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 218-19; and Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 475-76.

[41] Sensitivity to the differences between Matthean and modern secular imaginaries mandates that analogical inferences to identify "examples" (1 Cor 10:11) require caution. See discussion below on *epoché*. However, see Chapters 4 and 5 for a discussion that addresses the applicability or extrapolatability

Table 1 Economic Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew

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 πραθῆναι 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 κτήματα 19:22
Poor	πτωχοῖς 19:21; 26:9, 11
Treasure	θησαυροὺς 2:11; 6:19, 20, 21; 12:35; 13:44, 52; 19:21 μαμωνᾷ 6:24
Rich	πλούσιος 19:23, 24; 27:57
Hundred-fold	ἑκατονταπλασίονα 19:29
Merchant/merchandise	ἐμπόρῳ 13:45; 22:5
Price (value)	πολύτιμον 13:46 βαρυτίμου 26:7 τιμὴν 27:9 (2x)
Profit	ὠφεληθῇς 15:5; 16:26
Exchange	ἀντάλλαγμα 16:26
Tax (tribute)/tax collector	Δίδραχμα 17:24 (2x) κῆνσον 17:25; 22:17, 19 τελῶναι 5:46; 9:9-11; 10: 3; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31, 32
Coin (money)	χρυσὸν 2:11; 10:9 κοδράντην 5:26 ἄργυρον 10:9; 25:27; 26:15; 27:3, 5, 6, 9; 28:12, 15 χαλκὸν 10:9 ἀσσαρίου 10:29 στατῆρα 17:27 ταλάντων 18:24; 25:15-28 δηνάρια 18:28, 20:2, 9, 10, 13
Workers/work	ἐργάτας 9:37, 38; 10:10; 20:1-14; 21:28
Reward/Wage	μισθὸς 5:12, 46; 6:1,2; 10:41 (2x), 10:42; 20:8
Market(place)	ἀγορᾷ 11:16; 20:3; 23:7
Banker	τραπεζίταις 25:27
Interest	τόκῳ 25:27
Material things	πάντα ταῦτα 6:25-33

☐ *= Rich Young Man Narrative*   *Source: Author's analysis*

of Scripture to contemporary contexts.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The phenomenological nature of Taylor's articulation calls for a theological model for secular engagement that reflects understanding of the peculiar character of 'secular.' Social imaginary may therefore be utilized as a channel through which various aspects of life embedded within it may be addressed.[42] This study seeks to offer a model as a tool "for analysis, description, and the collation of interpretations" and for engagement with society.[43] Of course, this model is dependent on its broad presuppositional hermeneutical components, a discussion of which follows.

To facilitate the development of a multidimensional model, this study employs a tripartite conceptual strategy and method. Part one utilizes philosophical phenomenological hermeneutics to analytically describe and evaluate Taylor's social imaginary model for deconstruction.[44] Part two involves biblical hermeneutics to identify

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[42] On a historical horizon, responses to the economics-theology alignment range on a continuum from a rereading of economics in religious terms seeking to Christianize economics to prosperity gospel narrative, with overlapping and varied emphases in between. Locating economics in a theological model is not to suggest the irresponsible use of *double entendre* and/or careless manipulation of language but, rather, being open to utilize non-traditional means while remaining faithful to biblical principles. Hence, the concept of social imaginary could be employed in the process of exegeting the text (e.g. exploration of norms, expectations, images and understandings), the findings of which could then be utilized within the social imaginary model to initiate enhancements akin to the manner of a hermeneutical spiral. Accordingly, the efficacy of Taylor's modern social imaginaries as instrumental for theological engagement with, and transformative efforts toward, contemporary society, has been noted along with concerns about potential inherent weaknesses.

[43] Fernando Luis Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (North Charleston, SC: CreatedSpace, 2013), 130. Throughout this dissertation, the use of "model" to describe the objective of this project is deliberate in order to communicate a broad framework of essential elements from which details may be developed specific to particular aims. The model sketched is from reconstruction of Taylor's social imaginaries and portrays elements of a theological method crafted for the secular epoch, elements which may then be tweaked to precise need.

[44] This is distinguished from biblical phenomenological hermeneutics discussed below. On Darren Langdridge's view, phenomenology is concerned with the causal relationship between meaning and experience such that as a qualitative method it focuses on human experience in its own right

principles for theological method from exegesis of the apparently analogous Matthean imaginaries, the Sermon on the Mount, and the narrative about the rich young man.[45] Part three utilizes general hermeneutical principles to sketch elements of the model in response to Taylor's secular imaginary model.

Part one, philosophical phenomenological hermeneutics, mandates a broad understanding and explication of social imaginaries in general terms and, more importantly, on Taylor's view, around "an exploration of norms, expectations, images and understandings."[46] This phase of the analysis is fundamental and it is critical that Taylor's model be understood as he intends. What are the underlying complexities of

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(*Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method* [London: Pearson Education, 2007], 4).

[45] Fernando L. Canale divides biblical hermeneutics into phenomenological exegesis and hermeneutical exegesis (*Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001], 148-9). The former he defines as focusing on the canonical impact of the meaning of texts in the interpretive process and the latter as focusing on exegesis in terms of philology and history. So the phenomenological method plays an important dual role in this project: in the understanding of both Taylor's social imaginaries as well as Scripture. Hence, the use of "apparently analogous" is deliberate as judgment is suspended in order to allow the text to speak for itself as to whether in fact analogy pertains, and to mitigate, as far as possible, presuppositions and eisegesis. The conceptual linkages implied between imaginary and the interpretative framework within this project are stark, for despite the understanding that macro-hermeneutic presuppositions are always present in the examination of social imaginary—itself the unthought or background—the interpreter must continually subject any presuppositions "that could prove to be hindrances to the understanding of Scripture" (*Ibid*., 149). Grant R. Osborne likewise recommends *epoché*—this suspension of personal judgment—for he believes that it will evoke renewed and determined excavation of the Scriptures, such that new insights are fostered in the ongoing, enhancing, hermeneutical spiral (*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 373).

[46] As implied by Veninga based on her use to gain "understandings at play in both historical and contemporary events" ("Theology for a Secular Age," 374). While there is cautious agreement with Veninga's recommendation of social imaginary as methodology, given its potential inherent weaknesses noted above, this chapter contends that an evaluation is necessary prior to its recognition as a broad-based theological method. Specifically, as it relates to "doing theology in the twenty-first century," Veninga notes that "employing the social imaginary as a methodology allows theology to perform its social and public responsibilities in a sober yet potentially hopeful way" and for theology to engage with, and address, defining elements of twenty-first century life (*Ibid*., 375), on the presumption that there are, in fact, social and public duties of theology. While her focus and intent differ from that of this project, Veninga has certainly provided an impetus and a challenge for the direction of this project.

social imaginaries in general, and in his articulation? What is the trajectory he delineates,

and illuminates, and how does this inform understanding of contemporary society in

general? This phase is therefore an indicative, thematic description, preliminarily

analytical to juxtaposition with, and comparative rereading by, Scripture.

In part two, three aspects of biblical hermeneutics are critical in this dissertation

project. First, the often-constructed but false dichotomy between systematic and biblical

theology is rejected and, instead, emphasis shifts to the necessary correspondence of

systematic theology with Scripture in addition to Scripture's own internal coherence.[47]

Second, the study and articulation of theistic beliefs in this project in correspondence to

what the inspired biblical writers described and taught must be understood within the

context of a comprehensive approach of spiritual discernment with *sola-tota-prima-*

analogia Scriptura principle: in this study the 'usual' order of the framework is inverted

so as to deliberately emphasize the primacy given to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the

overall process of responding to the secular challenge.[48] Finally, it is within the context of

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[47] In fact, Grant Osborne argues for an "inseparable and interdependent" relationship between biblical and systematic theology and "a conceptual unity" (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, 353).

[48] The entire process of understanding, and applying, all scriptural interpretation is undertaken by giving primacy to the leading of the Holy Spirit rather than reliance on human competence and a presumption to produce the 'correct' meaning from the 'correct' application of 'scientific' hermeneutical principles. There is no awareness that this expanded articulation of the 'Reformation principle' of *sola Scriptura* in the inverted format is not original to this study, but it is derived from an articulation that has been developed due to the work of several dedicated scholars (see, for example, Canale, *Cognitive Principle*; John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016]; and Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000]). The expanded four-part principle utilized in this dissertation—*sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura*—communicates more explicitly than the abbreviated unipartite *sola Scriptura*, and, thus, carries the potential advantage to summarily address criticisms about exclusions of extra-canonical data. Thus, it addresses Scripture's relationship to other instruments of theology. Nevertheless, both constructions suggest a high view of Scripture with all sources/tools understood in harmony with, and subordinated to, Scripture. Each element of this hermeneutic has a unique role in the interpretation of Scripture. *Sola* intends that "[t]heologians define the hermeneutical principles of theology from Scripture alone" (Canale,

the preceding undergirding principles that the narrative analysis of the Matthean narrative

should be understood, along with the complementary close reading of the Gospel and

extended analysis of the historical context, as the uncovering and articulation of the

explicit and implicit analogous lessons for rereading Taylor's secular social imaginary

model proceeds.[49]

Part three of the project strategy utilizes three general hermeneutical principles.

First, these principles are founded on a commitment to a biblical conception of God,

human nature and telos, and knowledge that seeks to uphold faithfulness, coherence, and

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Revelation-Inspiration, 44). In this, Martin Frederick Hanna emphasizes that "the Bible alone … has unique authority over Christian faith, practice, and knowledge" (*The Cosmic Christ of Scripture: How to Read God's Three Books* [Berrien Springs, MI: Cosmic Christ Connections, 2006], 127). *Prima* means that Scripture holds "cognitive primacy over all resources theologians may call on in their work" (Canale, *Cognitive Principle*, 432). *Tota* means that to understand God and his dealings with the world, the entire content of scripture is necessary, "not just some select portions" (*Ibid.*, 425). *Analogia* communicates that Scripture is used to interpret Scripture (see, for example, John C. Peckham, "The Analogy of Scripture Revisited: A Final Form Canonical Approach to Systematic Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 22 [2011]: 41-53). Precisely how this methodological framework is applied to the secular context is discussed in Chapter 5 as part of the model construction. This canonical approach "views the biblical canon as the uniquely authoritative, sufficient source of theological doctrine, adopts the biblical canon as the rule of faith, and denies the positing of any normative extracanonical interpretive authority" (Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," 73). See Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21. The infallibility of Scripture describes an acceptance of the trustworthiness of its affirmations. *Cf.* Karl Barth for whom Scripture is only a witness to the word of God (see "The Task of Prolegomena to Dogmatics," in *Church Dogmatics* 1:42, 53, 54). Peckham highlights the "well-known" canonical approach of Kevin J. Vanhoozer in *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005) in contrast to, say, communitarian approaches "which typically posit the primacy of the biblical canon while emphasizing the theological authority of the community and adopting a community-determined extracanonical rule of faith or other normative interpreter for theological doctrine" (Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 73-74).

[49] By utilizing narrative analysis, focus is directed on how the story is constructed and communicated—its literary patterns and structure, words, and signals that guide the reader to apprehend the author's intended message—via the plot, settings, characterization, as well as the structure of the narrative. Grant Osborne suggests a potentially "dehistoricizing tendency" among the weaknesses of narrative "criticism" (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, 213). The corrective approach taken in this project, to deliberately focus on the historical context, is analogous to what Canale describes as "phenomenological exegesis"—analysis, not criticism, and interpretation that utilizes a panoramic canonical horizon beyond a specified pericope in seeking to apprehend the meaning of the latter's texts (*Revelation-Inspiration*, 148).

correspondence to divinely revealed precepts of the biblical canon as evident in the text.[50]

Second, despite the central role of Taylor's social imaginary in this work, the study's

grounding in Christian theism allows for a critique of Taylor's conception of social

imaginaries based on the phenomena of Scripture rather than an approach based on a

reality grounded in human perception. Third, Taylor's social imaginary model must be

deconstructed subject to the principles within the horizon of the biblical text.[51] Expressed

differently, part of the function of this study is what Canale calls "a philosophical

retrieval of biblical thought"[52] to replace the philosophical reading subsumed in Taylor's

social imaginary model. In other words, biblical imaginaries serve instrumentally to

reread Taylor's social imaginary model and re-present it for potential use as part of a

theological model. While several biblical narratives implicitly and explicitly reference

issues from Taylor's social imaginary model, the narrative of the rich young man, as

noted above, arguably frames a number of these in a most compact manner and offers

methodological lessons from Matthew's Jesus that are potentially adaptable to twenty-

first century society. The outline of the dissertation chapters follows.

Guided by the conceptual framework and methodology outlined above, a four-

pronged approach is employed and accomplished within five remaining chapters in order

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[50] See, for example, Peckham, *Canonical Theology*. In this vein, the *schema* utilized rejects the historical-critical method's search for meaning "behind" the text, as well as reader response criticism's search for meaning "in front of" the text, and seeks to discover the author's intended meaning "in" the text although this must be understood in some measure to understanding the historical context in which the author wrote, with a different focus.

[51] While the philosophy of systematic theology is somewhat dynamic—interpreting Scripture and finding meaning outside of the text—for any model to be properly effective in a theological sense, it must accord with biblical theology.

[52] Canale, *Revelation-Inspiration*, 276. By rereading and reinterpreting metaphysical and theological misconstructions via Scripture, society is enabled to progressively reimagine the social order.

to deconstruct Taylor's secular social imaginary model and to sketch a reconstruction for application in contemporary society using biblical principles. There seems to be considerable hermeneutical assurances in this framework, and in Scripture, regarding its own applicability across diverse contexts. Hence, this approach facilitates the crafting of inter-contextual application. In addition, this dissertation embraces the presumptions of "NT writers in their homiletical application of Scripture" that there is "*transcultural* and *transtemporal* relevancy of biblical instruction unless Scripture itself gives us criteria limiting this relevancy."[53]

Chapter 2 proceeds from this general introduction with the theoretical (philosophical) and historical background as part of an extended historical review and survey of the genealogical dynamics of social imaginaries that provides a framework for subsequent application in the dissertation. This framework, presented in two main parts, first explores and analyzes a select representation of highly influential contributions to the debate on imagination, its transition to, and as the antecedent to, the imaginary. This

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[53] Richard M. Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture According to the Scriptures: Toward an Understanding of Seventh-day Adventist Hermeneutics" (paper presented at Symposium on Biblical Interpretation, Geneva, Switzerland, May 20-21, 2003), 18; emphasis supplied. Davidson was outlining "basic guidelines" of interpretive steps "on the hermeneutical approach to Scripture," and includes "diachronic (thematic) analysis" to "trace the development of various themes and motives chronologically" (*Ibid.*,13, 11). Alfred A. Glenn notes that "[t]ranscultural truth [in the Bible] is truth that is not 'unique' to the cultural patterns of any one particular period" in history ("Criteria for Theological Models," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25, no. 3 [1972]: 302). Glenn further notes that that truth "is a common type of factual knowledge (*Historie*) acknowledged in every generation (Man is a sinner). Whether its significance (*Geschichte*) is interpreted in the same way by men is another thing (the significance of sin)" (*Ibid.*, 305). Glenn further adds that "nothing is *purely* transcultural or culture-free" (*Ibid.*; emphasis original). Walter C. Kaiser Jr., asserts that "[t]heological exegesis, when used with the grammatical-historical-syntactical-cultural steps, will employ the Analogy of Antecedent Scripture to aid the interpreter in making an authorized transfer from the *then* of the B.C. context of the OT to the *now* of the twentieth century" (*Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978], 18; emphasis original). Osborne discusses contextualization and hermeneutical rules necessary to demarcate "the cultural from the supracultural" norms in Scripture (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, 420-22). Presumably, these principles are extrapolatable, so that the *then* of the first century can be validly transferred to the *now* of the twenty-first.

is followed by a survey of social imaginaries from ancient to (arguably) post-modern times. In the second part, a selected survey of theories about imagination and its relationship with theology is presented. Both parts serve to contextualize Taylor's thesis.

Chapter 3 presents a thematic and summarized analytical description of Taylor's social imaginary model in two major parts to identify critical variables to social imaginaries. These variables inform and focus the rereading of critical constituents of modern social imaginaries. In the first part, the chapter examines the phenomena of Taylor's articulation of secularity from the patterns emerging from the development of modern social imaginaries via four major shifts of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology (PAST), and identifies a central locus in considerations of human telos as human flourishing. The teleological considerations are themselves bifurcated into considerations about human nature and action and God's nature and action, which drive the extent and direction of change. In the second part, the chapter explores whether, in fact, the concept of social imaginary might be re-envisioned so as to optimize its positive attributes in theological method. Using the impetus of human flourishing, a thought-experiment is conducted geared toward responding to why secularists might be amenable to a rereading of secular fundamentals.

In Chapter 4, the focus shifts to the Scriptures. Initial considerations center around the juxtaposition of first century and twenty-first century imaginaries, and identifying the utility of imagination via the pericope of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). Complementary analyses of the Matthean narrative of the rich young man (19:16-29) follows, and the chapter analyzes and interrogates the text by a close reading, and some primary exegetical, grammatical, narrative, and intertextual analyses along with

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secondary exegetical findings in order to draw theological conclusions as to how the problem in this dissertation might be addressed. In addition to this phenomenological analysis (both biblical and philosophical), the chapter also focuses on identifying economic allusions and human flourishing, by employing social imaginary as methodology to extract lessons for redeployment toward secular engagement.

Chapter 5 focuses primarily on model construction directed toward responding to the problem addressed in this dissertation. It gathers the threads of the discussion together, juxtaposing the elements of the study, and using the lessons garnered from the biblical analyses along with the methodological framework described above to reread and complement Taylor's articulation. From this follows a sketch of critical elements of a conjoint model in which a reoriented human flourishing (economics) and theology work in tandem—collaborating rather than competing—toward secular engagement.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of this dissertation and recommendations which accrue at various points in the analysis, and highlights potential areas for future research.

Scope and Delimitations

This dissertation is inspired and motivated by reflection on the Great Commission given to the church (Matt 28:19-20) and on the progress made in engaging the secular (however defined). The factors responsible for noted suboptimal results (see above) prompt an immediate concern to develop the appropriate responses: this investigation of secularity and theological method is justified by the church's need to fulfill her raison d'être.

Because this project is aimed at sketching a model toward secular engagement along the lines of "secular" articulated by Charles Taylor's social imaginary model, other conceptions of "secular" may be excluded simply by virtue of definition. Moreover, by nature of their broad, general, and inexact structure, "models have limits"; they are not "provable" because the general patterns they represent "are not explicitly formulated" but are deliberately broad to facilitate multiple applications.[54] Accordingly, neither comprehensive examinations of "secular" or "social imaginary" nor exhaustive exegeses of texts are produced. A selective exegesis of the philosophical and historical background to imagination, social imaginaries, and theological imagination follows in the next chapter.

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[54] Canale, *Cognitive*, 129.

CHAPTER 2

GENEALOGICAL DYNAMICS OF

SOCIAL IMAGINARIES

Introduction and Background

The previous chapter broadly alluded to a potentially fruitful relationship between

the social imaginary concept and theological method to address the problem of

ecclesiastical engagement with secular society. Because social imaginary may be

considered as a "broad understanding of how people *imagine* their communal

experience,"[1] one theme that is important in these discussions about secularity and social

imaginaries is the character and role of imagination—on which the concept of social

imaginary fundamentally turns—and the character and role of theology itself. In this

context, it is not unreasonable to question what is considered appropriate theological

engagement with social imaginaries taking into consideration historical tensions between

theology and imagination.[2] That is to say, are considerations for utilizing the form and/or

content of social imaginary to complement theological method feasible—in terms of its

differentia specifica[3]—in the light of its grounding in imagination?

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[1] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-2; emphasis supplied.

[2] Some of those tensions are highlighted in this chapter.

[3] In this case, the specific features that differentiate the concept of social imaginary. The Latin
term *differentia specifica*, literally "'specific difference'," provides a "basis for discriminating between two

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Because it is a heavily contested concept, this chapter focuses first on imagination in its own right, and then on its role in constructing social imaginaries, and, finally, its application in theology. Anthony J. Godzieba suggests that it is only "by taking the workings of imagination into account" that questions about social imaginaries—how they are generated, and to what they respond, as well as how they might be susceptible to change—can "begin to be answered."[4] By its focus on imagination, this chapter moves toward a response to those questions, and complements Charles Taylor who, according to Godzieba, "nowhere addresses the particular workings of imagination."[5]

From a wide range of possible topics and approaches, the material selected for this chapter is aimed at particular goals with regard to human identity and search for meaning; these goals materialized in an interface between the social structures and human telos. Ultimately, the goal of the chapter is primarily in terms of methodological justification and the outline of a broad theoretical framework to contextualize the remainder of this dissertation.

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or more alternatives" (Aaron Xavier Fellmeth and Maurice Horwitz, *Guide to Latin in International Law* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], 80). However, Richard L. Haney implies that the "notion" of "'social imaginary' conceptualization" might be irrelevant, as it is "comparable to other categorical terms used to describe social or cultural reality" ("Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries in light of Michael Polanyi's Tacit Dimension," [St. Joseph, MO, November 5, 2014], 13, 3-4, https://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/2014pprs/Haney-2014PSppr-11-5-14.pdf [accessed October 9, 2017]). Haney argues that it is useful to consider the social imaginary and other categorical terms of social reality "as 'cousins' in the family of categories that articulate efforts to describe social or cultural reality: "Peter Berger's 'plausibility structures,'" as well as "worldviews (*Weltanschauung*), Thomas Kuhn's paradigms, conceptual metaphors and Michael Polanyi's frameworks of meaning" (*Ibid.*).

[4] Anthony J. Godzieba, "Imagination, the Body, and the Transfiguration of Limits," in *At the Limits of the Secular: Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William A. Barbieri (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 199.

[5] Ibid.

Theoretical Considerations of Imagination

This section presents a brief philosophical overview of imagination covering three periods: pre-modern, modern, and post-modern.[6]

There is growing scholarly interest in 'imagination.' Eva T. H. Brann suggests that this growing interest may explain the appearance of imagination in diverse disciplinary perspectives: "the philosophical" as a "productive function" important "in constituting the knowable world," the "psychological" in a "reproductive role in cognitively indispensable processes of visualization," and also in the capacity "as a world-making agency."[7] John T. Fitzgerald and William Scott Green believe that "[b]eyond academia, society itself is manifesting a growing interest in the powerful role played by imagination, with the neologism 'imaginarium' appearing with increasing frequency."[8] On the ubiquity of interest in imagination, Dennis L. Sepper asserts that "claims about imagination are legion, and every single one is contested."[9]

Accordingly, from a constellation of definitions, and, except for alternative definitions quoted from scholars, this chapter adopts the definition of imagination as "an

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[6] The reference to post-modern is based on the taxonomy of the theorist and does not suggest an analytic description in terms of this dissertation.

[7] Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance*, 25th Anniversary Edition. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 774. Brann explores "the enigmas of imagination" from different disciplinary perspectives (*Ibid.*, 10). In this context, 'reproductive' may be understood in the sense of 'replicating.'

[8] John T. Fitzgerald and William Scott Green, foreword: "How does Religion Imagine Society?," to *Judaic and Christian Visions of the Social Order: Describing, Analyzing, and Comparing Systems of the Formative Age*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Bruce D. Chilton, and Alan J. Avery-Peck, Studies in Religion and the Social Order (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 2.

[9] Dennis L. Sepper, foreword to *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance*, 25th Anniversary Edition, by Eva T. H. Brann (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), xv.

act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical or

psychic content that is given not as itself, but in the capacity of 'analogical

representative' of the object aimed at."[10] Because this dissertation's focus is ultimately on

social imaginary—as the centerpiece of Charles Taylor's thesis on the secular social

identity—and its juxtaposition with theological method, a broad introductory focus on

imagination will suffice.

This section utilizes Richard Kearney's delineation of imagination.[11] Firstly,

Kearney records the movement from what he categorizes as "mimetic" premodern

imagination, to "productive" modern imagination, and finally to "parodic" postmodern

imagination, depending on how the relationship between imagination and reality is

conceptualized.[12] On Kearney's view, a Hebraic conception of imagination was mainly as

"a human imitation of the divine act of creation,"[13] determined by its "intermediary

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[10] Jean-Paul Satre, *The Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 20.

[11] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Launching from a presumption of the apparent inversion and subversion of "the very rapport between *imagination* and *reality*" (*Ibid*., 3), and an accompanying paradox attending the reign of the image and the simultaneous threat to the "notion of a creative human imagination" (*Ibid*.), Kearney narrates "heuristic" (*Ibid*., 20) paradigmatic shifts in the understanding of the relationship between imagination and reality at significant epochs of Western history.

[12] Kearney, *Wake*, 17. Since the pre-Christian era, Greek philosopher Plato, constrained by his two-world theory and theory of Forms, restricted imagination to mimetic images—"a blend of judgment and perception"—based on his understanding of "*phantasia*" (Thomas J. J. Altizer, "The Apocalyptic Identity of the Modern Imagination," in "JAAR Thematic Series: The Archaeology of the Imagination," ed. Charles E. Winquist, special issue, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Studies* 48, no. 2 [1981]: 19). Likewise, Aristotle interprets "*phantasia*" as falling on a continuum between *aesthesis* (perceiving) and *noesis* (thinking). The understanding of imagination as purely mimesis prevailed among significant thinkers, including Aquinas, until the time of the Enlightenment when imagination came to be considered as creative or productive, in line with the *zeitgeist*. See later in this chapter for a brief discussion on the modern ethos.

[13] *Ibid*., 53.

character,"[14] because "imagination is never understood in some internal, subjective power of man alone" but always "in terms of man's relation to a divine or cosmic power greater than imagination itself."[15]

Secondly, Kearney believes that the modern conception of imagination was marked by the "*affirmation* of the creative power of man."[16] Kearney posits that "the philosophical concept of imagination only fully came into its own in the modern era"[17] but has become central to other paradigms: hence, the *pre-* and *post-* prefixes. Arguably, Immanuel Kant's epistemological revolution of the Enlightenment era was pivotal to how imagination came to be regarded as "one of the most powerful sources that individuals and groups possess for articulating themselves, their understanding of the past, and their aspirations for the future."[18] In fact, Thomas J. J. Altizer notes that "it was Kant who

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[14] *Ibid.*, 82.

[15] *Ibid.*, 83. Kearney posits that the understanding of pre-modern imagination as "*alio-relative* (defined vis-à-vis something *other* than itself) rather than *ipso-relative* relative (defined exclusively in reference to itself)" also applies to Hellenic imagination (*Ibid.*; italics original).

[16] *Ibid.*, 155; italics original.

[17] *Ibid.*, 18.

[18] Fitzgerald and Green, foreword, 2. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) made a systematic investigation of reason's functions—what reason can and cannot do in relation to theoretical knowledge (see his *Critique of Pure Reason*) and in relation to action (see his *Critique of Practical Reason*). Based on this investigation, he synthesized rationalist and empiricist epistemologies, positing that the content of knowledge comes via the senses (a posteriori) but the form (structure) comes via the mind (a priori). Thus, on Kant's view, human intellect does not draw its laws out of nature but reads them into nature; objects of nature must in some sense conform themselves to the mind and human reason cannot reach the world behind appearances to know things as they are in themselves (noumena) but can only know things as they appear, as they have been structured by the mind (phenomena). As Kathleen Lennon understands it, David Hume conceives imagination as "the domain of … faint copies of sensory impressions derived from perceptions" but Kant conceives imagination as "the faculty by which sensory intuitives are given shape or formed, without which perceptual experiences are not possible" (*Imagination and the Imaginary* [New York: Routledge, 2015], 1-2). Apparently, for Kant, imagination "is both a 'transcendental' (or 'productive') faculty and an 'empirical' (or 'reproductive') faculty" (David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989], 66). Noting that Kant most frequently used *Einbildungskraft* for imagination, Bryant explains that "Mary Warnock states that this term

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created the first truly conceptual understanding of imagination" which is "most clearly present in his distinction between the beautiful and the sublime."[19]

Finally, Kearney reasons that the postmodern conception of "parody and play" which becomes necessary as "[t]ruth is replaced by parody,"[20] mediates between the pre-modern "tendency to repress human creativity" and the modern overemphasis of the "sovereign role of the autonomous individual as sole source of meaning."[21] Brann laments an apparent loss of imagination as a category after modernity, and suggests an explanation for the continuing movement. She posits that the contemporary "large, amorphous 'imagery movement'" is a "revealing example of the contemporary revolt against the dominion of rationalism."[22] She concludes that Kearney's delineation of the decline of imagination in "the postmodern paradigm" suggests a dismissal of "traditional [modern] attempts to ground imagination philosophically and dismantle it as a

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'suggests a power of making images, pictures or representations of things'" (*Ibid*.). Bryant also notes Kant's use of the term supports "making images … synthesis … to create a whole" such that, at the transcendental level it is able to "mediate between … pure understanding (*Verstand*) and … intuitions of … sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*)" (*Ibid*.). Imagination's contact with understanding provides the lead categories for its synthesis, and its contact with sensibility then allows the synthesis of appearances into a representation or image (*Ibid*., 67).

[19] Altizer, "Apocalyptic Identity," 20. Altizer sees Kant's understanding of the sublime as "formlessness [versus form] … limitlessness [versus limit] … or chaos [versus order]" making "possible our apprehension of the infinite or the transcendent" (*Ibid*., 21).

[20] Kearney, *Wake*, 253.

[21] *Ibid*., 33.

[22] Brann, *World of the Imagination*, 3.

category"[23] "the philosophy of truth and of imagination, which once stood together, now fall together."[24]

Interestingly, Kearney notes that for both Plato and Aristotle, "imagination remains largely a reproductive rather than a productive activity, a servant rather than a master of meaning, imitation rather than origin."[25] Simultaneously, Kearney underlines the "enduring influence" of the Greek heritage of "speculation" alongside "the biblical tradition of Judeo-Christian revelation."[26] This is the tension evident in the contemporary era, and it demands a response from everyone with 'public' responsibilities. Thus, the significance of the study of imagination and its social dimensionalities to the study of theological method cannot be overestimated.

Against the foregoing background, it is also worth bearing in mind that C. Wright Mills posits "sociological imagination": the means by which humans "hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society."[27] In this sense,

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[23] *Ibid*., 10.

[24] *Ibid*.

[25] Kearney, *Wake*, 113.

[26] *Ibid*., 79. That the "ascendancy" of imagination has been simultaneous with an apparent "wane" in the use of divine revelation, brings to the fore some potential challenges and tensions contiguous with changing notions of imagination and its role in contemporary theology and method (Garrett Green, review of *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, by Gordon D. Kaufman, *Religious Studies Review* 9, no. 3 [1983]: 219). Green notes the correlation although he does not specifically infer causation. According to nineteenth century liberalism of the Kantian, Troeltschian, and Feuerbachian kind, the authority of Scripture and divine revelation was rejected. Human reason was extolled above Scripture and traditional doctrines, as the modern epistemology undermined revealed vis-à-vis experiential knowledge.

[27] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5.

sociological imagination as a "method for analyzing the world"[28] is comparable to another conception of imagination which "serves to form community and create social identity."[29] In the next section, the discussion advances to intuitions from imagination to these social constructions of imagination—social imaginaries—which, as indicated above, bear increasing relevance in the contemporary context.

Social Imagination and Social Imaginary

Philosopher Kathleen Lennon believes that the "concept of the social imaginary shifts attention away from imagination as a faculty of an individual subject, and onto imaginaries as features of socio-historical contexts which can be encountered and shared; anonymous daily creations in which everyone participates."[30] In general, Lennon views the social imaginary as accorded with patterns and forms, creating and defining avenues through which people engage with, and experience, the world. While citations of imaginary have become "pervasive within contemporary writing" concerning social groupings,[31] major academic works concerning the intersection of imagination and

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[28] Jennifer Elisa Veninga, *Secularism, Theology and Islam: The Danish Social Imaginary and the Cartoon Crisis of 2005-2006* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 40.

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] Lennon, *Imagination*, 73-4. Despite this dissertation's preference for a particular view of imagination, it will become increasingly clear that the concept of social imaginary is complex and constituted by alternative conceptions which, nevertheless, appear to find themselves socially and ethically compossible. The concept of the imaginary demands recognition of the "affective texture" which imagination gives to the world (*Ibid*., 3; see, also, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009], 68). "One job of the social imaginary is to provide an account of how we come to experience the world" and is "encountered as conditions for experiencing the world, and actively and innovatively transformed as they are re-experienced" (*Ibid*., 73-4). Evidently, the role of "perceptual encounter" mandates some consideration of imagination in everyday experiences (*Ibid*., 11).

[31] *Ibid*., 1. Lennon also asserts that this is consequent on "the work of Lacan, Castoriadis, and

imaginary have left open the question as to the link with self-identification. Jacques

Lacan is noted for a conception of "the Imaginary [as] the domain of misrecognition and

illusion."[32] In contrast, Cornelius Castoriadis (and others) conceive the imaginary as

"necessary for experience of any kind."[33] These arguments bear relevance to the

methodological potential of 'social imaginary' in theology which is examined and

developed throughout this dissertation.

The link between imagination and social imaginary finds explicit expression in

the work of Benedict Anderson and Cornelius Castoriadis, both of which are examined

alternately here as a prelude to broader discussions of social imaginaries. Charles Taylor

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Irigaray" (*Ibid*). Anthropologist Claudia Strauss also observes a decline in the use of "culture" and "cultural beliefs, meanings, and models" in anthropology and an apparently simultaneous increase in the use of "imaginaries" (Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 [2006]: 322-44, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1463499606066891 [accessed December 3, 2017]). In addition to 'modern social imaginaries' of Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar ("Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14 [2002]: 1-19) and of Charles Taylor ("Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 [2002]: 91-124), Strauss cites "'National-cultural imaginaries' (Ivy, 1995)" as well as "'Spatial imaginary' (Handler, 2004)" and "'Technoscientific imaginaries' (Marcus, 1995)" to demonstrate the increasing use of the concept (Strauss, "The Imaginary," 322).

[32] Lennon, *Imagination*, 1. She notes deliberate use of the capitalized 'Imaginary' for references to Lacan in line with convention (*Ibid*., 12). Similar to Lacan, Eva Brann suggests that "'the imaginary'" is "the operative postmodern" replacement for imagination and that imaginary "denominates the illusional contrivance of a false individual or social self" (*World of the Imagination*, 10).

[33] Lennon, *Imagination*, 1. Similarly, Lennon, argues that "we cannot draw a sharp distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, cognition and affect, between what is known and what is imagined" because the imaginary is the domain "*by which* the real is made available to us" (*Ibid*., 1, 2; italics original). She defines 'real' as "the world, the actual, in contrast to the fictional, or illusory" (*Ibid*., 2). Lennon's "account of imagination, and its transposition into the concept of the imaginary" necessarily utilizes both Kant's "*productive* imagination" and Hume's "*reproductive* imagination" (*Ibid*., 15; italics original). Kant's "productive imagination" may be described in terms of the fact that experiences are inseparably phenomenologically intertwined with "*both* intuition and concepts" (*Ibid*., 19; italics original). Intuitions are empirical sensory data that must be shaped by concepts to have a meaning. Concepts, pure (a priori), or empirical, must be applied to "intuitions" to have meaningful content, and the "productive imagination" performs the critical, distinctive and creative role of shaping or "synthesis" of a concept prior to its application to intuitions to produce an image (*Ibid*.). Hume's "reproductive imagination" may be understood as "faint copies of something recalled from our senses, which may or may not be rearranged according to the originating experience." The content may then be as "fictions or illusions" (*Ibid*., 15, 16).

singles out their work as having been particularly influential to his work on social imaginaries and social identification: Anderson's for its similarity, and Castoriadis's for both similarity as well as distinction.[34]

<div align="center">Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities"</div>

Benedict Anderson offers an "anthropological" definition of a nation as "an *imagined* political community."[35] On the one hand, Anderson appears to exposit "*imagined*" negatively, as antithetical to face-to-face, because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" although "in the minds of each lives the image of the communion."[36] On the other hand, he argues that "perhaps even [communities with face-to-face contact] are imagined" because communities are distinguished "by the style in which they are imagined."[37] It seems, then, that the real point Anderson intends is that "imagined" includes, but is not restricted to, the absence of sensory experience or contact: People imagine themselves as part of a community based on accepted nuances and are linked by a common imagining and sense of belonging.

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[34] Taylor notes that Anderson discusses "some of the same issues [he is] trying to describe" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55). He also acknowledges that the term 'social imaginary' is one he "borrowed … from Cornelius Castoriadis to use in a slightly different sense" (Charles Taylor, "A More Adequate Narrative of Western Secularity," video of lecture, Berkley Center Lectures, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV9c4mVTalc [accessed October 5, 2017]). This chapter discusses the work of both scholars as found in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; and Castoriadis, *Institution*.

[35] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6; emphasis supplied.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Ibid.*

Rejecting the "falsity/genuineness"[38] dichotomy in this context, Anderson implies that the "imagined" constitutes the real. Against Ernest Gellner, Anderson emphasizes that 'imagining' is better linked with 'creation' rather than with 'fabrication' and 'falsity.'[39] In some ways, Anderson's model of social imagination bears strong similarities with that of Cornelius Castoriadis's, though the latter appears significantly more complex.

<div align="center">Cornelius Castoriadis's "Imaginary Institutions"</div>

Cornelius Castoriadis is considered to be "the most frequently cited" of major "theorists of imaginaries."[40] Castoriadis has also been credited with crafting the "fullest contemporary elaboration" of social imaginary "as an enabling and prohibiting symbolic matrix, a creative force, essential to each individual and society."[41]

Castoriadis argues for a peculiar distinction in the use of the term, particularly against "certain ['specular'] currents in psychoanalysis" noting that "the works of the imaginary" constitute "creation *ex nihilo*."[42] Castoriadis emphasizes that imaginary "is

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[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.* Anderson references Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), 169. Tangentially, Jennifer Veninga, notes that Islamic thought presupposes a similar conception of imagination. She notes that "[i]magination is related to a realm of reality that … is not simply fantasy … [it] plays a significant role in the development of the soul" (*Secularism*, 38). On Veninga's view, imagination bears "a relationship to reason and its ability to perceive similitudes. … God as transcendent … but God is also near to human beings and is somehow similar to them, at least insofar as they are able to imagine what God is like" (*Ibid.*, 39).

[40] Strauss, "The Imaginary," 323.

[41] Eftychia Stavrianopoulou, ed., "Introduction," *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 3.

[42] Castoriadis, *Institution*, 3.

not an image *of*" but that "[w]hat we call 'reality' and 'rationality' are its works."[43]

Castoriadis also asserts "the institution of an imaginary possessing a greater reality than

the real itself"[44] and that it is "the institution of a magma of social imaginary

significations" that constitutes society because, "society institutes the world."[45]

In defense of this conception of the social imagination, Castoriadis argues that:

> History is impossible and inconceivable outside of the *productive* or *creative*
> *imagination* … The social world is, in every instance, constituted and articulated as a
> function of … a system of significations, and these significations *exist,* once they
> have been constituted, in the mode of what we called the *actual imaginary* (or the
> *imagined*).[46]

Accordingly, his proposal for a symbiotic relationship between the symbolic and the

imaginary appears, because "the imaginary has to use the symbolic" in order "to

'express' itself" and, conversely, symbolism "presupposes an imaginary capacity," seeing

in something "what is not, to see it other than it is."[47] Therefore, on his view, laws,

practices, and symbols of the imaginary provide a "unifying factor,"[48] making it possible

for individuals to understand their relationships with other individuals and groups within

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[43] *Ibid*., emphasis original.

[44] *Ibid*., 128. For Castoriadis the concept of 'institution' is critical because the imagined (imaginary) structures of society, whether they be laws or symbols, are instituted by the autonomous, open and mutable society for itself.

[45] *Ibid*., 359. By magma he means "that from which one can extract (or in which one can construct) an indefinite number of ensemblist organizations but which can never be reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organizations" (*Ibid*., 343).

[46] *Ibid*., 146, italics original. With Lennon (*Imagination*, 81), Strauss finds Castoriadis's emphasis on society potentially problematic ("The Imaginary," 323).

[47] Castoriadis, *Institution*, 127.

[48] *Ibid*., 160.

society. One such symbol, to which Castoriadis ultimately assigns a fundamental role in

the construction of a society's imaginary, is religion.[49]

Castoriadis also wrestles with a number of other concepts that appear to carry a

general philosophical priority in his work: time, history, and language.[50] For example,

rejecting "proper meaning," Castoriadis argues that:

> The word *God* has no referent other than the signification God, as it is posited in each case by the society in question … Likewise … the 'economy' and the 'economic' are central social imaginary significations which do not 'refer' *to* something but on the basis of which a host of things are socially represented, reflected, acted upon and made *as* economic.[51]

These comments carry important implications for understanding 'social imaginary' and

particularly for distinguishing modern social imaginaries and the associated economic

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[49] Although Castoriadis appears to relegate religion to a destructive role in society, his argument exposes the dialectic between religion and society and the way in which society uses religion as a symbol (*Ibid.*, 317). Charles Taylor also identifies a fundamental role for religion to the conception, understanding, and *habitus* of secular imaginaries (see Chapter 3).

[50] Castoriadis distinguishes between 'identitary time' ("the measurement of time … into 'identical' or … 'congruent' parts … [e.g.] calendar time") and 'imaginary time' ("time of signification positing imaginary boundaries and periods and sharing a reciprocal inherent relationship … with identitary time") (*Institution*, 209, 210). Taking Castoriadis's idea on time to a logical extension produces history that is no more than a social construction of reality: "The social makes itself and can make itself only as history … The historical makes itself and can do so only as social" (*Ibid.*, 215). Castoriadis's focus on these concepts is a manifestation of his emphasis on the reality of social imaginary and social imaginary significations and therefore his denial or rejection of a reality beyond that which is imagined (*Ibid.*, 353). Indeed, he argues for a complexity that encapsulates a dialectic that reflects that "[s]ociety's doing and representing/saying are neither dictated by an indubitable, in-itself, being-thus of the natural stratum nor are they 'absolutely free' in relation to the latter" (*Ibid.*). Social imaginary significations, though induced by nature appear as the creation of the social imaginary. In this regard, Castoriadis's claim that "[c]entral significations … condition and orient social doing and representing, in and through which they continue as they are themselves altered" (*Ibid.*, 364) aligns very well with similar sentiments with regard to modern social imaginaries noted in Chapter 1. As will be seen later, in Chapter 3, Taylor also provides another example of taxonomic work on time.

[51] *Ibid.*, 362; emphasis original. On Strauss's view, "Castoriadis greatly appreciated the imaginary as a potential source of creativity and freedom, for both individuals and societies" ("Imaginary," 324). Strauss nevertheless expresses a preference for Taylor's view which posits that "a modern social imaginary is 'the way we imagine our society'" and "not what societies imagine" (*Ibid.*, 329).

fundamentals as articulated by Charles Taylor and discussed in Chapter 3. On this and

other premises, Castoriadis has been subject to criticisms.[52] Nevertheless, Strauss views

Castoriadis's work, along with Anderson's (and Taylor's), as among those who "focus on

the imaginary as something positive, an imaginative creation."[53]

Overall, then, this brief engagement with Anderson and Castoriadis provides a

window into the invisible reality of social imaginaries and a context for preparing for

Charles Taylor's story in Chapter 3. On the basis of Anderson's and Castoriadis's claims,

the concept of social imaginary is, apparently, a repository of potentially valuable lessons

for secularity 3 that accords to it a central pole defined by economic human flourishing.

Indeed, Fitzgerald and Green note that "imagination's literary artifacts provide modern

scholars with rare insights into antiquity's hopes and fears for society."[54]

Accordingly, the chapter now turns to a phenomenological analysis of social

imaginaries that aims to do justice to both the underlying intentionalities and, also, to its

social and historical context. It proceeds, firstly, by highlighting salient features of the

social landscape of ancient pre-modern societies and, then, by outlining some broad

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[52] Notwithstanding Castoriadis's scholarship and influence, Claudia Strauss, among others, is critical of his approach and so, giving preference to concrete material conditions and the imaginaries of people, they argue against the usefulness of his thesis of "'the imaginary of a society'" and abstractions of culture (*Ibid.*, 323). Because for Castoriadis the "'social imaginary' is the actual imaginary of a society … a society's imaginings, rather than ideas about society" Strauss argues that "the key is … to theorize how people in societies imagine" since imagination is a feature of creatures—people—and not societies (*Ibid.*, 324, 326).

[53] *Ibid.*, 326. Strauss contrasts the work of Lacan who "comes from a Marxian tradition that emphasizes the imaginary as illusion and a Freudian one that treats this illusion as a fantasy, an illusion created in response to a psychological need" (*Ibid.*). Hence, she notes Lacan's simple definition of the imaginary as "a fantasy—paradigmatically, one formed by the preverbal child" (*Ibid.*, 327). Taylor's conceptualization, which is the concern of this project, is discussed in Chapter 3.

[54] Fitzgerald and Green, foreword, 2.

theoretical considerations of social imaginaries since modernity. Concern lies with the archetypical patterns and features of mind and behavior that would have, perhaps also inadvertently, shaped the articulation of social theory and practice to produce the social mosaic of the various thought-worlds.

Pre-Modern Social Imaginaries

Whatever else may be said about pre-modern social imaginaries, it must be said that, at the core, they were predominantly religious.[55] As part of the theoretical framework and complement to the remainder of this dissertation, the discussion in this chapter is approached from the perspective of understanding how the enduring presuppositions and ethos of these pre-modern societies actualized in the various elements of social imaginaries and how these elements, in turn, were intertwined with the religious dimensions.[56] The present focus from an imagination-imaginary trajectory to Jewish and Greco-Roman social imaginaries is theologically-focused and aims to balance Charles Taylor's predominantly philosophically-focused discussion in Chapter 3. This section therefore seeks to initiate two complexly intertwined conversations: about social

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[55] Arguably, any one society is comprised of multiple social imaginaries and the focus in this study must be delimited to those areas that are considered germane to its primary objective. Writing in the context of Roman social imaginaries, Clifford Ando notes that "[p]luralism is a feature of all ancient empires … [and] the anthropological awareness that rendered certain pluralisms perceptible … must have differed from place to place and time to time" (*Roman Social Imaginaries: Language and Thought in Contexts of Empire* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015], 53, 54). Religious (and social) pluralism was, arguably, an undeniable feature of (especially early) Hellenistic and other premodern societies.

[56] Kearney suggests that because "[t]he story of imagination is deeply informed by the ancient biblical heritage of Western culture," in order to get a good understanding of the contemporary context, "we must begin at the beginning—the Book of Genesis" (*Wake*, 38). He notes that "Adam's transgressive act of imagination [in Genesis] represents the *alienation* of God's original creation" because, he posits, "imagination enables man to think in terms of opposites—good and evil, past and future, God and man" (*Ibid.*, 40; emphasis original).

imaginaries on the one hand, and about conceptions of social imaginaries and theological

imagination, on the other. The first conversation is essentially substantive, and the

second, which follows from the first, concerns method. A brief look at Hebraic and

Greco-Roman social imaginaries follows.

Hebraic Social Imaginaries

A cross-sectional view of the story of the nation of Israel—from the birth of the

nation to the covenant-making with God, through periods of conquest and changes in

leadership from judges to monarchy, to the exile and back—offers a panoramic view of

salient and sustaining features of Hebraic social imaginaries. Despite diversity in

approach, several authors converge on a number of interesting features from that era,

which appear to carry enduring relevance to secular social imaginaries introduced in

Chapter 1 as the focus of this study.

Evidently, a 'religious element' characterized and sustained people's expectations

in Hebraic society, even before a nation could have been imagined. Conceivably, the

birth of the Jewish nation began imaginatively in the promise to Abram (Gen 12:2)

although there was no manifestation for four hundred years in Egypt. Ultimately, the

great act of the Exodus-redemption birthed the promised nation that had been long

imagined, and became a powerful symbol of divine presence and intent to prosper.[57]

Baruch Levine has pointed out that the "Hebrew Bible preserves multiple visions

of the social order, projecting ideal societies while voicing severe criticism of existing

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[57] See, for example, Exod 7-15; Ps 77:14-20, 78:12-55; Hos 11:1. It is worth bearing in mind that the other 'nations,' like Egypt, are likely to have had different social imaginaries.

societies, Israelite and other."[58] On Levine's view, the biblical visions "reveal the group's interpretation of its own history, and convey its sense of destiny."[59] The covenant—established with the Israelites as God's treasured people—is perhaps the broadest expression of the biblical vision, foretelling conditions for blessings and judgments. Levine emphasizes a 'pedagogical' "model" of "collective" in the covenant that was necessary to the actualization of promised blessings and human telos: "individuals, as righteous, wise, or powerful as they may be, cannot achieve the divinely ordained goals of human life acting alone."[60] Thus, Levine believes that "a promising method for exploring biblical visions" of social order "is to examine the primary configurations of collective existence."[61]

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[58] Baruch A. Levine, "From the Repertoire of the Hebrew Bible: Visions of the Social Order," in Neusner, *et al.*, *Judaic and Christian Visions*, 37. It bears mention that, notwithstanding the hermeneutical complexities introduced into attempts to analyze ancient social imaginaries, the mention of what may be called 'the ideal social order' is instructive.

[59] *Ibid.*, 31. Secularists may certainly argue against the use of "biblical visions" on account of bias or artificiality. Perhaps one of the best responses come from Walter C. Kaiser Jr., who, discussing the issue rather obliquely, argues that "all texts should be innocent of all charges" until proven guilty "by clear external witnesses," and that allowing "the biblical record to speak its own intention first" before "philosophical and sociological impositions" reveals the "progress" and "development" of the "flow of historical currents" (*Old Testament*, 7-8). He argues that "this history was not just homiletically useful" but that "it had to be real history" in order for it to be worthy "of personal belief" and not susceptible to "internal collapse from the sheer weight of its own contrivances" (*Ibid.*, 8). It is on this broad premise that appeals to the biblical data are used throughout this study. It is not to suggest that the extraction of biblical data is automatically free from bias or error. Some methodological guidelines relating to this have been noted in Chapter 1 and are furthered developed in Chapter 5. For now, it is considered methodologically reasonable if this data are "discernible, demonstrable, and defensible." This triptych is excerpted from John C. Peckham's *sola Scriptura* methodology that is used in reference to a defense of Scripture and suggests the unnecessity "to be persuasive to all [or] to assuage every doubt" (*Canonical Theology*, 209, 41).

[60] Levine, "Repertoire," 31. He suggests that these goals were only accessible to a "'landed' Israel [in the Promised Land as per, for example, Exod 8:8; Deut 8:7-10], at peace, living in security" (*Ibid.*, 32). On Levine's account, the telos of the Israelites, as outlined in the Hebrew Bible, was "the attainment of a society that is at once just, caring and holy, and hence … a model for all nations … [as] Yahweh, the God of Israel, [had] established a covenant with the Israelites to be his treasured people" (*Ibid.*, 31). "Jewish" was distinguished by being God's chosen, partner to a divine covenant, and ethically guided by the Torah.

[61] *Ibid*. In addition to a common language and affirmation of common ancestry, it was particularly

Taking the cue from Levine, it seems reasonable to infer that the OT tabernacle (Exod 25:8ff.)—and also Solomon's and Ezekiel's temples (1 Chr 2ff. and Ezra 5ff., respectively)—qualifies among the "primary configurations" on account of its centrality to the Hebraic collective experience and intertwinements with history, nationhood, promise, redemption and blessing, covenant illumination, philosophical foundations of anthropology and theology, and as a visible and vivid reminder of the presence of God.[62]

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beneficial to the cohesion of the Israelites over the centuries for them to share "a common, overarching religion, whose deity was Yahweh" (*Ibid.*, 37). Hence, "a breach of trust between Israel and its God" was "thus a threat to the social order" and, "ultimately, to the world order" (*Ibid.*, 49).

[62] The Israelite tabernacle was similar to other tabernacles in the ancient Near East (for example, those in Egypt) and therefore was a symbol with which Israel was already familiar, both in its internal and external structure and contents. Some scholars believe that the cosmos, as the global social order, was represented in the OT tabernacle because the account of building the tabernacle was written as a parallel to the creation story of Genesis (Cf. Gen 1:1-2:4; Exod 25-40; 1 Kgs 7; Ps 78:69, 134:3, 150:1, 6). See, also, for example, Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011). G. K. Beale suggests "the temple as a small model of the entire cosmos" and that each of the three main parts comprising Israel's temple "symbolized a major part of the cosmos:" the outer court symbolized "the habitable world where humanity dwelt;" the holy place symbolized "the visible heavens and its light sources;" and the most holy place symbolized "the invisible dimension of the cosmos, where God and his heavenly hosts dwelt" (*The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 48, 32-3). Neither this chapter, nor this dissertation, addresses this 'cosmic temple thesis' or the provision of an indubitable theology of the tabernacle structure or the overall theological meaning. What is of import to this study are the implications as to what it offers in terms of understanding 'social imaginary.' In this regard, Beale notes that R. E. Clements's important conclusion on this issue is "cautious and judicious" (*Ibid.*, 50). Clements concludes to uphold "'the essential claim that the temple and its furnishings did possess cosmic, or naturalistic, symbolism'" although not all the "'symbolic references of features of the temple are convincing'" (R. E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Presence of God in Israel's Worship* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1965], 67, quoted in *Ibid.*). Clements nevertheless notes that the:

> 'features were designed to stress the divine power over the created order, and to establish the temple as a source of *blessing* for the land and people of Israel. The underlying idea was that the temple was a microcosm of the macrocosm, so that the building gave visual expression to the belief in Yahweh's dominion over the world … [although one] need not suppose that every Israelite worshipper was conscious of this' (*Ibid.*; emphasis supplied).

Moving from the premise that the narrative of the broader relationship of collective experience between the tabernacle and the world is "discernible, demonstrable, and defensible" from the Scriptures (Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 209), then, presumably, the tabernacle can confidently be investigated for lessons. Since this section will not cover the exegetical work, it will rely heavily on secondary data. Aside from the centrality of worship, and, possibly, a social meeting place, one purpose of the sanctuary was temporary redress of the alienation consequent on the Fall and thus to reconcile God with humans. In Exod 25ff., God outlines details of an explicit pattern to build the tabernacle and the furniture, and also gives

Indeed, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. asserts that Yahweh's divine presence was "central and

significant in the Mosaic era" and that "the ark of the covenant of God with its mercy

seat, or place of atonement" was in fact "the most intimate of all expressions of God's

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indications as to *modus operandi* for the ceremonies to be held and the roles of different persons: sinner, priest, high priest, and God *qua* God. There is an allusion that each role carries increasing responsibility and authority, as well as capability, to accomplish what was required. Historically, the tabernacle has been interpreted in two main ways, implying a Hebraic philosophy as to how people might have understood themselves, their environment, and their relationship with deity: metaphorically or literally. On the one hand, the metaphorical understanding—the ostensibly predominant view—denies a literal tabernacle and 'dwell'-ing, based on philosophical presuppositions of the nature of God as timeless and spaceless and therefore incapable of relating with temporal, and temporally-located, human beings in the way that literal "dwell" suggests. On the other hand, the literal understanding allows for a literal tabernacle, 'dwell'-ing, and therefore a possible relationship between God and humans: either God is not timeless, or is and is otherwise able to relate to humans in time and space. The timeless God is rejected by, for example, Fernando L. Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, no. 2 (Autumn 1998): 183-206; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); Gulley, *Trinity*; R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016); John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Nicholas P. Wolterstorff and Terence Cuneo, eds., *Inquiring About God: Selected Essays, Vol. 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 531-52; Open theists; and Process theologians. Canale, asserts that "the 'building' component does not play a mediatorial role between God and human beings, but situates and articulates their relationship in space and time" (Canale, "Philosophical Foundations," 184). Canale argues that, originating in Parmenides, the Platonic-Aristotelian view of God as timeless, has been the position adopted by Christian theology since "soon after the NT was written" (*Ibid*., 187). Canale notes that Philo adopts a corresponding "imaginative" (*Ibid*., 190) and Aquinas an "intellectual relation" (*Ibid*., 191) to the sanctuary and that "[f]ollowing in Philo's and Aquinas' [*sic*] paths, Calvin understood the OT sanctuary as a twofold metaphor facilitating real worship and pointing to Christ" (*Ibid*., 193-4). Canale outlines a tension with interpretations of the tabernacle: "Theologically, the sanctuary becomes [either] a myth" because "the biblical writings on the sanctuary attribute to God a life in time and space" which does not accord with the classical timeless God, or "God becomes the place where beings exist" giving rise to a possible "panentheistic understanding of reality" (*Ibid*., 197-98). There are certainly significant ethical consequences of adopting either the literal or metaphorical interpretation of the tabernacle and that is of critical significance to Christian theology and method. However, for the *immediate* focus in view, what is more significant is to recognize the centrality of the tabernacle and its activities to the social imaginary. Hence, while it is not *immediately* necessary to adjudicate between the literal and the metaphorical interpretations since both imply this cultus, the implications of one or other interpretation for theology, anthropology, and the philosophical-sociological locus of the God-world relationship will need to be addressed. What is also strongly implied, is that the philosophical understanding of God, humans, and the world (reality) are mutually interdependent (somewhat of a bouquet), with an understanding of each influencing how the other is understood. The provision of "discernible, demonstrable, and defensible" confidence is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The reader is referred to Canale, "Philosophical Foundations," for example, for a discussion.

nearness to His people."[63] By facilitating an understanding about the ways in which

people might have constructed their community and understood their social identity, the

tabernacle and its ceremonies might be facilely equated in contemporary language, with

'social imaginary,' 'human flourishing,' and 'fullness.'[64] In this regard, the divine

command for "ransom money" accompanying the tabernacle instructions (Exod 30:11-

16) carries potentially contentious repercussions, since the symbolic cost of redemption

was, obviously, open to alternative (mis)conceptions.

From the foregoing, it seems plausible to conclude that there is an explicit

expression of a transcendent moral theory in Hebraic social imaginaries, such that

knowledge of God and his will was possible. In this respect, the tabernacle—however it

was interpreted—by its centrality "to Israel's cultus," was central to Hebraic imaginaries.

That is to say, there are cultic implications of a consciousness of, and expectation of

connection with, deity in the normal existential experience where worship was central.[65]

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[63] Kaiser, *Old Testament*, 120. Kaiser reasons that the "single most important fact in the experience" of the nation of Israel was their understanding that "God had come to 'tabernacle' (*šākan*), or 'dwell,' in her midst" (*Ibid*., 119). In this regard, Kaiser identifies that "a new sense of the 'closeness' and active presence of God was to be Israel's" and that the use of *šākan*, in contrast to the usual use of *yāšab* for permanent dwelling, suggests Yahweh's presence in the tabernacle and later in the temple as an indication of contrast of "divine transcendence (*yāšab*) with divine immanence" (*Ibid*.). Kaiser continues to explain the point of distinction that "God is transcendent in that His permanent abode" is in heaven and "He is immanent in that He dwells" on the earth (*Ibid*., 133). This matter of God's presence was heuristic for ancient social imaginaries and will be revisited later in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this dissertation.

[64] Kaiser asserts that the biblical text "sets up priorities" as to what is the "inner, persistent, distinctive, and characteristic theme" guiding life throughout ancient societies and that this can be identified variously as "promise, oath, blessing, rest, and seed" (*Ibid*., 11-12). Kaiser presents a "tripartite formula" of the "promise"—"I will be your God; you shall be My people, and I will dwell in the midst of you" (*Ibid*., 34). He equates the third part with the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 29:43-46).

[65] Cf. Kearney who posits that the "main emphasis of … Jewish religious thought is not on knowledge *about* God but on the *imitation* of God … following the right way of living" (*Wake*, 50). He cites "fundamental properties" of the Jewish imagination [imaginary] as mimetic, ethical, historical, and anthropological (*Ibid*., 53).

To be sure, Hebraic "man" was able to have consciousness of "sin and time" because the tabernacle revealed God's solution to the "division and discord" resulting from "the fallen imagination" which had destroyed 'man's' "harmony with God in Eden."[66]

What is also evident, in addition to prescient understanding of divine reality, cosmic meaning, and money, is the context of freedom and choice evident in the potential for "breach of trust" and therefore the potential for tensions with cultic understandings. Furthermore, the broader implications emanating from the sanctuary as central to social imaginary persisted beyond the Mosaic era with sustained significance such that, even after major 'breaches' and judgment as exile, God redoubled his promise: "'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'" (Hag 2:5), and "the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, *when* My sanctuary is in their midst forever" (Ezek 37:28). On these grounds, expectation of salvation became characteristic for Israel, and adversity was not to be interpreted as divine absence or lack of blessing but was to evoke obedience and tenacious hope. God's actions had taught them to believe "in a coming age of peace and plenty" and "in a coming superhuman ruler," of whom the tabernacle was the prophetic typology.[67] Hence, the implicit assertions of a hierarchically stratified organization to society evident in the sanctuary ceremonies suggest a providential plan and care rather than subservience (see Chapter 3) because of the simultaneous provisions for mutually

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[66] *Ibid*., 40.

[67] Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 21.

beneficial and benevolent relationships. Rather than social, stratification was religious and based on God's selection and divine will according to God's loving character.

Greco-Roman Social Imaginaries

Greco-Roman society is said to have reflected a smorgasbord, and often a hybrid, of religious and philosophical systems, and a continual shifting of social imaginaries in the expectant and unrelenting quest for the identity, security, and prosperity promised many generations before.[68] Uncertain as to the precise meaning and actualization of the promise, there was a tendency for people to "concentrate on aspects that seemed attractive and unambiguous."[69] The goal of this section is to briefly explore this interface between social structures and this quest. While this section sketches an understanding of the interactions within the matrix of the broad social *milieu* in ancient Palestine during the Greco-Roman period up to the end of the first Christian century, it is very important to bear in mind Kearney's point that "Hellenic culture has provided Western philosophy with most of its formative concepts" since the philosophical influence was, and is, pervasive and deeply entrenched.[70]

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[68] See, for example, Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

[69] Baldwin, *Haggai*, 24.

[70] Kearney, *Wake*, 79. On the one hand, Kearney's context suggests synonymity between "Hellenic" and "Hellenistic" while, on the other hand, some scholars identify sectarianism that distinguish the concepts, such as Mumford's distinction of "Hellenic polis" and "Hellenistic metropolis" (Michael S. Moore, "Civic and Voluntary Associations in the Greco-Roman World," in Green and McDonald, *World of the New Testament*, 152).

Evidently, the "influence of *Hellenism* was massive."[71] Powell asserts that "Hebrew ceased to be the primary language of the Jewish people" and many options materialized "'in the air'" as part of a preoccupation with death and immortality and the efforts to answer the 'big' questions of about life, purpose, meaning, telos, freedom, happiness, and death.[72] On Powell's account, the likelihood of eclecticism and inconsistency increased as people were inclined to advocate and embrace philosophically incompatible beliefs. Acknowledging "one basic religious system"[73] in spite of stark pluralism, Hubbard notes that religion "was integral to community life, family life, and the private aspirations of individuals" and was evident in "overtly religious elements" contained in civic and state ceremonies and celebrations,[74] but that Greek religion was primarily concerned with "how to earn *material blessings* from the gods and how to

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[71] Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, vol. 414, (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 26; italics original. Kinney suggests that Hellenic philosophy brought notable changes to social imaginaries evident in "culture, education, literature" consequent on conquests of Alexander the Great (*Ibid.*). Consequent on the changes, Moyer V. Hubbard uses the term "social collisions" to describe the diversity stemming from the effects of expanding Hellenistic culture and the religious climate "among the scores of ethnic groups that composed Hellenistic antiquity" ("Greek Religion," in Green and McDonald, *World of the New Testament*, 105).

[72] Powell, *Introducing*, 32, 37. Within the context of this study, in addition to the change in basic cultural experiences like eating and language, among other things, Powell's work implies four significant Hellenic influences on social imaginaries, three of which were "amplified" by the first. First, there was "pervasive increase of religious syncretism" and exchange of religious ideas. Jewish people "came to believe" in the Greek philosophical idea of the "immortality of the soul" that was never previously interpreted from the Jewish Scriptures. Second, there was popularization of "wisdom theology" based more on "common sense" and "less on divinely revealed truth" and thus conducive to "a secular and more philosophically oriented world." Third, dualisms in religious perspectives were brought to the fore: for example, distinctions between "good" and "evil" became more prominent. Finally, dualisms were radicalized with "a deterministic view of history" in "apocalypticism"—pessimism towards the world in general alongside optimism for "a favoured remnant" (*Ibid.*, 31-4).

[73] Hubbard, "Greek Religion," 106.

[74] *Ibid.*, 122. She notes that the multiplicity of gods facilitated constant overview of the various domains of domestic and civic life.

avoid their wrath."[75] A sample of perspectives on the materialization of Hellenic and

Hellenistic influences in the Greco-Roman society is summarized below.

Samuel Angus asserts that "the social conditions [were] partly determined by and

partly determining the moral and religious."[76] In his discussion, Angus notes that the

social, religious, and economic developments of ancient Greco-Roman society were

inextricably linked, and that economic calamities, extermination of the middle class

(resulting in extremes of wealth and poverty), and in some cases the sudden eruption of

unearned wealth, would have contributed to the social context, and which defined how

the people lived.[77] This situation, Angus opines, fueled an ongoing quest for salvation:

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[75] *Ibid.*, 106, emphasis supplied. It should be noted that the word "religion," from the Latin *religio*, implies relationship with divine powers; diverse relationships and diverse divine powers. To strip the period of anachronistic impositions it is important to recognize that, contra Christianity, the practice of religion in the ancient world was frequently distinct from ethics. While Hubbard's *caveat* nuances 'economic' human flourishing, David J. Downs explains that "behaviors and discourses that moderns would classify as 'economic' were in antiquity embedded in other social structures" rather than "separate 'economic' endeavors" ("Economics, Taxes, and Tithes," 156). Downs concludes, accordingly, that "[g]iven the close relationship between civic and religious institutions … it is problematic to draw a sharp distinction between state and religious taxation" but he nevertheless cites the annual "half-shekel tax to the Jerusalem temple" as a subsidy for "cultic apparatus" (*Ibid.*, 165-6). It is worth recalling that the commandments governing this 'payment' were established in the Hebraic tradition, as first mentioned in Exod 30:11-16, and therefore played a significant role in the Jewish social identity. A particularly important aspect of the 'embeddedness' to which Downs refers is that it implies multiple imaginaries coexisting and it also points to an overarching and, apparently, compelling interconnectedness via religion. This echoes the "collective" character Levine highlights with respect to Hebraic societies (see above). Onno van Nijf posits that the notion of connectedness was evident in Hellenistic social imaginaries particular via the "remarkably homogeneous political culture," which he posits became "increasingly entangled" with social practices, and "hierarchizing tendencies" on the basis of economic and social status, and civic identity, as evident in theatres, stadia, gymnasia, and *agorae* ("Ceremonies, Athletics and the City: Some Remarks on the Social Imaginary of the Greek City of the Hellenistic Period," in Stavrianopoulou, *Shifting*, 315, 327).

[76] Samuel Angus, *The Environment of Early Christianity* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1951), 30. Angus asserts that cosmopolitanism, in a broad sense, as well as its consequential and accompanying political and economic structures, produced increased mobility, diversity, complexity, individualism, and skepticism as well as demarcation of social and socioeconomic structures, all of which embossed the awareness and desire for greater meaning in the present life and in the hereafter.

[77] The connectedness and symbiotic influences Angus cites are central to the thesis of others such as A. D. Nock who suggests important considerations for understanding the nature of, and changes within, social imaginaries. Nock notes that the people's material (economic) quest was inextricably linked to

evident in shifts from Olympic gods to Greek philosophy to mystery cults.[78] Richard

Niswonger and other scholars today present these mystery cults as competitors to

Christianity.

Niswonger cogently elucidates some characteristic factors of Greco-Roman social

imaginaries which, on his view, fueled a savior quest. Of particular import was the desire

and yearning for "faith that satisfied the intellect" while at the same time being "more

personal and emotionally satisfying" and providing "some assurance of a blissful future

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considerations of religion and human telos and that in order to understand this connection, attention must
be paid to people's "passage from one god or dream or devil to another" and to "what first prompted the
new interest, what gave to it compelling force, and what its acceptance meant" (A. D. Nock, *Conversion:
The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* [London: Oxford
University Press, 1933], vii).

[78] For a time, local anthropomorphic Olympian gods, 'assigned' to different areas of the human
existence, proved satisfactory. However, those in search of moral (ethical) direction were soon overcome
with skepticism. Notwithstanding, worship was attributed to gods because of what they could do to, and be
for, a person depending on what that person deserved. People sought to feel a certain level of control over
their own future, even if this meant through partially satisfactory gods. Interestingly, while everyday
Greco-Roman life was grounded in religion, it was in a corporate rather than individual and personal sense.
Hence, this was insufficient to address the hopes and expectations of the people. Greek philosophy served
as an effective preoccupation and distraction from the search for a god—especially for the elite—and in
that way presented itself as a religion, particularly as philosophers provided moral instruction. "The variety
of intellectual and religious ideas and movements exhibited by the Hellenistic-Roman world indicates how
intensely the people of the ancient world searched for the ultimate meaning in their lives. The way they
hoped to find it was through wisdom [philosophy]" (Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*
[Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976], 278). Philosophies focused on identifying ultimate reality but also failed
to satisfy the people because the gods were impersonal and, although some philosophies promised
salvation, they offered no salvation of the kind the people sought in terms of guidance for the present and
assurance for the future. These philosophical ideas (cynicism, stoicism, and epicureanism) focused more on
achievement—of good, a rational life, truth, virtue and purity—and little on experience. In the combination
of religion and ethics, mystery cults appeared to be the ultimate response. According to Ronald H. Nash,
"mystery religions … claimed to satisfy the hunger of their age for some kind of salvation, for the
successful attainment of a higher level of life" (*Christianity and the Hellenistic World* [Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan, 1984], 116). While mystery cults offered personal gods, security (assurance about death), and
the sense of community (fellowship) via rituals and promised salvation, it is not exactly clear how this
should be *precisely* understood for humans: From what will humans be saved and to what end? Mystery
religions emerged as a concatenation of Olympian ideology and later philosophy with the enhanced
dimension of personal participation. In doing so, they responded to the need for immortality (see, for
example, Nash, *Christianity*; Richard L. Niswonger, *New Testament History* [Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan, 1988]; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 2003]).

life."[79] Niswonger notes that the mythologies of mystery religions, the ethics of the ancient Roman gods, and Hellenistic ethical philosophy all failed to offer the assurance of certainty and security which the people sought. He delineates the spiritual dearth created by a concatenation of factors which, precipitated or intensified by the events in the money economy, created the most fertile conditions for Christianity and its Savior— conditions which, arguably, persisted into medieval social imaginaries.

Like Niswonger, Frederick Grant identifies a pervasive influence of economic factors on social history more generally and therefore on the historical development of religion.[80] He finds that this is particularly "true of the ancient Jewish religion, whose gradually developed customs, rites, and beliefs were subtly interwoven with the *entire* fabric of social life in Palestine from the tenth century before Christ to the third and fourth centuries of our era."[81] Grant concludes "that pre-Christian Jewish Messianism was nurtured and sustained by the disappointed hopes of a buoyantly optimistic nation."[82] He reasons that "only the strongest wall of non-intercourse, only the most obdurate tenacity in clinging to the religious traditions of the earlier time could prevent the Jews from sharing fully in the common economic life and civilization of the Hellenistic period."[83] According to Grant, it is this state of affairs that "accounts for the extreme

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[79] Niswonger, *New Testament*, 95.

[80] Frederick C. Grant, *The Economic Background of the Gospels* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1973).

[81] *Ibid*., 9; emphasis supplied.

[82] *Ibid*., 9.

[83] *Ibid*., 25. Grant characterizes Roman presence as dichotomous: "prosperity, order, peace … but … also … foreign religion … demand for tribute" and "taxation" (*Ibid*., 45, 47). This dichotomy which he

initial popularity" of what became the Christian message and movement because the Jews

were hoping for release and for the kingdom to be restored to Israel. On his view, the

"source of the misery" resulting in/from incessant war across Palestine "was not political

or religious, but economic."[84]

Similar to others, Howard Clark Kee, also identified a quest for 'salvation' and

'savior' in Greco-Roman society but, in contrast, he concludes that the quest was

predominantly religious. Kee nevertheless attributes causation to "political, social, and

economic factors"[85] among "the range of ways in which the early Christians found

personal identity in a communal context."[86] Kee reasons that "the specific *questions and*

aspirations of those who *heard* and responded" to the Christian message "were deeply

affected by their cultural and social background."[87] He notes that transitions and

paradigm shifts are apposite "for religions and philosophies that promise security and for

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attributes to "oppression and ignorance and misunderstanding" eventually erupted in open rebellion and the fall of Jerusalem (*Ibid*., 51).

[84] *Ibid*., 27, 54-55. Grant emphasized the broad context of fluctuations within the Persian empire and the conquest of Alexander the Great was a defining moment: "progressive political and economic stagnation" (*Ibid*., 21) before, and "world-wide prosperity" (*Ibid*., 22) after. "After Alexander, the Near East became more and more … a growing economic unity" (*Ibid*., 24). On Grant's account, a survey of economic conditions enlightens the "intimate connexion [*sic*] between crushing oppression" and its egregious effects "and the hopes of men for divine intervention" and a future of "rejoicing and plenty" (*Ibid*., 106). There is an allusion to a 'religion of the gaps' in Grant's argument in a quest for *national* salvation. Absent economic misery and deprivation, would the savior quest terminate? To restate this positively, what kind of god would economic flourishing produce?

[85] Howard Clark Kee, *Understanding the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983), 37.

[86] *Ibid*., vii. Interestingly, Kee cites cult centers in "commercial cities" as if to suggest incongruity but also to indicate intensity. He notes that "[i]n commercial cities such as Ostia, Antioch, or Corinth, cult centers for dozens of nonlocal deities sprang up, attesting to the yearning for personal identity through joining with others of like conviction and commitment" (*Ibid*., 7).

[87] *Ibid*, 8; emphasis supplied.

governments that promise stability"[88] and attributes this backdrop of complexity and transition—to use the modern term, these complex and shifting social imaginaries—to Greco-Roman society.

The foregoing discussions on social imaginaries moves toward responding to the question as to whether social imaginaries qualify for application in theological method based on their inherent utility for understanding historical communities and the construction of identities. Acknowledging the centrality of 'economic' factors to pre-modern social imaginaries, the next section summarizes a brief examination of the concept (and philosophy) of οἰκονόμος in Greco-Roman society.

Οἰκονόμος in Retrospect

As noted in Chapter 1, οἰκονόμος is the Greek term from which the English word 'economy' (and the cognate 'economics') is derived. This brief discussion is apposite because of the close relationship identified between economics and religion in social imaginaries, and because modern "[e]conomics and the church's social ethics tradition

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[88] *Ibid*., 14. Like others, Kee notes that the dislocation of persons resulting from accelerated geographical, sociological, political, and religious paradigm shifts in Greco-Roman society created unease and anxiety and led people to "search for certainty," sometimes by way of seeking "a more profound understanding of the nature of the universe and the ultimate meaning of life" (*Ibid*.). Noting the transitional adjustments necessitated in different epochs, Kee echoes the sentiments of others who highlight consequential changes in the mobility of ideas and of people, within and among classes as well as geographical locales, changes in the theory and practice of ethics, and reconfigurations in political and economic institutions. See, also, for example, Angus, *Environment*, for a discussion.

don't often mix well."[89] Cognizance that the story is "so immense"[90] dictates prudence

and deliberate brevity.[91]

Because, historically, the word οἰκονόμος could be a general designation for

"people,"[92]—referring to one who is obligated to perform a duty or service, such as a

"householder," "treasurer," "inspector of goods," "accountant," "chief cook," or

"manager"[93]— it suggests that the ancient understanding "is far more expansive than the

modern understanding of an 'economy'."[94] While it is apparent that the οἰκονόμος served

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[89] Paul Oslington, "Christianity's post-Enlightenment contribution to economic thought,"
in Harper and Gregg, *Christian Theology*, 61. The discussion is based on reference works and secondary
data. Chapter 5 of this dissertation considers the concept from a more biblical perspective.

[90] Stephen J. Grabill, "Christianity's pre-Enlightenment contribution to economic thought," in
Harper and Gregg, *Christian Theology*, 25.

[91] The relationship in the early Christian century as well as the post-apostolic era is explored by
focusing selectively on pre-Christian works, Scripture, and church fathers.

[92] Colin Brown, "House," New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology 2:254.

[93] Gerhard Friedrich, "House of God in Jesus and the Gospels," *Theological Dictionary of the New
Testament* 5:149. There is a view that the use of οἰκονόμος as "treasurer" has declined in importance since
Roman times (see, for example, J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, eds., "Οἰκονόμος," *Vocabulary of the
Greek Testament*, 443).

[94] Downs, "Economics, Taxes, and Tithes," 156. In Greek culture οἰκονόμος is used in reference
to a servant in charge of a household whether free-born or—as was usually the case—a freed-man, or a
slave to whom the head of the house (owner) or proprietor entrusts the management of his affairs, oversight
of financial transactions including careful accounting of funds, and supervision of servants and minor
children. However, it is also more broadly used and diversely understood in reference to any type of
management or administration by public or political officers (estate or farm manager, Roman procurators,
overseer, cook, city treasurer [or of treasurers or questers of kings] or even managers of bath houses). See,
for example, Brown, "House"; Friedrich, "House of God in Jesus and the Gospels"; and Danker, Frederick
W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds. "οἰκονόμος" in *Greek-English Lexicon
of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
2000 (Danker-Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, *BDAG*). Bruce Corley also finds an analogue, despite a lack of
"linguistic equation," in the Qumram community *mebaqqer* who functions as an administrator or overseer
supervising business transactions and administering the common treasury ("The Intertestamental
Perspective of Stewardship," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 [Spring 1971]: 18). Alistair C.
Stewart draws a similar analogy (*The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian
Communities* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014], 97).

in diverse roles in the social and public spheres, and although the role of the political οἰκονόμος was primarily the management of the finances, there are strong allusions to cultic duties in addition to financial responsibilities.[95]

John Reumann cites examples to show that οἰκονόμος occurred in pre-Christian Greek associated with politics as well as religious and mystery cults.[96] In fact, Reumann concludes that the term οἰκονόμος was "drawn into religious use" from its general use in society associated with "an office of trust and responsibility."[97] Somewhat paradoxically, Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg consider that discussions about "God and Mammon [are] fraught with considerable confusion" and "misunderstanding," and that a "majority of Christians" have opted for a "nuanced position" choosing the "delicate balance"

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[95] Corley, "Intertestamental," 20. Corley finds "evidence for the existence of *oikonomoi* in a strictly religious role in the cult of Sarapis at Memphis, Egypt" and draws a parallel with those cult officials and others in the Greco-Roman world.

[96] John Reumann, "'Stewards of God' - Pre-Christian Religious Application of Οἰκονόμος in Greek," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 4 (1958): 339-49. He notes that "in the pre-Christian Greek of inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca, οἰκονόμος did occur with religious applications" as evidenced in the religious tasks performed by the political administrator engaged in duties mainly of a financial nature (*Ibid*., 342). Reumann cites as an example, an inscription at Ephesus, dated 302 B.C., requiring the οἰκονόμος or city treasurer to pay for sacrifices and to participate with the priests in offering sacrifice to the god Artemis on occasion. Even more distinct religious duties are evident in Reumann's citation of four centuries of texts from Priene (B.C.), which stipulate that the city οἰκονόμος provide posthumous acknowledgements voted by the city at selected funerals, at which time the office of οἰκονόμος is regarded as λειτουργία (public service); λειτουργία is the Greek from which the English 'liturgy' is derived. In classical Greek, λειτουργία was used to refer to a service the people had to perform for the community or for the gods and which had a public importance. Similar religious or cult duties cited from Magnesia-on-the-Maeander in the second century B.C., Ptolemaic Egypt in the first century B.C., and Caria in the third century A.D., reveal that "a government official called an οἰκονόμος carries out some duty related to religion" and offers "prayer to the gods as a part of their official function" (*Ibid*., 343-44). Outside of the political context, allusions to cultic duties were more pronounced in the absence of 'duty' and particularly where the context itself was religious. For Reumann, the most convincing evidence "for the existence of *oikonomoi* in Greek pagan cults comes, however, from the Sarapeum at Memphis, Egypt" where the *oikonomoi* served as "officials in charge of 'household management' and food distribution within the temple precincts" leading to the suggestion that "perhaps the οἰκονόμος in later Christian monasteries was borrowed from this Sarapis cult organization" (*Ibid*., 345-46).

[97] *Ibid*., 349.

between "necessity" and "detachment."[98] Apparently, "the failures of Christians throughout the centuries" to maintain the necessity-detachment balance is partly the reason for the (present) "ambiguity" in Christian thought regarding "the purpose and nature of economics" despite the background of economics being "deeply Christian in both theory and practice."[99]

The explicit role of οἰκονόμος in ecclesiastical perspective—church leadership—in the Greco-Roman era shows up in the work of Alistair Stewart and Claudia Rapp and poses some interesting considerations for this study.[100] Tracing the root and development of the function and role of bishops (ἐπίσκοποι) and deacons or ministers (διάκονοι) in the early church, Stewart concludes, referencing Titus 1:7, that the *office* of ἐπίσκοπος is

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[98] Harper and Gregg, "Introduction," 1.

[99] *Ibid*., 1, 3. Stephen Grabill agrees that it is a "complicated relationship between Christianity and economics" positing that, especially before the eighteenth century, the story is largely untold, and that "Western intellectuals" have "downplayed the Christian roots" of economics ("pre-Enlightenment," 25). See, also, Oslington, "post-Enlightenment," 60.

[100]Stewart, Original Bishops; Claudia Rapp, Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition, Reprint ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

"readily" seen as "being *equivalent* to that of the οἰκονόμος"[101] and that "the principal function of early Christian *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* was economic."[102]

Like Stewart, Rapp cites the bishop's functions as primarily administrative[103]—the administration of church finances—and notes that in church affairs "the real power rested with the man who held the purse strings."[104] She explained that, later, a financial administrator was appointed "to stem the rise of rumors about episcopal rapaciousness" and that "the Council of Chalcedon decreed in 451" that ecclesiastical finances would be

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[101] Stewart, *Original Bishops*, 90. It is important to recall that οἰκονόμος is also used to signify 'treasurer,' such that the concept of treasurer or the act of being a treasurer is closely aligned semantically, etymologically and practically to that of a steward or the act of being a steward. The intent in highlighting this here, where these synonymities are being highlighted, is in view of how the church is organized and roles delegated. Church organization since the modern period may be a reflection of secularizing influences, such that these may need to be reconsidered in efforts to engage the secular. Notably, like Reumann, Stewart also notes that the titles and functions of early church leaders mirrored contemporaneous civil society. Stewart delineates the various functions of ensuring adequate food supply, caring for buildings and financial assets, and generally managing funds as was evident in the "social and economic support" by the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (*Ibid.*, 61). Stewart notes that "in the formative period of Christianity" the understanding was that "the liturgy is a point at which economic goods are delivered" (*Ibid.*, 62). On examination of the *Didache*, *1 Clement*, the directions of Igantius to Polycarp, church order literature, Phil 1:1, Acts 20, and the canons of the Council of Neocaesarea, Stewart concludes that the "term *episkopos* is a widely employed one for an economic functionary and it may have come into Christian usage solely on the basis of its common use" (*Ibid.*, 77). Because, for Stewart, "religious life was not distinct from the social life of the polis" he identified "no contradiction" in understanding the *episkopos* as "both liturgical president and financial agent" (*Ibid.*, 79-80). Thus, he also cites, from "the church order literature" that "the term 'shepherd' [*poimēn*—"pastor"] is a virtual synonym for *episkopos*" (*Ibid.*, 78). Since Stewart equates *poimēn* with *episkopos*, and οἰκονόμος with *episkopos*, it logically follows that *poimēn* is also equated with οἰκονόμος.

[102] *Ibid.*, 117. Thus, he establishes a link with the οἰκονόμος of Hellenistic society and notes that "the fundamental function of *episkopos* in early Christian circles was comparable to that of the *episkopoi* in civil society and in associations" (*Ibid.*, 60).

[103] Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 215. Rapp explores ideals and realities of bishops in late antiquity contextualized in a hierarchical structure, emperor-holy man-bishop, and disagreement with a distinctive binary secular-religious distinction. The administrative functions were not considered exclusive to the bishop but were thought to have borne closer resemblance to their civic counterparts over time: provision of buildings and food, charity, and advocacy for those in need.

[104] *Ibid.*, 219.

administered "by the οἰκονόμος" under the bishop's authority.[105] She concludes that "[i]t

is by virtue of [this] liturgical context" that "economic officers and patrons" in service to

the *civitas* were able to "exercise leadership in worship and leadership in Christian

communities overall"[106] and were commonly "appointed to the episcopate, *without an*

interim period in the priesthood. This was a *prevalent pattern* in the church in Rome."[107]

Evidently, this practice supported the "surprising degree of permeability between service

to the *civitas* and service in the *ecclesia*, starting in the fourth century."[108] With such a

situation recurring, it is plausible to understand any current tensions between the *role* and

significance of the ἐπίσκοπος and that of the οἰκονόμος (if only by imagination). It seems

reasonable to understand how such a situation could become prescient of later social

imaginaries, and money becoming the image of, or means to, salvation. This is especially

plausible when considered in the context of the social imaginaries of Latin Christendom

and the church-state relationships.

    Generally, this brief survey has shown that, despite variation in specific titles and

details, the use of οἰκονόμος historically—in *civitas* and in *ecclesia*—has been in

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[105] *Ibid*., 218. Whereas the management of money was initially an integral part of the duty of the clergy, modifications were made in the interest of both the safeguarding of the funds and the protection of the reputation of the episcopate. Moreover, there was also an apparent concern for the "spiritual" duties of the bishop: "As the financial operations of each see became more and more extensive and complex," there was "the additional advantage of relieving the bishop of an increasingly burdensome task that required constant attention and specialized knowledge" (*Ibid*., 218-19).

[106] *Ibid*., 118-19.

[107] *Ibid*., 201; emphasis supplied.

[108] *Ibid*., 204.

reference to service in an 'economic' position of responsibility. In performing the service, the οἰκονόμος is delegated authority in order to fulfill a significant responsibility.

Summary of Pre-modern Social Imaginaries

Overall, an increasingly obvious trend in pre-modern societies was the complexity of the social framework and an accompanying uncertainty consequent on increasing depersonalization and pluralism, combined with vestiges of historic Jewish heritage. Additionally, a persistent quest for 'salvation'—materializing, for many theorists, as a quest from political and economic hardship—carved out a significant and indelible link between 'economic' and spiritual concerns. Focused elsewhere, but clearly related to this in a broad sense, Fitzgerald and Green note that Jews, Christians, Greeks, and Romans all "imagin[ed] ideal societies" or "produced utopian visions" of the "ideal social order in which humans may flourish."[109]

In one way or another, human flourishing appears as an indelible and central feature of pre-modern social imaginaries. Based on the foregoing views, one may reasonably understand how the notion of economic human flourishing could have appeared as the divinely-ordained *sine qua non* centuries later. Paradoxically, it seems that concerns about the profaning function of money were mitigated by its compelling force that evoked a relentless quest for 'salvation.' While there is no expressed (or implied) presupposition of sin or conversion, evidently the impact of decline in the

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[109] Fitzgerald and Green, foreword, 7-8. The assertion that "one of the axial age's central features was … transcendence" (*Ibid.*, 5-6) is unsurprising in the light of the fact that the axial age (ca. 800-200 BC) would have been centered around the temple, which had replaced the tabernacle, and which would have carried similar religious, social, and ethical significance and conveyed similar traditions and norms.

money economy—at least as rhetorically captured—was a decisive catalyst to advance

the new religious paradigm that began with the turn of the Christian era, although,

perhaps, on a misguided expectation of political 'salvation' and kingdom. The outcome,

even more paradoxical, is that the 'savior' ultimately—in modern social imaginaries—

turns out to be the money economy itself, as Taylor articulates in Chapter 3.

A most salient finding to be extracted from these pre-modern imaginaries, despite

an evident and overarching aura of supernaturalism, is the presence—and likelihood—of

the coexistence and "jostling" of 'belief' and 'unbelief' because of the multiplicity of

'gods' in the imaginaries. The recognition of possible "breach of trust" in Hebraic

imaginaries (see above) pointed to this potentiality. In Hellenistic imaginaries,

widespread and accepted religious pluralism mandated a choice of the 'true' god from

among the plethora of gods. Greco-Roman imaginaries reflected that the push to identify

various 'gods' was intensified by the political and economic situation. Indeed, the

expectation of a political Messiah was *de facto* choice of a god who was apparently more

closely aligned with the existential political and economic situation.

Social imaginaries since the modern era appear to amplify the focus, and effect, of

existentialism and humanism, as the discussion below illustrates.

Modern (and Post-modern) Social Imaginaries

That "man is the measure of all things"[110] has been a central characteristic of

social imaginaries since modernity. This section outlines some broad theoretical

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[110] According to Socrates, that phrase was often used by Greek philosopher Protagoras. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 1987), 30.

considerations of modern social imaginaries, deferring a description of specific and predominant characteristics to Chapter 3 as part of the descriptive analysis of Charles Taylor's story of secularization.

<div align="center">Theoretical Considerations of Modern Social Imaginaries</div>

The modern era was ushered in by, and itself ushered in, the advance of a number of features that were, in the main, organically related to previous epochs, in addition to other features that appeared radically novel. A central feature that had already begun in, and alongside, other antecedent developments, was humanity's quest for 'salvation' which was, it seemed, consciously and unconsciously evolving from one era to the next. These developments witnessed increasing self-consciousness (humanism) consistent with the influence of the Renaissance as a mixed-breed descendant of Greco-Roman ideas. Similarly, as products of the Age of Reason, modern developments were dictated, and constrained, by human reason—both in terms of what was possible and what was acceptable.[111] On these premises modern motifs developed, with philosophical trends and transformations supporting increasing change (rejecting the old order of tradition and traditions), individualism, freedom, and strong philosophical foundationalism, in the quest for truth—scientism (naturalism) and disenchantment in place of supernaturalism, and rationalism in place of revelation.[112]

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[111] See, for example, Meic Pearse, *The Age of Reason: From the Wars of Religion to the French Revolution 1570-1789, Vol 5,* The Monarch History of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

[112] In general, the modern *zeitgeist* reflected a perceived anthropological omnicompetence (see, for example, Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013] for comprehensive discussion on these issues).

As indicated above in the discussion on imagination, two, apparently contrasting, views of imagination have had significant influence on social imaginaries since modernity. The first view, obsessed with the precision, certainty, and rationality of the scientific paradigm of the Enlightenment brought hostility toward imagination, constructing a dichotomy between "rationalistic discourse" as the "vehicle of knowledge, mastery and progress" and "imagistic thinking" which is "dismissed as the source of ignorance, superstition and illusion."[113] It is arguable that this dichotomy frames the famed *cogito ergo sum* of rationalist philosopher René Descartes and the empiricist traditions of, for example, Francis Bacon and John Locke.[114] Indeed, Richard Bernstein asserts that a 'Cartesian anxiety' has exerted significant influence in the search for "an Archimedean point" well beyond the nineteenth century in some circles.[115]

The second view of imagination was expressed by, for example, Kearney who, contrasting the premodern view of imagination as that which mediates something transcendental, posits that "imagination becomes, in modern times, the immediate source

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[113] Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.

[114] Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a central figure of the Enlightenment, known as the father of modern empiricism due to his methodological approach in his quest to discover truth. Locke, introduced above in Chapter 1, is known as the father of liberalism.

[115] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 16, 18. 'Cartesian anxiety' is "a construct" that is used to describe "the 'foundation' metaphor" in the "philosopher's quest … for an Archimedean point" to ground knowledge (*Ibid*., 18). On Avis's view, the prejudice towards logical thinking and the scientific approach as the most reliable form of validation was parallel to the prejudice against, and suspicion toward, imagination and the symbolic" while "other theologians like Sallie McFague" are "at the other extreme" and "exploit the figurative forms" (*Creative Imagination*, 18).

of its own truth."[116] On this issue, Avis cites the Romantic movement as influencing the recovery (or discovery) of this view of imagination as a source of truth, and also cites Michael Polanyi's "tacit knowledge" or "personal knowledge" as significant to the epistemological currents influencing the elevation of the 'subject,' the 'personal,' the 'individual,' and the 'authentic.'[117]

Despite this tension between the two approaches to imagination, it is apparent that, at least minimally, both involve epistemological commitments towards 'transcendence' and a measure of human capability. Undoubtedly, the dialectic effect of this commitment bears relevance to the social world and, ultimately, on social imaginary and social self-identity in this epoch. Some outworkings of these and other theoretical considerations are outlined in Chapter 3 as part of Charles Taylor's articulation.

<center>Theoretical Considerations of Postmodern Social Imaginaries</center>

It is not uncommon to find that contemporary society is referred to as 'postmodern' in some circles and simultaneously referred to as 'secular' in others. In fact, the term 'secular' is sometimes used to embrace various other typologies of contemporary society, including 'postmodern.' However, are there fundamental dissimilarities that should preclude this? Is society at once 'secular' and 'postmodern'?[118]

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[116] Kearney, *Wake*, 155.

[117] Avis, *Creative Imagination*, 31-2.

[118] Notably, the very nature of postmodernism implies that there is no 'ideal' conception of postmodernism. Consequently, this discourse is premised on a broad philosophical and cultural understanding.

Conceivably, contemporary society epitomizes the character of postmodernity evident in Jean-François Lyotard's perspective on thought and reality—episodic, diverse, plural, transient, and fragmentary.[119] The work of three other notable postmodern philosophers—Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty—reflects the central *dictum* of postmodern philosophy: "All is difference." Their views are broadly representative of a philosophy that questions the inherent goodness of knowledge, proposes the emotions and intuition as valid avenues for truth in addition to reason, concludes that reality is relative and knowledge of it incomplete, affirms community-based relative truth and, apparently, rejects metanarratives.

Within the context of this study's focus on theological method, an excellent exemplar is the constructive postmodernism posited by David Ray Griffin. Griffin argues that this variety of postmodernism marks a new beginning for theology—facilitating "renewed interest in religious spirituality as the foundation for both individual and social life."[120] Griffin believes that this postmodern worldview is advantageous because of its rejection of modernity's a priori rejection of religious truth and/or its constriction to the private domain.[121]

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[119] Jean-François Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, trans. Brian Beakley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

[120] David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 3. Griffin defends this 'constructive' vis-à-vis other 'deconstructive' postmodern approaches. He observes that, for a number of reasons, the modern scientific worldview rendered theology—and God—irrelevant and that the new paradigm, built on theses of "naturalistic theism," challenges the "mechanistic interpretation of nature and the sensationist epistemology" of modernism which view experience as sensory only (*Ibid.*, 63).

[121] *Ibid.*, xiii.

It will become evident in the next chapter that Charles Taylor's taxonomy of 'secular' is broadly accommodative of the advantage that postmodernism here seeks to promote because, in Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries, personal and corporate religion are *contested but not necessarily absent*. Perhaps more importantly, it is notable that since Taylor is "trying to give an account of how our existing situation of pluralism arose,"[122] it is plausible that the contemporary landscape he locates within "secularity 3" will necessarily overlap with that which others describe as otherwise "postmodern."[123] Yet, while the character of 'social imaginary' appears essentially diametrically antithetical to the postmodern intolerance for metanarratives, Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries provides an option for the fluid neutrality—that appears to be attempted universal compatibility of all ideologies—that characterizes the postmodern ethos to be plausible.

Having established this fundamental linkage, this study proceeds without making a distinction for any of the varying constructions of "post-" on the assumption that no new set of alignments will emerge based on what was teased out above.[124] Accordingly, the study is not considered to be devalued by denying attention to a specific 'postmodern class' and assessing whether, and how, this category might be presumed to be more precise and/or would enhance or challenge the theological task.

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[122] Charles Taylor, "Challenging Issues About the Secular Age," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (July 2010): 404-5. Interestingly, Taylor eschews labels such as "postmodern," citing them as very modern in character (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 716-17).

[123] It will be recalled from Chapter 1 that secularity 3 is characterized by exclusive humanism and contestable belief.

[124] Whether post-modern, post-postmodern, post-structural, post-Christian or other 'post' prefixes.

It is reasonable to conclude that "Western civilization grew out of the Classical World"[125] and, understandably, the influence of each of the social imaginaries is significant because of the ways in which they changed philosophical and religious preferences. By examining the ancestry of the theory, and the resulting practice, of selected social imaginaries diachronically, this chapter identifies differing but connected models of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology, and how they interact with each other. These models materialize as examples that might be suitable for enhancing theological method. Indeed, the "study of the distant past but not completely alien world can allow us to understand that there are alternatives to our ways and assumptions, and so it can help to liberate us from the tyranny of the present."[126]

Theology and Imagination

This section introduces a sample of perspectives on theology and imagination—the relationship between religious imagination and theological method—so as to inform this study's consideration of what it might mean that "theology must re-imagine new ways to address its social and public responsibilities" in this "contemporary age characterized by dynamics of diversity and secularism."[127]

Robin Stockitt claims that theological linkages with imagination are strong in the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) who defines the "primary imagination" as

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[125] Jasper Griffin, introduction to *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, ed. John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 2.

[126] *Ibid*.

[127] Veninga, *Secularism*, 34.

"a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[128]

Arguably, "[t]he story of imagination is as old as the story of creation itself,"[129] and

although it is possible to identify historical links between imagination and theology, it is

a relatively new strand of the literature that focuses on the juxtaposition of imagination

with theological method. In the late twentieth century, theologian Garrett Green

acknowledged the new trend:

> American theologians are fascinated by imagination these days. … Why *imagination*
> is emerging as a central concept in such [theological] works is by no means clear; it is
> not even certain that the various writers using it mean the same thing. But theologians
> are finding it useful in addressing those foundational issues of method, task, and
> norms that have set the agenda for systematic theology in the modern age.[130]

Green notes some accompanying concerns about the marriage of imagination and

theology that bear relevance to this study in its consideration of social imaginary for use

in theological method.

Unsurprisingly, the juxtaposition of imagination with theology has emerged with

equivocity and multivalence, undoubtedly a reflection of the "polysemantic nature of the

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[128] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Collected Works*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 202, quoted in Robin Stockitt, *Imagination and the Playfulness of God: The Theological Implications of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Definition of the Human Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), xi. Coleridge, has been credited as "the first English writer and thinker to advance a theory of imagination as opposed to fancy and phantasy" (Altizer, "Apocalyptic Identity," 20). According to J. T. Sellars, Coleridge presents imagination as the "means through which we gain a telos and significance" because the "higher divine life" is 'transposed' on the lower (*Reasoning Beyond Reason: Imagination as a Theological Source in the Work of C. S. Lewis* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011], 49). Stockitt claims that it was Coleridge "who made a significant contribution to our understanding of imagination," and describes imagination as "God's co-worker on earth, both mirroring and sharing in the activity of the Divine (*Imagination*, 9, x). However, Stockitt notes Coleridge's combination of Neo-Platonism, empiricist philosophy and "various forms of transcendental idealism, gleaned from Kant and the German Idealists" (*Ibid*., ix).

[129] Kearney, *Wake*, 39.

[130] Green, review of *The Theological Imagination*, 219; emphasis original.

category of 'imagination'"[131] and also of pluralism and shifts within social imaginaries. This chapter organizes four thematic categories of selected perspectives of imagination and its relationship to theology: negative imaginative, constructive imaginative, reflective imaginative, and positive imaginative views. Following Green, the chapter uses "imaginative" in an attributive sense to imply "a realistic use of imagination."[132] These categories have been constructed for the purpose of this dissertation and reflect whether or not the perceived relationship between imagination and theology is understood to align with a biblical point of view and a high view of Scripture. For example, "negative" is meant to communicate antagonisms between imagination and Scripture as well as, for example, perceived contradiction of imagination with, or assumed primacy over, Scripture. Simply put, "positive" views would be those perceived as opposite to negative views. Strictly speaking, the two intermediate categories may be considered as either positive or negative depending on their perceived accord with a biblical point of view and a high view of Scripture.[133] The categorizations are not discrete, and are best taken as indicative rather than precise. Each category is examined in turn.

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[131] Kearney, *Wake*, 15.

[132] Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1998), 63.

[133] The advantage of this four-part classification over, say, Veninga's categories as parabolic imagination (John McIntyre), Catholic imagination (Andrew Greeley), theology as an act of imagination (Gordon Kaufman), and analogical imagination (David Tracy), is that the four-part categorization summarily conveys an intuitive understanding of the character of imagination vis-à-vis Scripture. See Veninga, "Theology for a Secular Age," 124.

Negative Imaginative Views

Presuming an understanding of imagination as "the ability to bring to mind that which is not directly and currently present to the senses," Jeremy Law opines that "the role of imagination in theology has long been held to be problematic."[134] To support this claim, Law offers three warrants which he attributes to John McIntyre but which, as indicated below, also find support with other thinkers. First, Law agrees that translations of Hebrew and Greek terms for imagination in the "Authorized Version of the Bible" are "pejorative."[135] Second, Law believes that imaginative connotations of mental images are considered antithetical to the "'aniconastic' tendency … in the Western church."[136] Third, Law admits a reticence "to admit of imagination in theology" lest theology "would appear to loosen its moorings to what counts as reality and allow it[self] to drift off across

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[134] Jeremy Law, "Theological Imagination and Human Flourishing," in *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringe*, ed. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law, and Christopher Rowland (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 281.

[135] John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Handsel, 1987), 5, quoted in Law, "Theological Imagination," 281. Stockitt also acknowledges this 'pejorative' nuance and suggests that it may be the result of poor translation that has been "embedded in the English speaking world for centuries, [and] has done little to endear the concept of imagination as a valid theological category" (*Imagination*, 7). Although Altizer claims an absence of 'imagination,' per se, in the Bible, he highlights the modern roots of contemporary conceptions and concurs with the negative nuances surrounding close cognates in "Genesis, Jeremiah, and Paul" ("Apocalyptic Identity," 19).

[136] Law, "Theological Imagination," 281. Veninga offers an argumentation which might be applied to explain how this tendency might have arisen in her assertion that the book of Genesis "provides an ambivalent account of the nature of both image and imagination" ("Theology for a Secular Age," 118). She posits that the concept of the image in the *imago Dei* "is seen in positive terms to articulate humanity's original consonance with God. Yet imagination becomes problematic when the humans employ it to transgress a divine prohibition" (*Ibid.*). On her view, imagination is "the tool by which humans can transcend their imminent [*sic*] existence" but it "can become transgressive when it assists in creating images or idols of the divine" (*Ibid.*). By this, Veninga suggests that interpretations of the biblical prohibition against images (Exod 20:4) have also directly fueled what now appears as Christianity's antipathy, and notes an ambivalence towards imagination, possibly as the result of the apparently positive and contradictory implication present in the NT Christ, "'the image of the invisible God,'" in Col 1:15 (*Ibid.*, 120).

a sea of pure human invention and fantasy."[137] Evidently, there is a presupposition here of imagination's inadequate or corrupt character.

Undoubtedly, the Christian "ambivalence about imagination and image" has been enduring and has adversely affected the relationship with theological method.[138] Historically, it is said to have begun with Augustine's distrust of imagination, as pioneer of the term '*imaginatio*.' Apparently, "imagination was also regarded with suspicion" by "medieval figures such as Richard of St Victor, St Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas."[139] On this negative view, the historical trajectory of philosophical perceptions of imagination and the resulting consequences—including "traditional or contemporary abuses of Scripture"[140] to legitimize anti-biblical behavior such as slavery[141]—have undoubtedly had long-term and significant effect on the relationship between Christian

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[137] Law, "Theological Imagination," 281. Related to this, Garrett Green stresses that the Calvinistic model of total depravity renders imagination so distorted by original sin that humans are "unable to imagine God rightly, because their thoughts and actions" can "no longer conform to God" (*Imagining God*, 89). On this view, he locates the distrust of imagination outside of imagination, per se. Furthermore, Richard Kearney posits that in "Genesis it is suggested that the birth of the human power of imagining coincides with Adam's transgression of God's law" and is "identified with man's ability to imagine a world of his own making … The Adamic *myth* … tells the tale of a fallen imagination (*Wake*, 39; emphasis supplied). Kearney expounds the link between imagination and creative power, by noting that *yetser* (a chief Hebrew term for imagination or imaginings—good or evil) is rooted in *yzr* and related to *yetsirah* ("creation"), *yotzer* ("creator"), and *yatsar* ("create")" (*Ibid.*). Dorothy L. Sayers's caution that the relationship between beings who can create and the Creator must be understood analogically (*The Mind of the Maker*, [San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1987], 17-18, quoted in Sellars, *Reasoning*, 50).

[138] Veninga, *Secularism*, 37.

[139] *Ibid*.

[140] L. Gregory Jones and James J. Buckley, eds., "Editorial Introduction," *Theology and Scriptural Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 1.

[141] See, for example, John Henry Hopkins, *A Scriptural, Ecclesiastical, and Historical View of Slavery* (New York: W. I. Pooley, 1864), 5, quoted in Darius Jankiewicz, "Hermeneutics of Slavery: A 'Bible-alone' Faith and the Problem of Human Enslavement," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 49.

theology and imagination. The result is that the dominant perception that persists in some circles today is one of antagonism. Evidently, this view of imagination may reflect misuse as well as misunderstanding but, nevertheless, does not augur well for methodological application. Of course, this view is mutually exclusive with alternative understandings of imagination as constructive, reflective, or positive.

Constructive Imaginative Views

One mediating view of imagination is categorized here as the 'constructive imaginative view': a view of imagination as *constructing* God. Undoubtedly, the view embraced regarding 'god' and the relevance to individual existence is critical to any serious theological engagement with contemporary society. Gordon D. Kaufman and David Ray Griffin are exemplars of this type.[142]

Gordon D. Kaufman's "Theological Imagination"

Gordon D. Kaufman (1925-2011), a liberal theologian, proposes a "theological imagination" such that "the use of the word 'God' involves important imaginative and constructive activity," which, ostensibly, denies God as objective reality.[143] This is clear since "our *awareness* and *understanding*" via imagination "is gained *entirely* in and through the images and concepts themselves, constructed into and focused by the mind

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[142] See Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1981); and Griffin, *God and Religion*, respectively.

[143] Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 21. Kaufman's ostensible denial of objective reality in God appears strikingly similar to the Feuerbachian god as invention, the Marxian god as projection or opiate, and the Freudian god as illusion. See, for example, Jenifer A. Daley, "God, Power, and Gospel in a Postmodern World—A Critique of Griffin's Postmodern God," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 27, no. 1 (2016): 271-93.

into a center for the self's devotion and service."[144] Kaufman explicitly stresses that "all

religious practices, institutions and beliefs," not excluding "the idea of God" are

"humanly created" in order "to serve human needs and to further our humanization (what

has traditionally been called our 'salvation')" and therefore "theology [should be seen] as

a critical and constructive task, performed by humans for the sake of certain human needs

and purposes."[145] In addition to parallels with ideologies, such as Marxism, this

conceptualization of God as nothing but the creation of a purely symbolic or metaphoric

construct of human imagination seems to parallel similar nuances of the god of certain

types of deism with its overdetermined anthropomorphism.

Perhaps the most important inference to highlight for the purposes of this

dissertation that is focused on a biblical model toward secular engagement, is that

Kaufman's views expose a clear rejection of divine revelation and embrace a replacement

in imagination.[146] However, Kaufman's "deep commitment to … human flourishing"[147]

and emphasis on the concept of God as "a human construct"[148] would likely find

resonance in secularity 3. Kaufman's thesis is that theology is "a public discipline dealing

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[144] Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 21; emphasis supplied.

[145] *Ibid*., 263-64.

[146] Kaufman admits: "I do not believe this model of theological work [that of a personal God and divine revelation] is serviceable any longer" (*Ibid*., 100). Based on this, Garrett Green asserts that imagination "has become the alternative to revelation in Kaufman's thought" and that it is "the key to his theological method and the root of its most serious flaw" (Green, review of *The Theological Imagination*, 220).

[147] Karen King quoted in John Dart, "Liberal theologian, mentor Gordon Kaufman dies at 86," *Christian Century* 128, no. 17 (Aug 2011), 17.

[148] Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 267.

with the inescapable human problem of orientation in life and in the world."[149] His

emphases on "humaneness" and "indigenization," arguably, imply a form of process

theology as evident in a kind of "dipolar theism."[150] Arguably, process theologians

emerge as promoters of the constructive imagination, whether or not they explicitly use

this terminology.

David Ray Griffin's "Postmodern Theology"[151]

It is uncertain whether David Ray Griffin (*b*. 1939) specifically cites the word

'imagination' in his "postmodern theology" model. However, because,

"[e]pistemologically, postmodern theology is based on the affirmation of nonsensory

perception … as the fundamental mode of relating to [the] environment,"[152] it seems

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[149] *Ibid*., 14.

[150] Dipolar Theism is a central tenet of process theology. A simplification of Alfred North Whitehead's view on this is to stress the mutuality of God and the world influencing each other. See, for example, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb, and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). In this regard, there are two principal emphases in Kaufman's work that warrant reiterating. The first emphasis is on the "two central motifs in the symbol of God—humaneness ('God relates Godself to humankind in ways which promote and enhance human development and fulfilment' … and transcendence or absoluteness … [or] God's utter inaccessibility" [*Theological Imagination*, 270, 41). The second, and simultaneous, emphasis is that the concept of God as "a human construct" must, of necessity, be subject to a "continuing and full indigenization [into culture] … no matter how far this departs from biblical or traditional conceptions" (*Ibid*., 267, 277). The allusions to 'process' and the similarities with the panpsychism of Charles Hartshorne seem undeniable. For a useful summary of Hartshorne's panpsychism see Peckham, *Love of God*.

[151] This section utilizes David Ray Griffin's theses as exemplar of process theology. Griffin notes "forward symbiosis" with process theology but stresses a semantic distinction giving specific thought to addressing problems peculiar to modernity. His vision is consistent with the ideas of Charles Hartshorne, best known for developing process theology from Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy. See, for example, Griffin, Cobb and Pinnock, *Searching*; Peckham, *Love of God*; and Daley, "God, Power, and Gospel."

[152] Griffin, *God and Religion*, 4. He notes attempts to utilize "positive" modern premises (such as the "human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence") and traditional premodern concepts (such as "divine reality and cosmic meaning").

plausible to attribute the pantheistic "creative synthesis"[153] of Griffin's "constructive or

revisionary … Christian philosophical (or natural) theology" or "process theology"[154] to

constructive imagination.

For those who "have found traditional theology incredible and modern theology

irrelevant,"[155] and on account of reality being "experiential events,"[156] Griffin offers a

"constructive" god, which is a modification of "the doctrine of divine power"[157] that is

"traditionally associated with the generic idea of God."[158] This postmodern god "both

influences the world and is influenced by it."[159]

Griffin proffers "a proposal for the direction theology should take in the

[contemporary] period."[160] However, the constructive redefinition that has sought to

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[153] *Ibid.*, x-xi.

[154] *Ibid*., 9-10.

[155] *Ibid.*, xiii. Griffin notes that because people do not "reflect together" about what is believed to be of ultimate importance, there is no means for policies to be "shaped by our deepest intuitions and our highest thoughts" about fundamental concerns (*Ibid*.).

[156] *Ibid.,* 64.

[157] *Ibid.,* 67. Reality is an "inner reality" as an "embodiment of creative power" that lasts only momentarily. Griffin highlights the incompatibility between the "traditional" god—as "a personal, purposive being, perfect in goodness and supreme in power, who created the world, acts providentially in it" and "is the ultimate ground of meaning and hope" (*Ibid.*, 52). Griffin's claims that god "could not and does not have a monopoly on power and therefore cannot unilaterally determine the events in the world" (*Ibid.*, 65) reflect significant similarities with extant Christian interpretations, for example in its rejection of determining or coercive divine power and its denial of God's monopoly of power (assuming a consensual meaning of 'power'). See, also, for example, John C. Peckham, "Providence and God's Unfulfilled Desires," *Philosophia Christi* 15, no. 2 (2013): 227-36.

[158] Griffin, *God and Religion*, 62.

[159] *Ibid.*, 64. Griffin's humanly devised vision is of a postmodern god who, "exemplifies" the idea of the modern God and cannot influence by coercion or determination is thought to ratify "social and intellectual freedom" (*Ibid.*, 62).

[160] *Ibid.*, 3.

explicate the impugned omnipotence of the 'traditional' God ultimately promotes 'empowered individuals' and a 'disempowered God.' It seems that God, reconstructed by humans [imagination], no longer reflects an objective reality and yields only limited creative and providential power to influence others by persuasion from within. "Consequently, [a] postmodern god [that] is impotent to create *ex nihilo*"[161] emerges who, ostensibly, and arguably, renders the constructive view incompatible with a biblical theological methodology.

Reflective Imaginative Views

A different aspect to theological imagination concerns its 'reflective' use. Perhaps the best way to understand what 'reflective imaginative view' means is to contrast it with its opposing constructive view: it describes the understanding of imagination as *reflecting* an existing concept of God rather than *producing* it. The fundamental difference between the 'constructive' and the 'reflective' types center around whether imagination is accorded power to create, or to receive and communicate, theological content. Exemplars of this view of imagination as theological instrument and host are George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis.[162]

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[161] Daley, "God, Power, and Gospel," 280. Using Whitehead's understanding of creativity as ultimate reality of which God is ultimate but not sole actualization, Griffin sees actual events—electrons, cells, humans—as spatio-temporal creative experiences resulting from past and present internal and external experiences. Because creativity cannot thus exist in one actuality, God is limited to co-creator and creation ex nihilo is counter-intuitive (Griffin, *God and Religion*, 64-67 passim).

[162] See George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture," in *A Dish of Orts: Chiefly Papers On the Imagination, and On Shakespeare* (Gutenberg eBook, 2005), https://ia801409.us.archive.org/11/items/adishofortschief09393gut/8orts10.txt; Kerry Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Sellars, *Reasoning*. Because both MacDonald and Lewis lack a systematic work on imagination, some reliance is placed on secondary sources that have produced focused work in these areas.

George MacDonald's "Baptized Imagination"[163]

George MacDonald (1824-1905) was a Scottish Christian minister and a prolific author of more than fifty books, many of which were 'fantasy literature' through which he explored the human condition to inform theology. MacDonald defined imagination as "an *imagining* or making of likenesses"; it is a "human faculty" that "gives form to thought" and is "likest to the prime operation of the power of God" in that it has "been called the *creative* faculty."[164] However, noting the "unpassable gulf" between man and God, he restricted the use of the word 'creation' to those events relating to creation ex nihilo which, on his view, "is imagination of God"[165] and rightly belong to God alone, who, to him, is the only true Creator.[166] MacDonald's work on imagination suggests a tension with modern ideologies and he appears to be reacting against the high anthropology. On his account, the "imagination of man is made in the image of imagination of God" and from that it "has its being" such that "a man no more creates the forms by which he would reveal his thoughts, than he creates those thoughts themselves."[167]

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[163] Dearborn alerts readers to the fact that "MacDonald never used the phrase, 'baptized imagination'" (*Baptized Imagination*, 2). Indeed, it is said that it was C.S. Lewis who "claimed that MacDonald 'baptized' his imagination" because MacDonald "viewed imagination as a gift originating from the Creator" (Sellars, *Reasoning*, 140). However, Dearborn finds the phrase appropriate to MacDonald because "themes of cleansing death and renewal of one's imagination pervade his work" (*Baptized Imagination*, 2).

[164] MacDonald, "The Imagination," 7-8; italics original.

[165] *Ibid.*, 8.

[166] *Ibid.*, 246.

[167] *Ibid.*, 8-9.

MacDonald compared the relationship between intellect and imagination as that between laborer and architect: although there is "no imagination without intellect,"[168] his intent is "to insist upon" the thesis that "in finding out the works of God," the "Intellect must labour [*sic*]" purposefully "under the direction of the architect, Imagination."[169] Further, he posits that the only reason that imagination is not to "necessarily be regarded as the one faculty before all others to be suppressed" is that "a balanced repose" is not "the end of education" but, rather, that the end is "a noble unrest" and "a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future."[170] Thus, he argues that "the main function of imagination" is to "inquire into what God has made" so that although it is aroused by facts, it "refuses to regard science as the sole interpreter of nature."[171]

MacDonald considered imagination as serving a "divine function"[172] but he, nevertheless, constrained its function to being instrumental, to inform and to transform his inquiry into the divine by utilizing the forms and opportunities that God and nature provide. MacDonald's theology was centered on an ethos of the Bible as "'the most precious thing in the world because it tells me his story'" and his view that it is "'Jesus who is the Revelation of God, not the Bible'" but that the Bible "'is indeed sent us by God.'"[173] Moreover, in his apparent response to the modern *zeitgeist*, MacDonald used

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[168] *Ibid.*, 11.

[169] *Ibid.*

[170] *Ibid.*, 7.

[171] *Ibid.*

[172] *Ibid.*, 12.

[173] George MacDonald, "Letter to an Unknown Lady," in *An Expression of Character: The Letters*

imaginative ways to share his theology. Noting that some were "in confusion of face,"[174]

MacDonald wrote that:

> All that the creature needs to see or know, all that the creature can see or know, is the face of Him from whom he came. Not seeing and knowing it, he will never be at rest; seeing and knowing it his existence will yet indeed be a mystery to him and an awe, but no more a dismay.[175]

Evidently, this suggests some central elements in MacDonald's model of imagination in theology: an understanding of the human quest and its satisfaction only in a relationship with God. This perspective could, legitimately, utilize imagination and Scripture for doing theology in secularity 3.

C. S. Lewis's Use of Imagination in Theology

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a self-proclaimed "rationalist,"[176] lay theologian and Christian apologist, and author who utilized imagination and storytelling pervasively in all genres of his prolific work.

Lewis cautioned that "it must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward imagination as the organ of truth" since "reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."[177] Rather than being the "cause of truth," for

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of George MacDonald, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 154, quoted in Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination*, 96.

[174] George MacDonald, "Individual Development," in *A Dish of Orts* (Whitehorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996), 68-9, quoted in Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination*, 121.

[175] George MacDonald, "God's Family," in *The Hope of the Gospel*, ed. Rolland Hein, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1974), 56, quoted in Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination*, 121.

[176] C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, Canto Classics ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265.

[177] *Ibid*.

Lewis, imagination was "its condition," a view which he admits "has metaphysical implications."[178]

It is remarkable that, although Lewis favors "a literary appreciation of the Bible" in its role "as a sacred book" having "divine authority" and a "historical sense," he also accords it with "allegorical senses."[179] In pushing back against what he considered the modern denigration of imagination and noting the loss of these biblical characteristics in his era, he speculated that if the "religious claims of the Bible" are not acknowledged, then its "literary claims" would only receive decreasing "'mouth honour' [*sic*]."[180]

Lewis's early view perceives that "imagination is a vague word" that carries nuances of "the world of reverie, day-dream, [and] wish-fulfilling fantasy."[181] With regard to the mature Lewis, J. T. Sellars writes that "through his essay 'Transposition'" one may find "a *veiled* Lewisian theory of imagination"[182] although, as Sellars notes, the word "'imagination is *not* mentioned.'"[183] Nevertheless, Sellars concludes that C. S.

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[178] *Ibid*. In that immediate context, Lewis neglected to explain what those implications might be, stating, instead, that all views carry such implications.

[179] *Ibid*., 144.

[180] *Ibid*.

[181] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, C. S. Lewis Signature Book (New York: Book of the Month Club, 1997), 16. Elsewhere, Lewis notes that the word "fantasy is both a literary and a psychological term": as the former, it means "any narrative that deals with impossibles and preternaturals"; as the latter, it could take three meanings with respect to "imaginative construction" whether mistakenly taken for reality or not, or deliberately as recreational (A*n Experiment in Criticism* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961], 50-51).

[182] Sellars, *Reasoning*, 192; emphasis supplied.

[183] *Ibid*., 195; emphasis supplied.

Lewis echoed the Neo-Platonic theory of the Forms[184] and stressed "a *necessary*

transposition of the higher, divine life to the lower, mundane life" such that "the lower

life is saved by being brought up into the higher life."[185] Sellars locates Lewis within "a

premodern trajectory" on Lewis's view that "imagination has a role in the process of

cognition."[186]

By making allowance for 'transposition' from the divine, the Lewisian

perspective, particularly as analyzed by Sellars, suggests a contrast with exclusively

humanist modern social imaginaries referenced in Chapter 1. From this perspective

Sellars suggests, one should understand that "we gain our meaning and *telos* from a

reliance upon the participation of the divine, of transcendence."[187]

<center>Positive Imaginative Views</center>

Contrary to what seems to be the predominantly modern constructive view, the

fourth view of imagination and its relationship to theology—and the view embraced in

this study—is that there is a hermeneutical (positive but not omnicompetent) role for

imagination that is recognized as subject to the biblical canon and thus is able to benefit

from applying its advantages in Christian theology. The positive imaginative view

involves the recognition that, like any other human faculty, redemption of imagination is

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[184] *Ibid.*, 202.

[185] *Ibid.*, 192; emphasis supplied.

[186] *Ibid.*, 51. He also locates MacDonald on the same trajectory.

[187] *Ibid.*, 192. Without expositing the Lewisian argument about "transposition," what is important is the allowance it makes for, and inclusion of, "the divine, of transcendence" in the work of imagination contra the modern social imaginaries. Charles Taylor's conceptualization of the secular self-understanding of the relationship between imagination and human telos is discussed in the following chapter.

necessary, and possible, for positive use in Christian theology. Garrett Green is an exemplar.

Garrett Green's "Paradigmatic Imagination"

Garrett Green (*b*. 1941) is a theologian who posits an understanding of imagination as the nexus between divine revelation and human experience. This position is, arguably, positive, on the premise that this nexus "allows us to acknowledge the priority of grace in the divine-human relationship while at the same time allowing its dynamics to be described in analytical and comparative terms as a human religious phenomenon."[188]

In seeking to contribute to Christian theology while remaining sensitive to the dynamics of contemporary culture, Green insists that "the authority of scripture [*sic*] is imaginative, functioning as a normative paradigm for the Christian imagination … and hence of experience."[189] Since there is "need then to think through with greater care the implications of imagination for hermeneutics, the authority of scripture [*sic*], the relation of theology to other disciplines"[190] and other issues, Green's recommendation is for understanding imagination as a "paradigmatic faculty."[191] This faculty is "the ability of

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[188] Green, *Imagining God*, 4.

[189] *Ibid*., 6.

[190] Green, review of *The Theological Imagination*, 221. Green concludes that "[t]heology which is merely constructive" and focused on "building and rebuilding the image of 'God,' really *has* fallen prey to idolatry" (*Ibid*.; emphasis original). Arguably, Green's views here locate him in the reflective imaginative group rather than the positive imaginative group. This is an obvious manifestation of the previously discussed issue of the tentative nature of these categorical demarcations, which are to be understood as indicative rather than precise.

[191] By "paradigmatic" imagination Green seeks to introduce a new way of seeing imagination as, or as instrumentally dependent on, a paradigm—"a normative exemplar of constitutive structure"—to

human beings to recognize in accessible exemplars the constitutive organizing patterns of other, less accessible and more complex objects of cognition."[192] Green's argument of paradigmatic imagination, is for a "reformulated" understanding of "revelation, scripture [*sic*], and theology,"[193] although his precise intent in "reformulated" remains uncertain.

Summary of Theological Imagination

Thus, to return to the broader discussion in this chapter, how one begins to think through the issues of imagination, social imaginaries, and theological method, and identifying what principle of articulation guides the 'thinking,' carries cogent implications for Christian theology.[194] It must be stressed that the choice in favor of the positive imaginative view in this chapter is indicative that the critical factor for this dissertation is imagination, *not as source of truth* but, as instrument in the process of

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support his making "the best argument possible for the place of imagination in Christian theology" (Green, *Imagining God*, 67, 80). Green does clarify his point by noting the "interpretive" nature of "religious paradigms" for different "religious communities," which he likens to having a different "'scientific method'" for "botanists, astrophysicists, and microeconomists" (*Ibid.*, 80).

[192] *Ibid.*, 66. Green notes that, because the "grammar of imagination as it occurs in ordinary usage encompasses both illusionary and realistic senses," it is perceived as "the medium of fiction as well as of fact" and, in addition to arousing suspicion, there is often much "confusion about its use in connection with religion" (*Ibid.*).

[193] *Ibid.*, 5.

[194] What is extracted from the outline of Green's positive imaginative view is that an effective connection between imagination and theology is perhaps best based on a simple understanding of what is intended in 'ordinary' language of imagination in the hermeneutical sense in contrast to more technical understandings. Ultimately, it is recognition of the role, albeit instrumental and complementary, that imagination plays in the overall process of theology more generally, and in hermeneutics, in particular. While this dissertation will not focus specifically on defending this use of imagination, it will be implicit to the main task of rereading Charles Taylor's conceptualization of modern social imaginaries and will become increasingly evident as the discussion ensues in the pages that follow.

apprehending truth. Consciousness of this instrumental use is important for *epoché* and

for phenomenological analysis (see Chapter 1 and the ensuing chapters).

This engagement with imagination seems inevitable if theology is to seriously

embrace the idea that:

> Our responsibility is to discern the overarching predicament of our time, to
> understand *the* question behind the questions of our cultural and philosophical
> context, and to engage them with a meaningful and sufficient story of atonement …
> [as] a community out of which ever-new expressions of our faith can emerge.[195]

These views highlight the decisions with which theologians are confronted by

imagination and modern social imaginaries. The proposed application in this study is as

one of a number of potential avenues to pursue in this overall project of understanding,

and juxtaposing biblical principles and modern social imaginaries.[196]

Concluding Remarks

In order to foster effective secular engagement, there is certainly need for

Christian theology to engage closely with secular philosophy. This chapter has laid some

theoretical groundwork as a point of departure and necessary step in the process. The

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[195] Alan Mann, *Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2005), 3.

[196] The particular avenue pursued is outlined in Chapter 5. Arguably, this way of understanding imagination and its relationship to theology calls to mind Paul Tillich's method of correlation as the outworking of his "answering theology," and points to the potential for its reduplication of abstractions across heterogeneous epochs. Paul Tillich's theological method has been touted as "the single most important theological engagement with the religious meaning of culture in modern times" (Russell Manning, "The Religious Meaning of Culture: Paul Tillich and Beyond," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 4 [October 2013]: 438, dos:10.1111/ijst.12020). Positioned as it is with a deliberate ear to the cultural agenda while seeking to hold theology accountable to relevance within culture, Tillich's method carries notable advantages for affirming the multidimensionality that this dissertation intends. At the same time, although Tillich's theology is undoubtedly divergent to the theology which grounds this dissertation, an adaptation of the broad situation-questions-theological answers-approach allows for the vital presentation of the ethos of distinctive Christian theology that is sensitive to the prevailing cultural philosophy, and thereby a potentially effective channel of communication and for doing theology.

above contributions on imagination and social imaginaries represent a sample of the diversity that accompanies these issues. The chapter has focused on selected themes of the genealogical dynamics of social imaginaries with the broad objective of a potential juxtaposition with theological method within the context of secular engagement. It has highlighted some of the issues that are potentially pivotal to bridging the gap between church and society, particularly as it relates to the nature and composition of social imaginaries as evolved through the centuries.

Firstly, the chapter explored conceptions of imagination in general as ancestor to social imaginary. Current tensions between theology and image/imagination carry explicit and implicit consequences for any potential application of social imaginary in theological method.

Secondly, the chapter's reflection on ancient social imaginaries highlights some central features of social imaginaries, particularly as it relates to the constancy of a thematic quest for spiritual, moral, or social aspirations. Tracing the evolution of social imaginaries suggests that, rather than being fixed concepts, there is the potential for change, and change may occur simultaneously with constancy in specific elements across imaginaries. These are all critical considerations for any potential application in theological method. Ultimately, by the various accounts surveyed, it is possible to infer the intuitive utility of social imaginary for application in theological method for a secular context supposedly founded on social imaginary. Within the secular 3 context, defined as it is by human telos (human flourishing), considerations of social imaginary for theological method would absolve theology from claims of detachment from its cultural context.

Thirdly, the chapter highlights selected conjoint models of theology and imagination. In doing so, the chapter acknowledges utility in the positive (and possibly, reflective) imaginative views—simple ways of acknowledging and utilizing imagination in a hermeneutical sense that is not antithetical to Scripture. The chapter is set against a background of perspectives from theologians, philosophers, and others, and the conclusions suggest that blanket suspicion of imagination in theology might have been, at least, unevenly or inequitably adjudicated. Jeremy Law asserts that, in theology, imagination is "as useful and inescapable as language itself," and he defends the utility of "the theological imagination in service of the kingdom of God."[197] Law appeals to Walter Brueggemann to indicate how this might work:

> Where does one go … to "think outside the box" of a totalizing ideology? In his [Brueggemann's] sights is the economic ideology of neoliberalism and the appalling social, and may we add environmental, consequences of its logic of the accumulation of surplus value. … One turns, he suggests, "to the Hebrew Bible and to the odd, inexplicable 'voice' that speaks in that enigmatic, unsettled, unsettling tradition." One turns to the prophetic imagination that via theological performance is able to "deabsolutize" the dominant claim by, "*acts of imagination* that expose imagination of the [prevailing] regime as faulty, inadequate, and eventually false."[198]

Toward addressing and, possibly, redressing, the dominant ideology of modern social imaginaries, this study will indeed return to the "Hebrew Bible" as well as the rest of the canon in Chapters 4 and 5 to outline a theological vision for secular engagement. Graham Ward is right: "If you have no imagination, you can have no theological vision."[199] To

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[197] Law, "Theological Imagination," 285, 7.

[198] *Ibid*., 287; emphasis original.

[199] Brandy Daniels and Graham Ward, "The Academy, the Polis and the Resurgence of Religion: An Interview with Graham Ward," *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology and Culture*, November 18. 2008. https://theotherjournal.com/2008/11/18/the-academy-the-polis-and-the-resurgence-of-religion-an-interview-with-graham-ward/ (accessed January 9, 2018). It is noteworthy that the Hebrew Bible records

actualize the theological vision then, imagination must be "chastened by experience and theological logic" because "[i]magination without theology is blind, but theology without imagination is dead; worse it could easily become a religious endorsement of the *status quo*."[200]

It is clear that so much depends on theological source(s) and also on conceptions of reality, anthropology and telos, sociology, and theology. What this chapter has done is to contextualize what is to follow in terms of Charles Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries and to preface an evaluation of possibilities from his interpretation of the contemporary self-understanding.

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one writer's claim that "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov 29:18).

[200] Law, "Theological Imagination," 297.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL IMAGINARY

IN CHARLES TAYLOR

Introduction and Background

Recognizing that the present epoch is the product of inextricably complex

developments over time, it is a central thesis of this dissertation that there is need for

Christian theology to continually seek greater understanding of secular philosophy if it is

to offer a reasoned response to the challenge of secular engagement. That is to say, it

might be to the advantage of the theological project if the way(s) in which it seeks secular

engagement are calibrated to society's terrain—exposing and considering society's

historical character and constitution—such that "belief might be made more believable."[1]

In this regard, Chapter 2 suggests the concept of social imaginary as, generally speaking,

a particularly apt complement to method for secular engagement, precisely because of its

role in the social construction of communities and in creating social identity.[2]

The purpose of this chapter is to present a basic understanding of Charles Taylor's

model of contemporary secularity as the framework upon which the dissertation rests—as

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[1] Barbieri, "Introduction," 25.

[2] It should be recalled from Chapter 1 that on Taylor's view, the social imaginary is a broad understanding of how people *imagine* their communal experience (*A Secular Age*, 171-2). Two key determinants of the utility of 'social imaginary' are its transformable and transformative character and an apparently constant teleological pattern generally, and, specifically, of human flourishing, variously defined.

an avenue to enhance understanding of the historical construction of the secular context, and as a source of potential lessons extrapolatable in contemporary Christian theology and method. Among the most esteemed voices of the contemporary debate centering around secularity and social imaginaries, Charles Taylor offers a compelling thesis. Taylor's hypothesis is noticeably complex, and an "indispensable" juxtaposition of history, philosophy, social science, and theology. As noted in Chapter 1, Taylor's secular taxonomy diachronically distinguishes among three secularity types enumerated consecutively from secularity 1 to secularity 3.[3]

This study is constrained to a discussion of thematic cross-sections of the factors that are pivotal to an apprehension of Taylor's articulation of the essence of modern social imaginaries. This chapter provides background information on Taylor's conceptualization of modern social imaginaries, selectively tracing the turn towards this secular age from premodern social imaginaries.[4] The overarching goal of the chapter is to enhance the overall understanding of the nature, character, and phenomenological effects of contemporary secular society so as to be able to gauge its interaction with theology, as well as individual and corporate Christian praxis. The church of the twenty-first century

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[3] Taylor, "Challenging," 408. The issues involved are undoubtedly complex and multifaceted. Graham Ward, for example, notes the "irreducibly complex if not convoluted" issues with which Taylor grapples ("History," 340). Ward notes the "complex … genre" (*Ibid.*, 341), "complex analysis" (*Ibid.*, 343), and "complex environing backgrounds" (*Ibid.*, 346) which Taylor seeks to describe. "The theological significance … is complex" notes D. Stephen Long ("How to Read Charles Taylor: The Theological Significance of A Secular Age," *Pro Ecclesia* 18, no. 1 [Winter 2009]: 93). For more details on Taylor's work, see Taylor's *A Secular Age*, as well as other works, including, but not limited to, titles noted in Chapter 1. See later in this chapter for a description of Taylor's taxonomy.

[4] The data utilized in this chapter were obtained primarily from Taylor, *A Secular Age*, as well as *Modern*; and Smith, *How (Not)*.

cannot renege this responsibility if it is to respond adequately to the Great Commission.[5]

It is not the objective of this chapter—or this dissertation—to adjudicate the secularity

debate but, rather, to understand and locate the *character* and *context* of contemporary

secularity *as outlined in Taylor's model*, toward informing Christian theology and

theological method.[6]

A Brief Comment on the Approach to Charles Taylor's Secular Taxonomy

Taylor posits that contemporary secular social imaginaries result from dramatic

shifts, since 1500, initially among a few élites and subsequently among a wider

population, because of a significant reorientation of the social self-identity. A focus on

those shifts headlines this chapter. Thus, the analytical description of Taylor's secularity

model focuses on the need to understand how the sedimented distant past continues to

shape the present, traces the phenomena of secular development, and identifies the

patterns emerging and factors of central import.

In broad terms, the intellectual questions being addressed in this chapter and this

dissertation about the nature of the social identity within which, and to which, theology

seeks engagement include: What does Taylor suggest as the issues that influenced the

development of the secular age? What is the historical trajectory of the patterns to which

he alludes and of what significance is this to theological engagement with society? What,

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[5] In Chapter 5, this study returns to Jesus's exhortation to his disciples—then and now—in the Great Commission in Matt 28:19-20.

[6] This chapter is not a defense nor comprehensive analysis, nor is it primarily a critique, of Charles Taylor's model of secular. Rather, it focuses on the phenomena of selected themes of Taylor's framework and systematically identifies and evaluates them vis-à-vis the broader concern of Christian theology in secular society—how the phenomena might inform thinking and strategy for secular engagement.

and where, is the locus of meaning for secularists? Within the tacitly "secular" contemporary context, what of the 'traditional' religious beliefs and symbols—including God, sin, salvation—remain relevant or necessary to the community's quests for meaning and, if so, how? What are the implications of the findings, both conceptually and practically, for contemporary Christian theology and theological method?

Accordingly, the discussion in this chapter highlights the "three orienting themes that guide Taylor's project."[7] First, Taylor's question: "How did we move from a condition where … people lived naïvely within a theistic construal, to one in which … unbelief has become for many the major default option?"[8] Second, Taylor's taxonomy of the secular: "What does it mean to say that we live in secular age?"[9] Third, Taylor's method: to tell a story.[10] The chapter is presented in two main parts: Part one focuses primarily on the second theme, initially describing Taylor's secular model in the light of both countervailing delineations of "secular" and of the contemporary landscape, and then selectively summarizing the third theme as a response to the first. The discussion moves, secondarily, in part two, to an evaluation of Taylor's model of secularity given considerations of what might be appropriate methodological concerns for Christian theology and method. Some concluding remarks close the chapter.

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[7] Smith, *How (Not)*, 18.

[8] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 14.

[9] *Ibid.*, 1.

[10] *Ibid.*, 28.

Secular Taxonomy: Identification and Definition

That "ours is a secular age" has been echoed by ecclesiastical as well as academic communities, with accompanying questions, resignation and diagnoses, and a plethora of prescriptions. Within this "secular" epoch, the primacy of 'individual' partners with a strong this-worldly ethos and telos, pluralism, religious indifference, and outright rejection of the strictures and structures of 'traditional' religion.

At the same time, "secular" is, at best, a multifarious and heavily contested concept.[11] In some quarters "secular" is promoted as "religious" in a new spring bonnet.[12] In other quarters, "secular," as the cosmic companion of the once-exclusive "religious," remains inextricably linked to "the dynamic" relationship with the religious[13] running alongside as a viable alternative with equal or unequal significance[14] as "'the secular' and 'the religious' haunt each other in a mutual dance of displacement and decentering."[15] Still another view defines secular as a concept "that brings together certain behaviors,

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[11] "Secular" is sometimes used as one of several 'synonyms' used to describe contemporary society such as "postmodern," or "post-secular," "post-Christian," inter alia, none of which are monolithic. Ingolf U. Dalferth notes an inherent "complexity and ambiguity" to the concept of "secular" as well as variegation in its use ("Post-Secular Society: Christianity and the Dialectics of the Secular," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 2 [June 2010]: 317).

[12] See, for example, *Ibid*. Dalferth notes that the role and importance of religious beliefs and practices change consequent to social differentiation and questions, inter alia; whether "religions will be replaced by non-religious functional equivalents in society" (*Ibid*., 318).

[13] Hirschkind concedes a consequential and perpetual "indeterminacy or instability" ("Secular Body?," 643).

[14] This chapter will explore this context. Hirschkind's view is that secular is a concept that "articulates a constellation of institutions, ideas, and affective orientations that constitute an important dimension of what we call modernity and its defining forms of knowledge and practice – both religious and nonreligious" ("Secular Body?," 633).

[15] Smith, *How (Not)*, 2.

knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life … it is neither singular in origin nor stable in

its historical identity … the sacred and the secular depend on each other … the secular is

[not] a mask for religion."[16] Evidently, the characterizations vary, as does the range of

factors which influence, or are influenced by, the secular.[17] Christopher Craig Brittain

argues that it is "appropriate to identify the secular as a highly contested and shifting

social space, a site of interaction and engagement between communities of difference"

but, highlighting the problem of the space to which the concept refers, Brittain describes

"secular" as "a tragic category, for it is deeply imperfect and never absolutely neutral – a

flawed attempt to deal with complex historical and political realities."[18]

Broadly, for Charles Taylor, secularity "is a matter of the whole context of

understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes

place."[19] Taylor points out that the combined outcome of nova effects and cross-polemics

"end up generating a number of new positions" so that "our present predicament offers a

gamut of possible positions."[20] James K. A. Smith's summary is well-taken—"[f]ar from

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[16] Asad, *Formations*, 25-26.

[17] Other notable contributors to the debate include, for example, sociologists of religion José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards A Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005); and anthropologist Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[18] Christopher Craig Brittain, "The 'Secular' as a Tragic Category: On Talal Asad, Religion and Representation," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 17 (2005): 161.

[19] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

[20] *Ibid*., 299. 'Nova effects' refers to "an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options" (*Ibid*.).

being a monolithic space or 'experience,' our secular age is marked by tensions and fractures."[21]

Taylor's hypothesis is that the present epoch is best described as a "secular 3" age and that the essence of secularity 3 is contingent on "new *conditions* of belief"—what makes for plausibility of belief or not—and not on expressions of belief.[22] For Taylor, secularity 3 reflects "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[23] On Smith's summary, secularity 3 is characterized by:

> a situation of fundamental contestability when it comes to belief, a sense that rival stories are always at the door offering a very different account of the world … not because of any index of religious participation (or lack thereof), but because of … manifestations of contested meaning.[24]

From this, Smith attempts to emphasize *believability* rather than *belief* based on Taylor's thesis about the character of secularity 3.[25] Ultimately, Taylor's taxonomy of the secular is that secularity 3 is the result of a continuing shift from secularity 1, and through secularity 2.

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[21] Smith, *How (Not)*, 61.

[22] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20, 21; emphasis supplied. Taylor explains that the conditions are such that "belief and unbelief uneasily coexist, and often struggle with each other in contemporary society" (*Ibid*., 295). Cf. secularity 1 and 2 where belief and unbelief are often deliberately separated.

[23] *Ibid*., 3.

[24] Smith, *How (Not)*, 10, 12.

[25] *Ibid*., 20; emphasis supplied.

Taylor assigns the term "secularity 1" to the ethos of the classical-medieval era

that promoted a strict duality between the realm of the spiritual and the other-worldly in

contradistinction to the "temporal," "earthly," and "mundane" (the sacred-secular

duality). On his view, secularity 1 involves emptying religion from social spaces.[26]

Taylor labels as "secularity 2" the methodological rejection of "enchantment" resulting

from the scientific, industrial, and technological revolutions of the modern period, which

produced and heightened rationality and the crafting of "neutral, and *a*religious space."[27]

Secularity 2 is "the 'secular' of secularization thesis and normative secularism"[28] as

people turn away from God and church attendance decreases.

On Taylor's account, the secular 3 age began ca.1960s, consistent with the

identification of contestable religious belief or disbelief in God. In tracing the move from

unbelief by a few 'élites' in the eighteenth century to what he describes as "mass

secularization"[29] in the twenty-first, Taylor notes that in this "Age of Authenticity"[30]

there is a rejection of externally imposed models of behavior and belief in favor of the

primacy of humanity, which is secured in the feelings.[31] Emphasizing that religious

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[26] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

[27] Smith, *How (Not)*, 21.

[28] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2. Secularization thesis posits that "as modernity progresses, people will become less and less religious" (Simpson, *Modern*, 4).

[29] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 437.

[30] Taylor refers to the Age of Authenticity as the post-1960s era when "expressive individualism" seeks to identify peculiar and deinstitutionalized spirituality versus religion (what is authentic to each) (*Ibid.*, 213). On his account, this Age of Authenticity was preceded by the Ancien régime (ancient and medieval—which had religious and political identity tied together) and the Age of Mobilization (roughly 1800-1960—which saw the turn to ideological mobilization).

[31] The detail of the shift is the focus of Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Chapter 1. There are apparent

participation is not absent from contemporary society but that it is more vulnerable to be

contested, Taylor notes that this context is partly the result and partly the cause of

"exclusive humanism." Exclusive humanism is how Taylor categorizes modern social

imaginaries, because the meaning, significance, and telos of humanity lie *completely*

within the "immanent" and requires no "reference to the divine or transcendence."[32]

Some peculiar features of modern social imaginaries are described next.

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Secular Taxonomy: Overview of Modern
Social Imaginaries

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Taylor invokes the concept of social imaginary to develop, clarify, support and

justify his thesis of secularity. Social imaginary represents collective understanding and is

informed by a context of overlapping ideas relating to "background," "pre-ontology," and

"taken-for-granted."[33] On this view, social imaginary is that which both enables and

makes sense of the practices of society; it is not just "a set of ideas."[34] Taylor explains

that the concept of social imaginary is "broader and deeper" than an intellectual system,

and may, instead, be considered as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social

surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images,

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parallels in Taylor's description here with what Alasdair MacIntyre describes as "emotivism" (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007]).

[32] Smith, *How (Not)*, 26; emphasis supplied. See also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

[33] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3, 13, 95. Stressing implicit elements of social imaginaries, Taylor, likens them to "a 'pre-ontology' in the Heideggerian sense" (*Ibid.*, 3). Martin Heidegger discusses "'pre-ontological'" as synonymous with "pretheoretical" and "prereflective" (*Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh and Dennis J. Schmidt. SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010], xv). For Heidegger, "[t]o be a human being is to be 'thrown' into an already established cultural tradition" (*Ibid.*, xvi).

[34] Taylor, *Modern*, 2.

stories, legends, etc."[35] Social imaginary is "the expectations that are normally met, and

the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[36]

These definitions, and Taylor's explanations, highlight three salient features of

social imaginaries that redound as crucial considerations for the theological project in its

quest to engage 'every people.' First, the context of understanding which constitutes

social imaginary embraces "ordinary people" and it is not, mainly, theoretical but

practical. Second, although it may originate with a relatively small representative group,

social imaginary *qua* social imaginary is shared by a relatively large group and may be

"generalized to whole societies."[37] Third, social imaginary is a complex interplay of

positive and normative values within a broad and deep frontier of 'common practices.'

Charles Taylor is deliberate and emphatic in the use of 'social imaginary' as a

more wide-ranging alternative to 'worldview'; the latter he considers to be the product of

the former.[38] Taylor's deliberate use of the phrase 'social imaginary' in contrast to

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[35] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-2.

[36] Taylor, *Modern*, 23. For a historical and philosophical perspective on imagination which blossoms into social imaginary, see discussion in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[37] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299, 207. See, also, *Modern*, 2. Taylor references the theories of Hugo Grotius and John Locke as exemplars of influential minorities (*A Secular Age*, 172). What is interesting about this penetration by a few theorists into, and apparently changing, the society, are the potential parallels that may be imagined for theology. Can theology, conceivably holding a minority position in contemporary society and seeking to 'promote' a particular 'theory,' apply similar means for penetration of the society to profitable and transformative ends?

[38] Taylor, *Modern*, 23, 24. Cf. Richard L. Haney, who argues the relevance of 'social imaginary' ("Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries," 2-7). Haney notes Taylor's use of the "wide-angle nature of the 'social imaginary' conceptual category with phrases like 'the breadth and depth of this implicit understanding'" (*Ibid*., 7). Interestingly, Taylor reasons that the "sense-giving features [of the background—social imaginary] can't be circumscribed"; the background is "wide and deep" (*A Secular Age*, 174).

'worldview' or 'paradigm,' emphasizes the phenomenological roots of his thesis and its peculiar 'pre-theoretical' character.[39] While every social imaginary carries distinctive features, Taylor posits that the pioneering features of modern social imaginaries are true "[o]f no previous society."[40] Taylor is speaking of the central place that human flourishing—which he exposits throughout as nuances of 'economic prosperity'—has secured in the design of modern social imaginaries. The concatenation of features which produced this outcome is explored below.

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Secular Taxonomy: Exclusive Humanism
and Human Flourishing
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This section summarizes an understanding of the interrelationships among elements of Taylor's characterization of modern social imaginaries that are vital to apprehending the secular "context of understanding"[41] for any engagement with contemporary secularity 3. Because in Taylor's conceptualization, modern social imaginaries are endowed with layers and sub-layers of contextualized meaning, it is prudent to consider social imaginary as an embedded model of contemporary society (in a non-technical sense). Thus, there are several interlinked features which dominate and define "exclusive humanism" in modern social imaginaries. For convenience, these features are classified into four categories: philosophical, anthropological, sociological,

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[39] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 146. "Phenomenological" refers to a focus on "people's lived experience." See, for example, Langdridge, *Phenomenological*.

[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18.

[41] *Ibid*., 3. For Taylor, the "context of understanding" includes both explicit and implicit elements. See footnote 33 above.

and theological (PAST).[42] To mitigate repetition, the classifications are utilized later in this chapter to describe the paradigmatic shifts in the transformations from medieval to modern social imaginaries. However, in this section, a systematic summary will suffice.

On Taylor's account, the secular 3 age is characterized by a society encased in "secular time," a "universe" that is "closed," "disenchanted," and "purely self-sufficient," and an "immanent frame" with "buffered" and self-sufficient humans.[43] Taylor reasons that disenchantment—"the eclipse of the world of magic forces and spirits"—was aimed at a "more ordered" and uniformed society that inhibits impromptu supernatural interferences.[44] He explains that disenchantment occurs where meaning is transferred from form (things such as time and rituals) to reside exclusively in the mind—"society was increasingly understood [as] a rational order."[45] Alongside disenchantment in society is the crudely analogous 'disenchanted' individual of secularity 3 who relinquishes an "open," "porous," and vulnerable self in favor of a "buffered" and disengaged self.[46] These two particular transformations occur within a more general context whereby, in secularity 3, the understanding of an open "cosmos," in which divine purpose and action was not only permitted but was also fundamental, is replaced by a closed universe of inert

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[42] Because of the interlinkages noted in Taylor's narrative, these classifications are considered as but crude approximations. "Anthropological" features also include what may be, and sometimes is, properly articulated as "teleological."

[43] Terms given special technical meanings in this context are explained in the discussion.

[44] Taylor, *Modern*, 49.

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37-8.

matter that is further socially circumscribed within a natural order. The natural order of

"the immanent frame" excludes any need for, or contact with, or influence from, the

supernatural.[47] The immanent frame is an inclination "to make us see ourselves as living

in impersonal orders, naturally, socially, and ethically."[48] At the same time, Taylor notes

the cross-pressures resulting from the once-open-now-closed world—a "pull to

transcendence"[49]—within this immanent order that is characterized by a nova of options

positing varying levels of belief and unbelief.

 As the replacement ethos of social imaginary, "exclusive humanism" displaces

the previously otherworldly ethos, and, ultimately, reveals reformulations of God and

divine providence, as well as human telos.[50] For Taylor, "exclusive humanism" is the

"crucial transforming" alternative moral order of modern social imaginaries that

transforms God into an utterly transcendent and impersonal deist god—a force

understood more in terms of power that "had to be discerned in the design of things"[51]—

and is focused on individualism and common temporal benefits, "accepting no final goals

beyond human flourishing."[52] Consequent on the influence of a few influential thinkers

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[47] This idea of complete independence from transcendence is contestable. Arguably, Taylor's references to divine providence and the 'invisible hand' in secularity 3—ordering life experiences for the good of all—imply, at the least, the sporadic intervention of the supernatural/transcendent.

[48] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555.

[49] *Ibid*., 49.

[50] *Ibid*., 543; Smith, *How (Not)*, 47.

[51] *Ibid*., 329.

[52] *Ibid*., 18. Taylor maintains that "exclusive humanism" does not obviate the human quest for meaning but relocates it from the transcendent. On his view, human flourishing is "what constitutes a fulfilled life" (*Ibid*., 16).

and what later became the market economy, "security and prosperity [have] become the principal goals of organized society,"[53] conceived by the members of society as designed by God and conforming to divine purposes such that each person, by furthering self, served others.[54]

Accordingly, with this understanding of divine providence, people are lured from "traditional, institutional religion" by 'economics'—the culture of exchange and benefit reflected in the apparently successful consumer culture—the "stronger form of magic."[55] Apparently, Locke's magnification of the "economic" became "the model for human behavior and the key to harmonious coexistence."[56] While the conception of "the economy as a system" occurred in the eighteenth century "with the physiocrats and Adam Smith," Taylor notes that the acknowledgement of "the *most important purpose and agenda* of society as *economic* collaboration and exchange" is "*a drift in our social imaginary*" from then until today.[57] He notes that although the most important components of social imaginary—market economy, public sphere, and self-governing people—may have begun initially as moral order ideas of a few élites or influential

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[53] Taylor, *Modern*, 13-14. Security is defined as keeping "lives and property safe under law" and "prosperity" solely as the product of economic exchange.

[54] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 166. See, also, *Modern*, 15. Hence, Taylor cites Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* as having "provided us with the most famous of these mechanisms, whereby our search of our own individual prosperity redounds to the general welfare" replacing other notions of goodness, virtue, and happiness as divinely-designed goals (*Modern*, 70).

[55] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 490.

[56] Taylor, *Modern*, 15.

[57] *Ibid*., 76; emphasis supplied. Taylor notes "the shift in the idea of natural order" in which "the economic dimension takes on greater and greater importance," and that "'economic' (ordered, peaceful, productive) activity is more and more the model of human behavior" (*A Secular Age*, 229).

thinkers in the seventeenth century, the pervasive idea of "mutual" was instrumental to their transformation to become the unformulated "background to thinking" of whole societies in the twenty-first.[58] Exclusive humanism is the pivotal replacement in the imaginary—the moral order in Taylor's thesis—that casts a wide shadow of the central import of economics as the primary impetus, and the replacement telos, of humanity.

On Taylor's account, the emergence of exclusive humanism is reflective of, and was highly influenced by, a number of shifts resulting from a 'dialectical' process, or "long march,"[59] between theoretical developments and their practical outworking in society such that, in modern social imaginaries, exclusive humanism appears, phenomenologically, as the pre-reflective background to thinking. A better comprehension of Taylor's conception of the modern social imaginaries and of the centrality of human flourishing as human telos to their emergence and maintenance, and a fair evaluation of the significance and usefulness to the theological project, will come from an understanding of these shifts. Such an understanding requires a sketch of the way in which the historical experience has contributed to current social identification.

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[58] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549. These moral order alternatives may have begun initially as ideas of "physiocrats" in the seventeenth century but mutated to become the "background to thinking" of whole societies in the twenty-first century consequent on the idea that 'mutuality,' rather than 'hierarchy,' regarding respect, service, rights, and obligations, assumes preeminence in modernity. As one of the single most pervasive departures, the idea of "mutual" is most evident in the market economy (*Ibid*., 12). Taylor defines public sphere as "a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these" (*Modern*, 83). Hugo Grotius, John Locke, and Adam Smith are noted as some of the early influential thinkers who promoted human collaboration for mutual benefit.

[59] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 167. For Taylor, this "long march" is "a process in which the modern idealization" has "transformed our social imaginary on virtually every level, with revolutionary consequences" (*Modern*, 16).

Latin Christendom to Modern West: Divine
Telos to Human Flourishing

As with "secularization theory," Taylor eschews "subtraction stories" as adequate

explanations for the emergence of modern social imaginaries.[60] On his account, modern

social imaginaries result from major shifts in sub-societies *as well as* changed

conditions—"Reform"—which, *together*, foment the context which constitutes the

exclusive humanism.[61] It is the divestiture of large scale theological meaning to life, and

the reorientation of various elements of social imaginary, particularly the elevation of

economic human flourishing as the normative end of human existence and search for

meaning. This section outlines Taylor's articulation of the turn to secularity 3 from

premodern social imaginaries via paradigmatic shifts.

While Taylor narrates these shifts from medieval imaginaries, the narrative of

their evolution is a complex symbiotic interplay with layers of embedded features, and

the attempt to separate them here and to consider them as discrete occurrences is

artificial, at best. This section utilizes the four thematic aggregations noted above, PAST,

and includes Taylor's "Reform" as well as "shifts." Because of the inherently

overlapping and iterative nature of the shifts, it is difficult to decide the best place to

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[60] As indicated above, secularization theory touted the idea that religious significance would decrease as preference for science and intellectualism increases. Taylor notes that this is what he labels as secularity 2, and denies it as an appropriate descriptor for contemporary society (*A Secular Age*, 21, 525). It will be recalled that, on Taylor's view, "subtraction stories" are those that view secularity as a sort of 'remainder' when religion is removed from society (see Chapter 1 of this dissertation).

[61] In this regard, it is important to note Taylor's identification of a "hegemony" of a "presumption of unbelief" in crucial sub-societies, such as the intellectual/academic, that is easily extendible to others (*A Secular Age*, 13).

begin. An appropriate and helpful point of entry is the shifts within the dominant

philosophical and sociological understandings in society.

Paradigmatic Philosophical and Sociological Shifts
to Exclusive Humanism

In this section, considerations relating to the overarching philosophical mood in

society (the philosophical [P]) and those relating to the social structure and organization

(the sociological [S]) are considered. The theological (T) and anthropological (A) follow.

Paradigmatic Philosophical Shifts

There are two main features that are classified as philosophical and discussed in

this section. The first relates to perceptions of the natural world as the context for human

activity and interaction. It is this background to thinking—the context of understanding—

Taylor argues, that has undergone significant change since medieval times.[62] Taylor

posits that perceptions have shifted from revelation via what is evident in "Creation" to

"a purified religion … based on Nature"[63] in terms of how the world is understood. The

natural world no longer carries the significance of the ordered cosmos which "testified to

divine purpose and action" and served as the whole on, and within, which "the 'natural'

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[62] Smith highlights that: "philosophically, Taylor is working from the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, an heir of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. So he equates the 'conditions' of belief with the 'background' we bring to our perception of reality" (Smith, *How (Not)*, 18n.29). In theological method, this might be properly referred to as the macrohermeneutical presuppositions and the macrohermeneutical environment (see, for example, Canale, *Revelation-Inspiration*). Peckham refers to the "conceptual framework" (*Canonical Theology*, 213).

[63] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 292.

world hangs,"[64] and from which the natural world is infused with meaning.[65] In secularity 3, the natural world of meaning and significance is governed by natural laws: an "immanent order" in an unconnected, closed, autonomous, and independent universe. In fact, Taylor argues that one part of the story is that nature becomes a replacement for creation or for "a manifestation of God," as became evident in "science … in art … in ethics (the recovery of ancient ethics of 'nature', Aristotle, the Stoics)."[66]

On Taylor's account, these shifts were motivated by "Christian devotion"; a desire to make divinity more present in the ordinary lived experience and, interestingly, attempts to "order" the world. The inadvertent outcomes of the Reform movements were not only philosophical but, primarily, theological. What changed *theologically* in modernity was not just perceptions of reality from a broad metaphysical pole, but also the macro hermeneutical presuppositions as it relates to the nature of reality and, hence, how God and humans are perceived in themselves and in their relationship with each other.[67] Hence, Taylor cites the absence of communion as humans are perceived to live in a closed and self-sufficient universe and life is devoid of the supernatural.[68] Functionally, it "became possible to see the immediate surroundings of our lives as existing on this

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[64] *Ibid.*, 60, 152.

[65] *Ibid.*, 25.

[66] *Ibid.*, 90. Taylor is careful to note that this 'autonomization' of nature is just one part of the story (subtraction) and that other historical 'contingencies' were necessary to produce the secular 3 age.

[67] *Ibid.*, 292.

[68] *Ibid.*, 289.

'natural' plane."[69] Correspondingly, Taylor explains that the hierarchical form in the

heavenly realm which previously manifested in the Chain of Being on earth has become

undone with the "great disembedding" of individual from society, society from cosmos,

and cosmos from divine.[70]

The second philosophical change is related to the perceptions in nature and to a

changed time consciousness, in two closely-related senses. First, the infusion of a 'higher

time' in the once-meaningful cosmos emanated from a consciousness of the divine.

Second, Taylor articulates the once-meaningful cosmic consciousness which engendered

an imaginary in which time held significance and supernatural meaning (beyond

chronology) in the way that time was understood and experienced. In this sense, he

suggests that there was tacit distinction between 'higher time' and 'secular time.'

Consequently, Taylor cites historical events that, in the medieval period, carried religious

significance in the annual calendar.[71] Contemporary secularity 3 reflects the "encasing in

secular time."[72]

Paradigmatic Sociological Shifts

Parallel to these philosophical shifts which, for Taylor, increased the likelihood of

exclusive humanism, are changes in the social structure contingent on the buffered

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[69] *Ibid.*, 143.

[70] *Ibid.*, 152.

[71] Taylor highlights the Christian acknowledgement and celebration of Good Friday (*A Secular Age*, 55).

[72] *Ibid.*, 59.

individual in whom all meaning becomes vested. In the medieval period, the strength of

the social bond also implied "communal repercussions."[73] Taylor notes that the buffered

self that ensues with disenchantment portends "atomism" and "disengagement" and that

disbelief rescinds social consequences and fragments social cohesion.[74] As

disenchantment 'disembeds' humans, society devolves into a collection of individuals.[75]

As "communitarianism" is removed, exclusive humanism is intensified and there is a

resignation to meaningfulness limited only to "mundane vagaries."[76]

Taylor views life as the collective as severely altered because of the new

existential conditions created by autonomous individuals arising from disenchantment

and the replacement of "naïve" understandings.[77] He opines that the 'authentic' secularity

3 individual ascribes to the social contract theory only to the extent that this is necessary

for the atomism and new individually-ascribed meanings, even as society becomes

disembedded from the cosmos—no longer grounded in higher reality.[78]

Evidently, perceptions of reality are inextricably linked with questions of

epistemology and this has become increasingly apparent in the mutation of perceptions

from medieval to modern times: from the understanding of the possibility to apprehend

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[73] Smith, *How (Not)*, 30. See discussion in Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

[74] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

[75] *Ibid.*, 146.

[76] Smith, *How (Not)*, 31.

[77] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 13. Taylor contrasts "naïve" with "reflective."

[78] Social contract theory is concerned with relations of authority between individuals and the polity. Grotius, Locke, and Kant are among social contract theorists.

meaning that exists externally, to the impossibility of meaning existing externally and only residing in the mind (imagination).[79] Accordingly, the acknowledgement of supernatural beings, divine-human communication (revelation), and many rituals practiced by the church fathers and passed on in church tradition—that informed the medieval background—are rejected in the modern epoch in favor a cultural spirituality and omnicompetent human beings. On Taylor's account, it is the replacement of an enchanted world by one disenchanted, inter alia, which took place from medieval to modern times, that has made secularity 3 and exclusive humanism imaginable.[80] These shifts evidently carry, and reflect, undeniable theological consequences.

Paradigmatic Theological Shifts to Exclusive Humanism

What is delineated here as theological shifts entail movements relating to the understanding of the nature of God and the God-world relationship in a broad sense.

Charles Taylor posits that "reformulations" over the past five centuries in the way that society imagines God and divine providence are pivotal to the development of what has emerged as the secular 3 age. Recognizing that the eclipse of the idealistic God by humanly devised projections and meaning influence the cultural viability of the notion of religion and the ethos of society, Taylor notes a continuing shift in theological understanding: from idealism, to Deism, to atheism and the plurality of options of belief and unbelief on offer in secularity 3.[81] Explaining that in the secularity 3 story "'Deism'"

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[79] See discussions in Chapter 2.

[80] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 27-28.

[81] *Ibid*., 293.

is "an intermediate stage" by which exclusive humanism becomes "a live option" for many people although it began with only a few "élites," Taylor highlights three "facets" of Deism:

> [First,] the notion of the world as designed by God … goes through an anthropocentric shift … [to] 'Providential Deism.' The second facet of Deism is the shift towards the primacy of [an] impersonal order … [and] a third facet of Deism [is] the idea of a true, original natural religion [now rediscovered].[82]

These 'subtractions' along with movements of "Reform" ultimately produced the secular 3 age discouraging belief in God.[83] Within the group of Reform movements, Taylor includes the Protestant Reformation, changes within Christendom and the Roman Catholic Church, and Renaissance humanism as major contributors. On his account, Reforms were birthed from the increasing pressure for humans to live in *this* world while striving toward seemingly impracticable eternal goals.[84]

Taylor explains that the overarching goal of the Reform movements was to restructure the social arrangements so as to "make over the whole society to higher standards"[85] and to mitigate "the profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical [dis]equilibrium"[86] of an apparently distorted "two-tiered religion"[87] resulting from sharp secular-sacred distinctions, among other things. One way of expressing this new thrust

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[82] *Ibid.*, 221.

[83] *Ibid.*, 143.

[84] *Ibid.*, 774, 85.

[85] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 63.

[86] *Ibid.*, 61.

[87] *Ibid.*, 63.

would be to emphasize the 'priesthood of all believers.'[88] Taylor's story suggests that the

increased possibility of naturalism[89] was the (easier) inadvertent solution that emerged,

following the rejection "of the sacramentals,"[90] the removal of "expectations of

transcendence,"[91] and the Reformation's centrality to "the eventual creation of a humanist

alternative to faith"[92]—which could be interpreted as "a Pelagian assumption of human

powers."[93] The understanding of a sacred presence in the world changed, and with it

moved social, ethical, cultural, and political understandings. In other words, on Taylor's

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[88] This was one emphasis of the Protestant Reformation. Taylor implies that Martin Luther's 'priesthood of all believers' may have emerged as a part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Ian McNeill suggests that such a stance to authority might indeed be problematic particularly where it is interpreted as "rais[ing] the individual conscience to the office of judge of all authority" ("Attitudes to Authority in the Medieval Centuries," in *Problems of Authority: An Anglo-French Symposium*, ed. John M. Todd [1962; repr., Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1964], 166). Another view attributes the resulting secularization and individualism from these tenets to the Radical Reformation (see, for example, Darius Jankiewicz, "Models of Religious Authority," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 18, no. 1 [Spring 2007]: 22-23).

[89] Smith, *How (Not)*, 39. Taylor describes a "rigorous naturalism" with "an admiration for the power of cool, disengaged reason, driven" and "acting … in the interest of human flourishing" (*A Secular Age*, 9).

[90] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79. Taylor talks about "sacramentals" as "locations of sacred power" to the extent that they can be placed "in [sacred] person[s], time[s], space[s], gesture[s]"; in other words, "elements of magic in the old religion" (*Ibid.*).

[91] Smith, *How (Not)*, 38.

[92] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 77.

[93] Smith, *How (Not)*, 38. Pelagius (ca.355-435) was an ascetic British monk based in Rome, and who is probably best known for his role in what became the Pelagian controversy: the impasse concerning the understanding of human nature, sin, and grace between himself and Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Pelagius promoted an extremely high anthropology. Alister E. McGrath notes that Pelagius suggests that humans can (without further divine aid than endowed at birth) "achieve the good goals which God purposed" (Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 4th ed. [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011], 357).

account, the Protestant Reformation had some significance in the genesis of what later emerged as exclusive humanism.[94]

Furthermore, it is important to re-emphasize that "exclusive humanism wasn't just something we fell into … It is an achievement."[95] Apparently, had it not been for the *theological* shifts, and resulting *anthropological* shifts, modern social imaginaries—and secularity—is likely to have unfurled rather differently.[96] Pivotal to Taylor's overall argument is the shift in the understanding of divine providence catalyzed by, and reflected in, "four eclipses" which took place early within the modern period when ultimacy and meaning were divested to *this* world, resulting in "immanentization"—the process whereby meaning is enclosed within the natural material world, totally excluding the supernatural. A brief exegesis of these eclipses follows.

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[94] Amid strong scholarly debate, a number of authors support this linkage. For example, Brad S. Gregory notes that "the Western world today, is an extraordinarily complex, tangled product of rejections, retentions, and transformations of medieval Western Christianity, in which the Reformation era constitutes the critical watershed" (*The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012], 2). On Gregory's view, "incompatible, deeply held, concretely expressed religious convictions paved a path to a secular society" (Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 352). If the Protestant Reformation is understood as focused on advancing the call *ad fontes*— in this case, back to the Scriptures—and in the operationalization in the church, and if Taylor is right that the Protestant Reformation played a catalyzing role in secularization, then it is important to remain cognizant of how this might influence any potential response to doing theology in secularity 3. However, responding specifically to that particular concern falls outside the scope of this study.

[95] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 255.

[96] Although the anthropological shifts (especially the reoriented telos) appear to have catalyzed the theological shifts (particularly those relating to the 'autonomization' of nature), the theological shifts (in the guise of Reform movements) appear as the catalyst for other anthropological shifts. This demonstrates the complex, symbiotic, and multilevel nature of the forces that, in Taylor's story, coalesced to produce the secular 3 age.

Theological Eclipses, Anthropological Outcomes[97]

Charles Taylor cites four eclipses that are pivotal to the emergence of the secular
3 age via their role in Providential Deism: eclipses of "eternity," "grace," "mystery," and
of God's plan for "a transformation of human beings" as the expression of human telos.[98]
Each eclipse is briefly described in turn.

Taylor discusses the eclipse of a "sense of further purpose" (human telos) beyond
achieving human good. On his account, "eternity" was the first to be eclipsed, initiated
via the work of John Locke and Adam Smith on whose account a reformulated divine
providence directed humans to seek "mutual benefit."[99] Now, "we owe [God] essentially
the achievement of our own good" and "[w]orship shrinks to carrying out God's goals (=
our goals) in the world."[100] The secularity 3 "'economistic' view"[101] of divine
providence—and, hence, of human flourishing—and the resulting complementarity of
immanentization are the products of the modern moral order. The process of
"immanentization" endowed the modern world with the ultimate fullness for the human
experience "naturalistically," thereby rejecting the ethos of an obligation to "fullness

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[97] These "eclipses" may reasonably be considered to be anthropological because the consequences were all properly anthropocentric. They are classified here as theological because they redirected perspectives from the divine and other-worldly to the human and this-worldly.

[98] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222-4.

[99] *Ibid*., 177, 222; *Modern*, 12.

[100] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222, 233.

[101] *Ibid*., 221. In the broadest sense, the close ideological alignment in the elevation of economics and the downgrade of the divine, both of which characterize contemporary society, proceed from Adam Smith. James K. A. Smith's commentary on Taylor's tome summarizes the influence of Locke and Smith as a transposition of divine providence, from being an "*ultimate* plan" to a this-worldly emphasis and also an emphasis on "*economic* benefit" (*How (Not)*, 49; emphasis original).

[that] requires reference to God … to something beyond human life and/or nature."[102]

Taylor suggests that, by infusing the social imaginary with this idea that divine providence was about ordering "the two main goals of organized society … security and *economic* prosperity,"[103] Locke and Smith seem to have initiated a reformulation of premodern social imaginaries. What this means within the context of the broader epistemological *milieu* of modernity wherein social imaginary imposes meaning onto things, is that God's purposes for humanity shrinks to mutual, anthropological, this-worldly benefit. Economic human flourishing, understood as directed by, and embedded in, God's design and providence, increasingly becomes the hermeneutical clue to understanding society and, at the same time, becomes normative, directing behavior within society.[104] This is a key factor in this dissertation: evidently, human flourishing is a strategic determinant of the terms of any engagement with secular society. This will be examined in greater detail later in the ensuing chapters.

Taylor describes the second eclipse, of "grace," as another movement toward "providential deism."[105] God's agency becomes irrelevant to the divinely designed

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[102] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 8, 222. Taylor suggests a tension here between human flourishing and eternal goals. Can eternal goals be compatible with human flourishing? This is explored in Chapter 4.

[103] *Ibid*., 177; emphasis supplied.

[104] *Ibid*., 162, 221.

[105] It might be the case, that Taylor's articulation of this shift in secularity 3 is expressed in a way that reflects the classical (and Catholic) understanding of the concept of divine grace which is, undoubtedly, influenced by earlier views. One issue arising from the Pelagian controversy (see above) in the early church was whether grace "was something external and passive" and not having "any real place … in the beginning or continuation of the Christian life" as Pelagius proposed, or whether grace was "divine assistance to humanity … the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us" and having "priority … at every stage in the Christian life" as Augustine, the "'doctor of grace'" proposed (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001], 447, 25). These views reflect the alternate high and low anthropology of these thinkers. Pelagius

purpose for human beings because God's grace is no longer a necessary requirement to

achieve this goal. Humans are independently and rationally capable to achieve their good

purpose because "moral/spiritual resources can be experienced as purely immanent" and

the God-world relationship is expressed in an established order where the understanding

of God is essentially in terms of an impersonal, albeit creative, power.[106] With the eclipse

of a transcendent telos and the shrinking of divine providence, the role of the divine is

checked. The reconfigured telos renders the transcendent God redundant—except,

maybe, at the beginning and end of life as initiator or judge.[107]

On the third eclipse, the idea of God and mystery becomes intolerable. All that

matters (for meaning in life) is natural and visible and is understood. This is unsurprising

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argued for grace to be understood as the natural human will working independently to choose right. Augustine writes that human nature "was created at first faultless and without any sin" but now requires "the Physician, because it is not sound" (*On Nature and Grace* [Pickerington, OH: Beloved Publishing, 2014], 3). On the one hand, "Augustine portrays sin as inherent to human nature," prohibiting relationship with God and, thus, God's 'prevenient' and 'operative' grace were God's necessary gifts to deliver and heal (some of) humanity (McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed., 25, 26, 450). On the other hand, Pelagius believed that humanity inherently possessed "the resources of salvation" (*Ibid*., 26). The early church decided in favor of Augustine's views at the Council of Carthage (418) and these views remained dominant through to the medieval church. McGrath posits that the "most important statement of the medieval understanding of the nature and purpose of grace is that of Thomas Aquinas" (*Ibid*., 451). McGrath explains that while Aquinas built on Augustine to some extent, Aquinas distinguished between "actual grace"—as "divine action or influences upon human nature"—and "habitual grace"—as "a permanent alteration to the human soul" that is created as an "intermediary" to bridge the gap between humanity and God and make humanity acceptable to God (*Ibid*). This Thomistic understanding of grace as 'changing' human nature was "regarded by Aquinas [and the Catholic Church] as the basis of human justification" and was a major point of contention with the Reformers who "located the basis of justification in God's gracious favor" which was imputed to (cover) humans. On these views, an 'eclipse of grace,' then, would suggest a relapse from this Thomistic view.

[106] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 244, 222-3. Commenting on Taylor's similar views (in *Sources*), Stanley Hauerwas notes, that "[i]nstrumental rationality becomes the avenue of participation in God's will … The affirmation of ordinary life went hand in hand with the notion that the very purpose of God's creation was for the human good" (*Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995], 173).

[107] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222.

in the light of the first two eclipses because, now, the divine plan is, apparently, well

known, clearly understood, and, as it originates and resides in *this* world, it is rationally

accessible, explicable, and attainable. Within this context God becomes superfluous.[108]

In the light of the foregoing, the idea that there is a personal God who is planning

and acting towards a transformation of human lives to realize goals beyond their finite

condition—a God with a plan for humanity beyond economic human flourishing, as

Taylor describes—is the fourth eclipse and "the Divine-human history of salvation,

lose[s] much of [its] force"[109] causing "the prospect of the after-life to fade, in the climate

created by the first two changes."[110] Taylor articulates how this is actualized in the

cultural ethos in this extended quote:

> Parallel to and overlapping with Deism was a drift towards Unitarianism. …
> Unitarianism … can be seen as an attempt to hold on to the central figure of Jesus,
> while cutting loose from the main soteriological doctrines of historical Christianity.
> What is important about Jesus is not that he inaugurates a new relation with and
> among us, restoring or transforming our relation to God. That is not what salvation
> can mean. What it properly amounts to is our acceding to rational principles of
> conduct in law and ethics, and our becoming able to act on these. Jesus' [*sic*] role in
> this is that of a teacher, by precept and example. His importance is an inspiring
> trailblazer … For this he doesn't need to be divine.[111]

It turns out, as the quote implies, that one of Taylor's most fundamental points is that

exclusive humanism does not obviate the human quest for meaning but that it relocates it

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[108] *Ibid*., 223.

[109] *Ibid*., 718. Salvation in this context must be understood as "the patristic notion of 'theiosis'"—a "'becoming divine,' which was part of human destiny" (*Ibid*., 290, 224).

[110] *Ibid*., 261.

[111] *Ibid*., 291. The notion of Jesus as 'teacher' is briefly and obliquely addressed in Chapter 4 as part of the analysis of the narrative of the rich young man in Matt 19:16-29.

from the transcendent. One might say that "even our theism becomes humanized, immanentized, and the telos of God's providential concern is circumscribed within immanence."[112]

"What remained [of] God after the 'Deist' fourfold eclipse?"[113] Taylor suggests that God is "[s]till something significant" as he "remains the Creator, and hence our benefactor," although 'significant' is "not enough to block exclusive humanism" and so God morphs from "being the guarantor that good will triumph, or at least hold its own, in a world of spirits and meaningful forces" to being "the essential energizer of that ordering power through which we disenchant the world, and turn it to our purposes."[114] Taylor posits an "actual coming-to-be of a range of non-Christian and anti-Christian positions, ranging from various forms of Deism and Unitarianism to exclusive humanism,"[115] but it is still extremely difficult to disintricate, from what he says here, what *exactly* remains of God in secularity 3. He suggests that because "much of the historical practice of Christianity ran afoul of the new ethic of purely immanent human good: all striving for something beyond this," the result was that "this modern humanism [would] define itself as anti-Christian, whether it remained in some weak sense 'Deist' or flipped over into outright atheism," and that since for some, "Christianity must be identified with such

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[112] Smith, *How (Not)*, 49.

[113] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 233.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid.*, 238.

further aspiration, this flip-over appears inevitable."[116] However, Taylor insists, that

because of "the sedimentation of the past in the present," God is "still a reference point"

in contemporary exclusive humanism: "Perhaps an atheist might look forward to [an]

utterly Godless society. Whether it ever could exist or not, it plainly is very different

from our present society."[117] This is because, on his view, the "move to Deism involves

more than just a change of belief" to include "a major shift in our background

understanding of the human epistemic predicament"; a "change in horizon which

profoundly alters what it means to reason about God, or 'religion'."[118] Secularity 3 offers

"the new conditions in which belief and unbelief uneasily coexist."[119] Ultimately, there is

an epistemological continuum: viewing God from "the supreme being" with "agency and

personality," to a God-world relationship "only through the law-governed structure he

has created," and ending with a view of "an indifferent universe, with God either

indifferent or non-existent."[120]

What also emerges naturally from these four eclipses is pronounced shifts in

anthropological/anthropocentric understandings. A look at these follows.

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[116] *Ibid*., 263.

[117] *Ibid*., 268, 269. Taylor questions whether "there could be unbelief without any sense of some religious view which is being negated" because unbelief "needs the perfect tense: a condition of 'having overcome' the irrationality of belief" (*Ibid*., 269). He further notes that "later-arising forms of unbelief, as well as all attempts to redefine and recover belief, define themselves in relation to [a] first path-breaking humanism of freedom, discipline, and order" (*Ibid*.).

[118] *Ibid*., 293.

[119] *Ibid*., 295.

[120] *Ibid*., 270.

Paradigmatic Anthropological Shifts to Exclusive Humanism

By focusing on what are categorized as anthropological shifts, this chapter seeks to isolate those changes between the premodern and modern epochs that relate specifically to concerns about the nature, function, and destiny of humans. Anthropological changes in the modern period were wide-ranging and influential.

With disenchantment, the wrenching of sacred-secular intertwinings, and the shift in the locus of meaning to the individual, Taylor posits a "very different existential condition"[121] as the individual becomes an insulated and isolated buffered self, "giving its own autonomous order to its life"[122] and capable of rejecting God with impunity. This is the 'authentic' secularity 3 individual of modern social imaginaries with "his/her own way of realizing our humanity" of finding "out and [living] one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed … from the outside."[123] Apparently, the change to an understanding of the self as buffered (which protects against potential consequences of disbelief in the gods) and the privatization of the meaning-invested individual (which protects from the social stigma and repercussions) were of such significance that perceptions of the human telos were also considerably altered.[124]

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[121] *Ibid*., 41.

[122] *Ibid*., 38-39. This individual is in contradistinction to the open, porous and vulnerable individual of the medieval era.

[123] *Ibid*., 486.

[124] Smith, *How (Not)*, 31. The reversed order is also plausible.

On Taylor's view, there was a "tension" between "self-transcendence … beyond ordinary human flourishing … and the requirements of ordinary ongoing human life."[125] He reasons that the tension, which was "inhabited" in Christendom "by a kind of division of labor"[126] is, instead, resolved in modernity by eliminating the demands of transcendence altogether and restricting flourishing to this world. Smith describes the telos of human life as untethered from "a transcendent eternity," and pointedly refers to Taylor's conceptualization as a "lowering of the bar"—"the mundanization of the *ne plus ultra.*"[127] Very importantly, Taylor's referencing of "'true' flourishing" in contradistinction to "ordinary flourishing"[128] is telling of an implied understanding of flourishing and its incompatibility with 'eternal goals.'

At the same time, spirituality—as "a *quest* for the individual … faith … and spiritual depth"[129]—as the religion of the Age of Authenticity is accompanied by "a

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[125] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 44.

[126] *Ibid.*, 659. Unsurprisingly, considerations of "division of labor" highlight the close linkages between what is here categorized as sociological and anthropological shifts. These changes relate to the structure and organization of individuals within a society vis-à-vis those that relate to the considerations specific to human nature, function, and destiny, per se. In the allowances evident in Christendom for purely "religious" and purely "secular" vocations (as in secularity 1), Taylor cites an avenue to inhabit the temporal-eternal tension. That avenue is also available in the provisions made via rituals, for example, for maintaining the balance of the tension when "society recognized … a need for ritualized 'anti-structure'" (*Ibid.*, 50). In these ways, society facilitated the maintenance of traditional understandings of anthropocentricity. It is when society (the sociological) fails to support the contemporaneous understanding that the anthropological shifts are effectuated and the sociological is, in turn, reoriented and ultimately changes the very philosophical framework on which it stands. Taylor acknowledges the crucial role of this mutually-influential process between theory and practice in the evolution of modern social imaginaries (*Modern*, 23).

[127] Smith, *How (Not)*, 31.

[128] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 17.

[129] Smith, *How (Not)*, 89; emphasis original.

profound dissatisfaction with a life encased entirely in the immanent order."[130] Taylor

describes this tension in the sense of loss experienced by the voluntary eclipse of

transcendence in secularity 3 as an experience of "cross-pressures": of tension between

the desires of immanence and its inadequacy, and the pull of transcendence and its

(potentially) greater sufficiency.[131] Smith's summary is telling: "[m]aterial abundance

can engender this existential sense of lack precisely because the swelling of immanence

seems unable to make up for a pressure we still feel – from transcendence, from

enchantment."[132] Taylor identifies a similar tension existing between the spiritual and the

mundane as a major catalyst for the Reform movements (noted above), which themselves

catalyzed other shifts within the spiral of effect and countereffect.

    In discussing anthropological shifts resulting from theological shifts in the

understanding of divine providence, Taylor cites what Smith aptly labels as "epistemic

Pelagianism … (the confidence that *we* can figure everything out)" and "civilizational or

cultural Pelagianism: the confidence that *we* make *this* world meaningful," as the

underlying reasons for "immanentization."[133] Furthermore, Smith cites "intellectual

Pelagianism: we can figure this out without assistance" as justification.[134] A high

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[130] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 506. This dissertation infers nuances of this tension in Matt 19 as the dilemma of one seeking to "have eternal life" but who opts to walk away "grieving" due to apparent anthropocentric attachments and commitments. What is particularly interesting in this narrative is that it suggests the powerful influence of the anthropocentric commitments because there was no apparent indication of other shifts—in fact, there were clear indications of their absence (see Chapter 4).

[131] *Ibid*., 302-3. Taylor argues that neither belief nor unbelief is the solution, though belief comes closer. Evidently, "[f]aith is always required for following" (Ward, "History," 344).

[132] Smith, *How (Not)*, 69.

[133] *Ibid*., 55, 60.

[134] *Ibid*., 50, 60. Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222-3. Taylor's thesis of social imaginary bears

anthropology and a telos restricted to the immanent are consistent with Deism,

intolerance to mystery, and reconstructed theories about salvation and eternal life.

Ultimately, Taylor's taxonomy of secularity reflects what could reasonably be

called a triumph of Pelagianism as the "religion of autonomy, which held that human

beings are able to take the initiative in their own salvation"[135] and God is "under an

obligation to reward humanity for its moral achievements."[136] Furthermore, Taylor

identifies a central role in Adam Smith's concept of the 'invisible hand' and the way in

which it works to realize this reward to everyone for the role self-interest presumably

plays in contributing to economic human flourishing more generally.[137]

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indubitable similarities with Pelagius: a self-sufficient universe replaces the previous other-worldly aspirations ushering in "the primacy of the individual" driven and supported by an "ethic … of independence, self-control, self-responsibility, of a disengagement which brings control … the refusal of the easy comforts of conformity to authority" (*A Secular Age*, 559).

[135] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 18. Augustine differs, and "emphasizes that the resources of salvation are located in God, outside of humanity. It is God who initiates the process of salvation, not men or women" (*Ibid*., 19).

[136] *Ibid*., 18.

[137] Taylor advances an important link between divine providence and the economic arising from the modern moral order. In the story of secularity 3, Taylor frequently cites the term 'invisible hand'—such as "the happy design … in the existence of what one might call 'invisible hand' factors"—along with the new Grotian-Lockean emphasis on "mutual" benevolence to work to the mutual good of society irrespective of the original intent (*A Secular Age*, 177). He describes these "invisible hand" factors as "actions and attitudes which we are 'programmed' for, which have systematically beneficent results for the general happiness, even though these are not part of what is intended" and makes an explicit link to Adam Smith (*Ibid*). By this comment, Taylor cites what is, arguably, Adam Smith's most famous use of the term "invisible hand." In regard to a merchant seeking the greatest return on his capital, Adam Smith notes that the merchant "intends only his own security … and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by *an invisible hand* … By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effactually than when he really intends to promote it" (Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1976], 456; emphasis supplied). The phrase also appears in his other publications: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1975), 185; and "The History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1980), 48-50. Ultimately, Taylor shows intent to interpret Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' as turning on divine providence. Implicit in his story is a perception of the 'invisible hand' as central to the theological shift of reformulated divine providence. Having cited Smith's formulation, he emphasizes its distinctive role in the modern moral order vis-à-vis pre-modern notions and introduces the idea that this "new understanding of Providence is already evident

The foregoing discussion in this chapter has briefly surveyed some critical

elements of Taylor's taxonomy of secularity and, in particular, of the distinctive

conception of contemporary secularity 3 arising from a number of major shifts. "What

underlay these shifts?"[138] Apparently, the answer lies in what Taylor emphasizes as

"economic-centric *harmony*" as society's focus and ideal, "in which the economic

dimension takes on greater and greater importance, and 'economic' … activity is more

and more the model for human behavior."[139] One becomes acutely aware of the central

role and the spiraling effect of economics in Taylor's theses—not only does it appear as

the primary impetus to and from changing perspectives of divine providence leading to

exclusive humanism, but it is also the replacement telos of humanity in economic human

flourishing. Indeed, a central tenet implicit in Charles Taylor's articulation of modern

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in Locke's formulation of Natural Law Theory" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 177). Conceivably, Taylor may have meant something subtle, citing the invisible hand as a sort of secular metaphorical replacement for the more traditional religious view of divine providence, barring any concern for Smith's intent. However, there are implications that Taylor may have intended to articulate something else as he cites Adam "Smith's *Wealth of Nations*" as having "provided us with the most famous of … mechanisms, whereby our search of our own individual prosperity redounds to the general welfare" (*Modern*, 70). He further notes that "private vices conduce to public benefit … finally given canonical form in the invisible hand doctrine of Adam Smith, [which] was henceforth almost universally admitted" (*A Secular Age*, 229). In effect, this exposes the profundity of Taylor's point: the economy is not just an element of social imaginary; the economy effectuates a different social imaginary which the Grotian-Lockean theory of moral order "helped to constitute … [by] penetration or transformation" (*Ibid.*, 176). Allusions to changing social imaginaries are viewed as potentially mitigating to any previous aberrant result of imagination and are extrapolatable in theological method. In other words, Taylor seems to project the centrality of Smith's invisible hand, by way of the relevance of economics to Taylor's model, describing secular social construction in contemporary secularity 3. For considerations relating to theological method and social imaginary, these issues are obviously of critical importance. While this dissertation does not investigate Taylor's Adam Smith trope, it is important to acknowledge this frequent and direct link to this technical economic link to notions of human flourishing in secularity 3, and the potential for further research.

[138] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 224.

[139] *Ibid.*, 229.

social imaginaries is the conception of the human as primarily an economic being.[140] In view of this, and in view of potential utility noted for social imaginaries in general in Chapter 2, is there potential benefit from Taylor's secular taxonomy founded on economic human flourishing for theological method seeking to enhance secular engagement? If so, what might these benefits be? Toward responding to these crucial questions, some implications and evaluations of Taylor's taxonomy and its articulation are explicated next.

Conceptual and Practical Redeployments

The issues raised above in respect of the paradigmatic shifts and the effect on social imaginary go far beyond theoretical concerns. They concern, as well, the relationships among various elements within the imaginary and how the result of these shifts become "the practice of the great majority of the people."[141] On this, Smith summarizes that:

> The anthropocentric shifts … find mirror images in shifts in religion itself … "change in the understanding of God." … What becomes increasingly distasteful … is the notion of God's *agency*, and hence the personhood of God … an active God would violate the buffer zone we have created to protect ourselves from such incursions. And so the "god" that governs the cosmos is the architect of an *im*personal order.[142]

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[140] This points to very important considerations about how one understands what it means to be human. This is very important because of its relationships with other Christian doctrines. "Our anthropology will determine how we understand ourselves and, consequently, how we do theology" and, presumably, how theological overtures affect us (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998], 481). See also Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

[141] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 70.

[142] Smith, *How (Not)*, 57.

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Fundamentally, Smith highlights what has become evident from the shifts and eclipses: changes appear to center around a pivotal shift in the understanding of God, bringing about a change in it and, in turn, being changed by it. There is a decided rejection of a hierarchical god and with it, the god-related-definitions of human nature and telos, as well as the nature of reality.

Within the broad context of the benefits noted for social imaginaries in general, there are potentially significant consequences from the foregoing analysis on considerations for utilizing Charles Taylor's specific conception in theological method. In this regard, a brief summary of some conceptual commendations and criticisms of the secular story that Taylor articulates follows.

Charles Taylor's 'Social Imaginary' in Retrospect

This section explores some conceptual implications of Taylor's taxonomy for theological method before considering potential practical applications.

Theology and Modern Social Imaginaries: Commendations

Perhaps one of the most obvious advantages of Taylor's taxonomy is its intuitive appeal. The explosion of material activities evident in the contemporary consumption-dominated society, bourgeoning scholarly work researching the relationship between economics and theology, and theoretical and anecdotal challenges of churching the rich, provide strong indications that Taylor has, indeed, captured some vital aspects of the essence of contemporary society in the concept of social imaginaries ultimately founded upon economic human flourishing. Therefore, it seems that this essential economic

element within society ought to be kept in focus in efforts toward efficacious secular engagement.[143]

In Taylor's work, social imaginary materializes as methodology by its apparently superior understanding and articulation of the development of the modern character and ethos. A number of theorists attest to this feature. Claudia Strauss asserts that Taylor's "applications of the imaginary" is:

> potentially valuable if we use person-centered methods to study real rather than abstract cultural subjects, if we insist on a deeper understanding of the psychological processes involved, and if we respect complexity at both the psychological and social levels.[144]

Here, Strauss cites preference for Taylor's, Anderson's, and Lacan's use of imaginary over Castoriadis's (see Chapter 2).

As noted in Chapter 1, Veninga strongly recommends social imaginary as methodology for this secular age.[145] Acknowledging the usefulness of Taylor's conceptualization of social imaginary for "examining contemporary social identities and practices," Veninga reiterates Taylor's own response to critiques, that despite "possible complications … exploring the social imaginary is a helpful way to grasp the history and

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[143] The plausibility of the 'economic effect' on religion/theology is intuitively evident. The economics-secular link is such that concerns about secular engagement call for engagement with economics in a broad sense. On this, Devin Paul Singh notes that "we must consider money and its economic and symbolic functions in order to have a more robust analysis of secularization processes and of the sphere/ideology we call the secular" ("Secularity and the Money Economy" [paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, GA, November 23, 2015], 2-3). Singh notes that such consideration "calls for greater self-reflexivity about the nature and limits of our conceptual schemas" (*Ibid.*, 3). See, also, for example, Jordan J. Ballor, "Theology and Economics: A Match Made in Heaven?," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 26, no. 1 (2014): 115-34.

[144] Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," 322.

[145] Veninga, "Theology for a Secular Age," 140, 374. See also, Veninga, *Secularism,* 31.

meaning of modernity, our secular age."[146] Indeed, Haney, despite his questioning the

usefulness of the concept, asserts "its heuristic power" and concedes that "[a]lthough the

'social imaginary' conceptualization would also work as a worldview or plausibility

structure, Taylor's unique conceptual metaphor succeeds in his larger work of explaining

our secular age."[147] Eftichiya Stavrianopoulou notes the distinctiveness of Charles

Taylor's proposals about changing conceptions of society vis-à-vis conceptions of

Castoriadis and Anderson, and highlights Taylor's emphasis on the use of the social

imaginary model as a methodological "key concept in the hermeneutics of history and

culture."[148] Evidently, Taylor's conception of social imaginary possesses great potential

as a hermeneutical approach for, and to, contemporary society.

Taylor's articulation records advantages, as well, within the context of the

modern-postmodern debate. With its "nova" explosion of different options, secularity 3—

as purported by Taylor's frontier of economically-defined social imaginaries—is

undisputedly pluralistic but, arguably, constrains a more precise awareness and

engagement of "what we confront in the postmodern era."[149]

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[146] Veninga, "Theology for a Secular Age," 147.

[147] Haney, "Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries," 7, 13.

[148] Stavrianopoulou, "Introduction," 3. Like others, Stavrianopoulou criticizes what some see as Castoriadis's tendency to homogenize, which derives to some extent from his emphasis on society rather than individuals. Cf. Strauss "The Imaginary," 324-326.

[149] Vic Froese, "Charles Taylor's A Secular Age," *Direction* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 99.

Notwithstanding, caution must be exercised in any adaptation or adoption of Taylor's model for application as part of theological method in the light of potentially mitigating factors, some of which are cited in the next section.

Theology and Modern Social Imaginaries: Criticisms

Four major criticisms are highlighted in this section.

First, Taylor's social imaginary conceptualization has been criticized as perpetuating 'meta' within the 'anti-meta' context of the 'post' and pluralism of contemporary society, or as promoting what may be called idealistic coherence.[150]

Second, Haney's "convivial critique" poses some rhetorical questions that are particularly useful for this study: "Do [religionists] practice faith self-consciously aware of this immanent frame? Or, do secularists and religionists simply see the world very differently and does this difference affect one's social imaginary?"[151]

Third, not unrelated to the above is another pivotal issue in Taylor's secularity 3 thesis. He cites an implied problematic in the coexistence and contest between belief and unbelief. One might ask the fundamental question: what might be the relevance of this

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[150] See, for example, Bernard Yack, review of *Modern Social Imaginaries,* by Charles Taylor, *Ethics* 115, no. 3 (April 2005): 629-33. The contemporary context has been variously described as post-Christendom (for example, Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007]); post-secular (for example, James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004)]); post-modern, (for example, Griffin, *God and Religion*); post-liberal (For example, George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox, 1984]); post-structural (for example, Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994]); and post-foundational (for example, Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996]), among others. All these *imply* intolerance to meta-narratives (see, also, Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

[151] Haney, "Charles Taylor's Modern Social Imaginaries," 13, 12.

coexistence? What peculiar features attend this not-so-novel coexistence in modern social imaginaries and what are the potential implications for secular engagement? How might theological method leverage lessons from social imaginaries to advantage in secularity 3?

Fourth, this leads to considerations of what are perhaps the strongest criticisms of Taylor's taxonomy: those directed at the immanent-transcendent binary. Taylor posits an immanent-transcendent binary in the secular imaginary, defining "'religion' in terms of transcendence" and referencing "transcendent religion, on one hand, and its frontal denial, [immanence] on the other."[152] Interestingly, Taylor argues strongly against "false dichotomies in every age," but he also concedes that "in one way or another the [immanent-transcendent] distinction is troubling and unclear."[153] Notwithstanding his 'regret' Taylor insists that:

> the distinction is indispensable, because without it we couldn't understand our dominant social imaginary, and hence the world it helps constitute. And this would make it difficult to understand some of the ways in which the issues of belief and unbelief are inevitably posed for us, whether there is something "beyond" this order or not, whether it exhausts reality or not.[154]

One might see Taylor's use of the immanent-transcendent distinction as perpetuating a false dichotomy between immanence and transcendence as polar extremes. Nevertheless, the distinction remains fundamental to Taylor's model, clarifying that the world it helps constitute is one in which there is an eclipse of a 'superfluous' God from a "self-sufficient" immanent order. Although Taylor references transcendence in relation to

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[152] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20.

[153] Taylor, "Challenging," 411.

[154] *Ibid.*, 412.

"higher time" which is different from "the world as lived" by its inclusion of "spirits" and "forces,"[155] he does not, in this context, provide a definition of either immanent or transcendent, per se.

In one sense, Taylor's description of society as "immanentized" may be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to demonstrate the amplification of the significance of immanence in contemporary society. Smith infers that the "immanent sphere—the this-worldly plane—swells in importance just to the extent that the eternal and the transcendent are eclipsed."[156] Whatever Taylor might mean by immanence and transcendence in a maximal sense, he notes that the rejection of transcendence was contingent on "the need to make God more fully present in everyday life and all its contexts" and that this "led people to invest these contexts with a new significance and solidity."[157] If indeed, this reflects the secular 3 distinction between immanence and transcendence, even in a minimal sense, then at least two issues are critical here which have a common root. The first issue is that secularity 3 might be understood as endorsing the long-established, deeply-entrenched, and pervasive understanding of God as utterly transcendent and, therefore, some would claim, out of touch with everyday human experiences.

The second issue is the concatenation of theological and non-theological applications of this conception which have found their way into Taylor's conception of

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[155] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 145.

[156] Smith, *How (Not)*, 55.

[157] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 145. Further, Taylor notes the inevitable reconfiguration in meaning of theological concepts—in particular, divine providence—which is necessary to reflect God as primarily passive except in facilitating human desire.

secularity 3. For Christian theology, the efficacy of theological method hinges on the

definition of divine ontology and its implications for theology, more generally.

Undoubtedly, divine ontology is a heavily debated concept. "'What it means to talk about

God is far from indisputable,' even in theistic religions."[158] In this vein, Taylor's

articulation of theological shifts serves as a reminder that:

> the modern moral order reshaped the understanding of Providence … to an
> "economistic" view … the narrowing of the purposes of Divine Providence. God's
> goals for us shrink to the single end of our encompassing this order of mutual benefit
> he has designed for us.[159] … God's providence has also been emptied. His Providence
> consists simply in his plan for us, which we understand. "Particular providences",
> unforeseeable interventions in specific cases, have no more place in the scheme; no
> more than miracles.[160]

From this comparison, and from the discussion of theological shifts above, it seems clear

that, central to these reformulations are considerations of the nature of God and the God-

world relationship, particularly with respect to human telos. In Taylor's words, "each

[direction of change in the shift] was reducing the role and place of the transcendent."[161]

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[158] Daley, "God, Power, and Gospel," 271.

[159] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 221.

[160] *Ibid*., 223-4.

[161] *Ibid*., 222. These "four directions" were briefly outlined above. Understandably, metaphysical
and ontological views of God and reality prejudice conceptions of the God-world relationship. See, for
example, Dennis W. Jowers, ed., *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011);
Griffin, Cobb, and Pinnock, *Searching*. See also, for example, Louise Hickman, ed., *Chance or
Providence: Religious Perspectives on Divine Action*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge
Scholars Publishing, 2014); Maurice Wiles, *God's Action in the World* (Norwich, United Kingdom: Hymns
Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2012).

Summary

Taylor's articulation of divine providence in secularity 3 might be taken to imply presuppositions that increasingly legitimize secular humanist conceptions of the nature of God and human telos.[162] With the foregoing in view, can secular social imaginaries as hermeneutic itself be efficaciously utilized as transformative social imaginaries that can help to reframe its inherent and prevalent understandings? In other words, is it feasible to consider modern social imaginaries of secularity 3 instrumentally for shifting "the whole context of understanding" toward the gospel? This study is propelled by the belief that it can, via the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). In general, the acknowledged critiques of the ways in which Taylor's taxonomy of secular might be understood do not devalue its significant inherent utility: it is, apparently, a plausible framing of contemporary society taking into account all the historical, sociological, and theological constructions reflected as constitutive within the social imaginaries. The options, strategies, mechanisms, and modalities of theological method may utilize both the ethos and the concept of social imaginary to address the critical question as to how to engage secularists concerning the trustworthiness, reliability, and consistency of the gospel "in [this] culture where a variety of rationalities coexist."[163]

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[162] By Taylor's own claims, secularity 3 emerges as a reconstruction of divine providence: exclusive humanism is defined by the absence of goals beyond human flourishing and the latter emerges from the reformulation of divine providence.

[163] Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., "Introduction," *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 11. As evident from the discussion above, in Charles Taylor's model, the secularity which dominates contemporary society is characterized by the cohabitation of belief and unbelief, albeit uneasily.

To give further consideration to the practical implications and application of modern social imaginaries for theological method, a recapitulation, and indicative analysis, of some major themes is prudent.

Charles Taylor's 'Social Imaginary' in Prospect

It is encouraging that, in line with methodological potentialities for social imaginaries in general noted in Chapter 2, Taylor's articulation of social imaginary appears as a potentially efficacious conduit for communicating transformative ideas. Moreover, Taylor's flagging of human flourishing as important has rendered it a potential, and particularly viable, instrument. Toward enhancing theological engagement with contemporary society, and acknowledging the critical locus of human telos in secularity 3, the remainder of this chapter shifts to consider the potentialities of modern social imaginaries in theological method. The next section advances the discussion by considering some factors influencing whether, and how, Taylor's conceptualization of secularity might usefully be utilized in the light of the theological agenda and rules of engagement.

Modern Social Imaginaries and Christian Theology: Methodological Issues

This section briefly addresses some methodological concerns for redeploying social imaginary in theological method for contemporary society, given the need to take patterns of human *telos*—specifically economic human flourishing—and the divine nature into account.

First, despite Taylor's admission of the "weakness"[164] in the use of the immanent-transcendent polarity in his articulation of secularity 3, neither Taylor nor his critics appear to acknowledge a fundamental linkage to the issue as relating to an understanding of God. Certainly, such an understanding illuminates the cross-pressures to which he refers, which he explicates broadly as a longing for "transcendence." There appears to be an undeniable tension in Taylor's articulation between an enclosed universe and a deist god who is expected to intervene to realize guaranteed flourishing. What are the necessary underlying presuppositions of even a deist god that would be compatible with these activities and also with the immanent-transcendent dichotomy?

Second, in the light of the foregoing discussion, the notion of divine providence in a secular 3 age also raises a number of questions. If indeed, divine providence is perceived to exist in secularity 3 as Taylor articulates, what *exactly* are the underlying presuppositions of divine providence that Taylor articulates as the secularity 3 view? Under what condition(s) can one expect divine action by an utterly transcendent deist god (or a non-existent god), in concert to favor human telos defined *completely* within the "immanent"? In what way is divine providential action possible within such a context?[165] What are the implications of these questions for theological engagement with the secular?

Third, in the light of the foregoing, how might the identified utility of social imaginaries be optimized in theological method in secularity 3 where economic human

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[164] Taylor, "Challenging," 411.

[165] Although what Taylor (and secularists) mean by "God" is not all clear from the discussion above, it might be prudent to consider the secular conception of "God" on a continuum from Deism to atheist materialism (*A Secular Age*, 279).

flourishing is definitive? Presumably, secular society would favor a formulation that is consistent with its "need to make God more fully present in everyday life and all its contexts"[166] and that ultimately supports it ethos of economic human flourishing. However, based on the foregoing, the current formulations appear to pose several problems within an autonomized, natural, and immanent order. Both the utterly transcendent deist god and the non-existent god (if this is possible) of secularity 3 are internally incoherent with the secularity 3 precondition to immanent human flourishing, and do not appear to fit the image that secularists have in mind when they express the need for a "God more fully present." Furthermore, even if the secularity 3 god's providential activity (if this is possible) somehow extends to economic benefits, on what basis is it reasonable to presume a limitation to enabling economic blessings *only*, as Taylor interprets and describes from exclusive humanism? Should secularists question that postulate as a foundational plank?

Fourth, relying on the hypotheses of Taylor as indicative of the broader argument of contemporary society, it is apparent that, fundamentally, a deistic underpinning— whether euphemistic or not—also exposes external incoherence with traditional theism's emphasis on God's action in the world. Hence, any idea of a merger of the models appears to be a moot point. Aside from that, traditional theism—which "generally refers to the classical conception of God as necessary and self-sufficient, perfect, simple, timeless, immutable, impassible, omniscient and omnipotent"[167]—seems to fall short of

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[166] *Ibid*., 145.

[167] Peckham, *Love of God*, 17. Cf. Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids, MI:

the image that secularists have in mind when they express the need for a "God more fully present in everyday life and all its contexts."[168] The consequence of this *aporia* in the rejection of this God by secularity 3 appears reasonable. Evidently, neither the secularity 3 immanent-transcendent deist (or atheist) model articulated by Charles Taylor, nor the classical (Thomistic) model which secularity 3 apparently rejected, is entirely unproblematic for secularists 3. Accepting either of them mandates a commitment to certain consequences that secularists—and some Christians—may find less than desirable. However, on which side (or both) does the shortcoming lie?

A Way Forward

It seems that if Christian theology is to reflect sensitivity to the concerns of secular society, then what is needed is an account that is not only consistent and coherent with basic assumptions constitutive in secularity 3, but also plausible for contemporary Christian theology within its rules of engagement.[169]

From the perspective of Christian theology and theological method, there is valuable potential for creativity and thinking outside the box to be "ready to let the cross and the resurrection of Jesus *stimulate our imaginations* as to how Christians can engage the world redemptively."[170] From this perspective, what is needed is a judicious articulation of human flourishing and the God-world relationship in a way that might

Zondervan, 1983).

[168] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 145.

[169] Without avoiding any natural tensions and resisting casuistic or Procrustean reconstructions.

[170] Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 201; emphasis supplied.

begin to turn the tide of the social imaginary. Without attempting a direct response to each of the individual concerns noted above, this dissertation moves to ask: could there be any practical value from a close reading of Scripture to enter into dialogue with the secular understanding? What would secular society look like if some current constructions are denied as basic assumptions? What advantage might there be of an alternative account of human flourishing that is found in Scripture within the context of a meaningful and determinate history that is also integral to considerations of human flourishing? Of course, a scriptural account is likely to reflect both significant similarities and dissimilarities to a social-scientific account of human flourishing, and is likely to have paradigmatic consequences both for definitions of society and theological method. While this may appear to be of less interest to secularists, it is essential to Christian theology.

It is probably not insignificant that Scripture records that God has a plan for humanity in history, a purpose with an endpoint and a telos (Jer 29:11), or that God's choice of close habitation with humanity (for example, Exod 25:8; John 1:14) responds to the secularists's need for a God who is fully present in everyday contexts. Taylor suggests that the secular mindset is not unreasonable. He says that "however well backed up with reasons, the imagination can easily be nudged towards other ways of accounting for the awkward facts."[171] Furthermore, Taylor concedes that "conversion"[172] is possible across social imaginaries when a new understanding becomes accessible to the

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[171] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 328.

[172] Taylor discussed "conversions" in the final chapter of *A Secular Age*.

participants and eventually becomes "the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention."[173] The question is, how can this be done? What is the most efficacious approach to stimulate imaginations, engage the secular, and transform the social imaginary? How might these ideas be incarnated with theological intentionality? These are questions regarding eternal consequences, for they frame the Christian's clarion call. An attempt toward responding to these questions, is the focus of the remainder of this dissertation.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has analytically described some essential themes of Taylor's taxonomy and his articulation of secular society, and sought to systematically identify and evaluate the usefulness of these themes to inform thinking and strategy for juxtaposition with the broader concern of secular engagement.

In the first place, the chapter explored Taylor's secularity 3 taxonomy and its constituent context of social imaginary: how this frames the essence of contemporary secular society, exclusive humanism. From the patterns emerging, the chapter identified *loci* of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology, PAST, with a central role ascribed to economics in the form of human flourishing. As a second objective, although logically prior, the chapter has highlighted the centrality of a proper understanding of the character of contemporary society for theological engagement. It seems that what is really of utmost import to theology is less the nomenclature used to describe contemporary society (whether modern or postmodern) and more the apprehension of its

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[173] Taylor, *Modern*, 29.

true and underlying essence to which the theological message and method must be directed and, possibly, calibrated—particularly in this humanistic, pluralistic, and self-sufficient society.

The chapter has highlighted the need for a well-defined and appropriately crafted model for communicating with secular society that is sensitive to society's hermeneutics and philosophical underpinnings. Such a model would, from the Christian approach of this dissertation, adopt the commonly accepted standard of biblical warrant and aim to apply it to the questions at hand. A potentially viable option is to commence the process by seeking to respond to, and through, the questions that are most important to members of contemporary society.[174] However, the requirement for faithfulness to biblical principles mandate that the Church remains cautious in any consideration of secular engagement, particularly in any attempts at redeploying borrowed concepts from secular culture. It might be useful for any such theological method to account for current philosophical-theological intertwinements via a judicious understanding of God, and of humanity, and the concomitant effects of these understandings with secularity's central theme of human flourishing.

Importantly, this chapter has shown that conceptions of human telos—human flourishing—provide a basis to discuss the relationship between God and society and to draw important conclusions for theological engagement with contemporary society. These issues are pivotal to bridging the gap between church and society and suggest social imaginary as both the locus of secular understanding, and as part of a framework

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[174] This avenue situates in a strategy *akin* to Paul Tillich's method of correlation with biblical controls.

with which to respond to the challenge of secular engagement. In particular, by focusing on the theological implications of the role Taylor accords to human flourishing within secularity 3,[175] the chapter ultimately proposes the need to "tell a quite different story,"[176] to tell "a counternarrative"[177] of human flourishing from the Scriptures, toward crafting a multidimensional model for secular engagement.

It seems prudent that such a model should be conceptually, linguistically, and phenomenologically palatable to the secular. As noted above, Taylor's articulation of social imaginary has been commended for its heuristic appeal. There are thematic elements from Taylor's articulation evident in the historical relationship between economics and theology in humanity's quest for meaning and also in some nuances from Scripture. Broad biblical allusions of a relationship between economics and theology were teased out from the Gospel of Matthew in Chapter 1. Accordingly, one avenue would be to recognize the dynamism already present in Scripture that appears to address the issues that are of import to secularists. The allusions and analogies are explored, developed, and analyzed in Chapter 4. Specifically, an analysis of human flourishing in Scripture and the symbiotic relationship with social imaginary frames the next chapter as part of this dissertation's response toward addressing the need for a multidimensional model that is sensitive to secular philosophy.

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[175] Explorations of human flourishing are limited to Taylor's postulates in his secular taxonomy and do not extend to a comprehensive coverage of flourishing or types of flourishing. Taylor is not unique in all his postulates of this complex era or of human flourishing, but focus here is restricted to his articulation. On this, human telos, and specifically, human flourishing, has emerged as a non-negotiable in considerations juxtaposing secular constitutive elements and theological method.

[176] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 560.

[177] Smith, *How (Not)*, 24.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL IMAGINARY

IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Introduction and Background

In the phenomenological overview of Charles Taylor's secular taxonomy in
Chapter 3, the concept of human flourishing emerged as a central tenet of secularity 3,
conceived as pre-conditioned by a shift in the understanding of divine ontology. That
analysis suggests a number of concerns regarding the proposal for effective theological
application of modern social imaginaries for secular engagement. These concerns are
premised on the belief that less contention naturally arises once the properties of God and
divine providence, and human nature and telos (inter alia), are denied the apparent
inconsistencies and incoherencies.[1]

This chapter presents a biblical and theological reading of some fundamental
secular concepts discussed in Chapters 2 and 3—imagination, social imaginary, and

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[1] Three of the major inconsistences noted in Chapter 3 may be recalled. First, foundational
formulations of divine providence and human flourishing are incoherent with other claims about God and
an "immanent frame." Second, human flourishing restricted to a veneer of economic fundamentals is very
limited as a foundational ideal, particularly when posited as a divine design. Third, tension between a quest
for meaning or human flourishing and salvation should not be presumed. As indicated, it is not every
element of contemporary social imaginaries that should be denied. In particular, the idea that human
flourishing is central to human telos should be retained, but this is perhaps best within a modified context
where it is not limited to the economic understanding that Charles Taylor identifies and articulates.

human flourishing—by analyzing the Sermon on the Mount and narrative of the rich young man.[2] These analyses inform the selection of social imaginary as complementary theological methodology toward secular engagement. Undoubtedly, theological (mis)constructions, within and without the church, have increased current challenges to secular engagement and, from the ecclesiastical perspective, realignment with Scripture is necessary. It is also necessary to maintain a sensitive, yet constructively critical, distance to the cultural imaginary. By its engagement with social imaginary and with human flourishing from the Scriptures, the rest of this chapter is the first part of the move toward that delicate balance to identify theological practices that are purposefully sensitive to the cultural situation *and* faithful to Scripture.[3]

A Brief Comment on the Approach to Matthew's Gospel for Rereading the Secular

Chapter 2, as 3, suggests a situation where it is plausible to believe that despite different definitions and sources, "human flourishing has been and is the driving force behind every philosophy and religion known to humanity."[4] Human flourishing, variously defined, emerges as human telos across time and shifting social imaginaries. On

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[2] The aptness of the Gospel of Matthew for this biblical approach was outlined in Chapter 1.

[3] "Being in and speaking to any age is no simple matter for our Church." So says Charles Taylor, who cites a need "to hold in balanced tension two stances towards our world" which he notes as: "reaching out to our world in solidarity and communication" and "maintaining the full integrity of the deposit of the faith" (Charles Taylor, foreword to *At the Limits of the Secular: Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William A. Barbieri [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014], viii).

[4] Jonathan T. Pennington, "A Biblical Theology of Human Flourishing," Institute for Faith, Work and Economics (2015): 2, URL: http://tifwe.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Pennington-A-Biblical-Theology-of-Human-Flourishing.pdf (accessed February 2, 2018).

a contemporary understanding, human flourishing is the anthropocentrically contrived telos that is restricted to economics. In contrast, Johnathan T. Pennington argues that "human flourishing is a biblical idea" that is "woven through the entire canon," but that "temporal happiness and flourishing" have "become almost completely lost in our grammar and understanding."[5] Pennington asserts that the Bible provides the "answer to the foundational human question of how to flourish and thrive."[6] If Pennington's observation is plausible, then it supports the objective of this chapter to approach Scripture with the aim of detecting resonances of human flourishing that may provide an option for a fresh reading of secular fundamentals so as to adjust the vision of God and divine providence, and therefore of human telos, in secular social imaginaries.

Arguably, social imaginary is Taylor's implied strategy by which the church may address the perceived disconnect with contemporary society. As a response to the acknowledged utility of social imaginaries (Chapters 2 & 3), this chapter moves through four parts: first, a phenomenological exegesis of Matthean social imaginaries by focusing on the canonical impact of the meaning of texts in the interpretive process;[7] second, a

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[5] Pennington, "Biblical," 4-5. Cf. Charles Taylor's claim that "the rituals of the pre-Axial religion were concerned with securing human flourishing" (*A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007], 439). Pennington references Ellen Charry's *God and the Art of Happiness* in which she traces "the history of the loss of the idea of happiness and flourishing in the Church's practice and doctrine," noting that the church has deferred happiness and flourishing "to the eschaton" ("Biblical," 4). Cf. Alexis de Tocqueville's claim that the focus in the Middles Ages was "'only on *the other* life'" whereas "American preachers 'refer to *this* world constantly'" in their efforts to "'touch their listeners all the more effectively'" (*Democracy in America* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press], 616, quoted in Volf, *Flourishing*, 239; emphasis supplied).

[6] Pennington, "Biblical," 5.

[7] The use of "phenomenological" is not to ground reality in human perception (or imagination). Rather, it is, as John C. Peckham says, to use "exegetically derived canonical data" to uncover meaning and "to continually criticize" one's mindset based on "engagement with the phenomena of the canonical text" (*Love of God*, 57, 57n.39).

selected survey of the Sermon on the Mount to explore positive theological imagination; third, complementary analyses of the narrative of the rich young man (Matt 19:16-29); fourth, extracting potential lessons from the analyses. Some concluding remarks close the chapter.

Social Imaginaries and the Gospel of Matthew

As Taylor employs it, social imaginary is the way ordinary people imagine their surroundings. Two broad strands may be used to organize the nature of social imaginaries in the Gospel of Matthew. Regarding the first strand, Robert Kinney notes that "[b]ehind each of these [NT texts] is the historical religious tradition of ancient Israel"[8] and "[t]he question of the Matthean community's relationship to Judaism dominates."[9] On Kinney's views, this chapter progresses on the inference that three dominant pillars of Jewish social imaginaries: Law, good works, and temple services—read tabernacle (Chapter 2)—are also applicable to the Matthean context of the Sermon and the rich young man.[10]

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[8] Kinney, *Hellenistic*, 40. Kinney also draws an interesting and powerful linkage between the Sermon and what may be understood as the Hebraic imaginary discussed with relation to the tabernacle in Chapter 2. He says that "beyond linguistic transitions between narrative and discourse, one of the more obvious Old Testament corollaries to the Sermon on the Mount … is the Sinai discourse of Exod 20:1-31:18" (*Ibid.*, 165). Without reductionist conflation of these profound and substantive issues, and while this connection is not conclusive of any deeper connection between the Sermon and the tabernacle, it is worth noting that the point serves essentially as critical mass for consideration as a potential part of a greater overall argument towards their applicability in multidimensionality in theological method.

[9] *Ibid.*, 41.

[10] The issue of 'good works' was not specifically highlighted in the discussion of Hebraic social imaginaries in Chapter 2 but features strongly the narrative of the rich young man discussed later in this chapter. Given Matthew's Jewish influence and imaginary, it is unsurprising that, in many ways, "good" is characteristically Matthean. Matthew records references to good fruit (καρπὸν καλὸν 3:10), good news of the kingdom (εὐαγγέλιον 4:23), (lack of) good quality salt (τὸ ʽάλας … οὐδεν ἰσχύει 5:13), good works (καλὰ ἔργα 5:16), good people (ἀγαθοὺς 5:45), good gifts (δόματα ἀγαθὰ 7:11), a good tree (δένδρον ἀγαθὸν 7:17, 18), good treasure (ἀγαθοῦ θησαυροῦ 12:35), good soil (τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν 13:8), good seed (καλὸν σπέρμα 13:24), and good thing (ἀγαθὸν 19:16).

Anders Runesson notes that "for Matthew, the basic distinction between groups of people is religio-ethnic in nature" and that although the Jewish people comprise several groups they are not "judged according to different criteria."[11]

Regarding the second strand, Kinney argues in contrast to 'conventional' "Matthean scholarship" which, he says, "has ignored the Greco-Roman background of the Gospel,"[12] with the result that "[a]lmost no attention is given to the *Hellenistic* part of *Hellenistic Judaism*."[13] Thus, he argues "for the plausibility of a broadly Greco-Roman backdrop for the Gospel of Matthew."[14] By focusing on some "basic features of the Gospel," Kinney infers that the Matthean text "is absolutely saturated with Hellenism" and that it is "possible" and "entirely probable that a Hellenistic background is a useful backdrop for studying the Gospel of Matthew and will enrich the deep study of this text, its ideas, and the world of its first audience."[15] On Kinney's latter complementary views here, this chapter progresses on the inference that the quest for identity, security, 'savior,' and the inextricable links to 'economics' (Chapter 2) and to Jewish Messianism, would also be applicable to the context of the Sermon and the rich young man.

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[11] Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016), 207, 208.

[12] Kinney, *Hellenistic*, 4.

[13] *Ibid*., 41; italics original. He notes that "recent trends in Matthean scholarship focus on the relationship of Matthew's Gospel to contemporary Judaism, but they do so to the exclusion of Matthew's place in a broader Hellenism" (*Ibid*., 2).

[14] *Ibid*., 156. Kinney cites Martin Hengel's work as "one of the earliest" to argue that "both the geography and the chronology of Judaism in Palestine during the few hundred years prior to the composition of the Gospels cannot be separated from the influence of Hellenistic culture" (*Ibid*., 26).

[15] *Ibid*., 2, 4. He notes that "the most basic aspects of the Gospel of Matthew point to the plausibility of a Greco-Roman background for the Gospel text" (*Ibid*., 75-6). The question of the Matthean audience is briefly discussed later in this chapter.

Taking a cue from Kinney, then, this dissertation moves to consider Matthean social imaginaries in two directions. The first direction is to follow Jewish social imaginaries in this chapter—exploring goods works and the Law in the Sermon and the narrative of the rich young man. The second direction, as an extension of the first in many ways, is to follow Greco-Roman social imaginaries in Chapter 5—to juxtapose it against central and dominant features of modern social imaginaries by way of a phenomenological exploration of broad analogicity toward application of social imaginary in theological method. Premised on this intent to instrumentalize social imaginary this chapter moves, in the next section, to consider theological imagination in the Gospel of Matthew via the Sermon on the Mount.

Theological Imagination and The Sermon on the Mount

Chapter 2 referenced antagonisms between theology and imagination, possibly arising as a result of responses by the former to what is deemed as the pernicious modern character of the latter. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, appeals to imagination to apprehend the teachings of Scripture are intuitive. Consider that:

> such widely divergent human activities as religious belief and practice, the scientific investigation of nature, and artistic endeavors of various kinds all employ imagination in comparable ways. Imagination turns out to be not the opposite of reality but rather the means by which manifold forms of both reality and illusion are mediated to us. Religions characteristically employ this power of imagination in order to make accessible the ultimate "shape," the organizing pattern, of reality itself, thereby illumining the meaning and value of human life.[16]

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[16] Green, *Imagining God*, 83. Concerns about divine revelation and truth are undoubtedly critical when interpreting the manifold complexities of life. That discussion is, however, outside the scope of this study.

Thus, it seems imprudent 'to throw out the baby with the bath water' if indeed "the most powerful way to change the world is precisely by interpreting it."[17] This chapter and this dissertation seek to seize and to espouse the 'ordinary,' and 'positive,' hermeneutical sense of imagination in order to dialogue with modern social imaginaries toward theological engagement with the secular. In this chapter, the Sermon on the Mount is used to illustrate the practicality of 'image' and 'positive imagination' in matters of theology in three interrelated ways.

First, Craig S. Keener estimates that there are "more than thirty-six discrete views" as to the message of the Sermon on the Mount.[18] This variety of views may be indicative of the unintuitive character of the Sermon and suggests a role for image and imagination in grasping its message.[19] Furthermore, imagination is illustrated in the

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[17] *Ibid.*, 152. Green notes that "God seizes [sinners] by the imagination" in order to save them (*Ibid.*, 149). Green cites the use of imagination to receive proclamation. He suggests that it might be useful to consider the suggestion that "God does not appear … to address the intellect, the feelings, or the conscience separately" and that "[i]magination is not so much a particular faculty as the integration in human experience of the various human abilities and potentialities" (*Ibid.*, 151). Utilizing these premises, Green exposits that imagination is greater than just intellect or moral perception, and may be expressed in liturgy (sacraments), the Lord's Supper, worship, and music (*Ibid.*).

[18] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 160. The Sermon is found in Matt 5:3-7:27 (or more broadly Matt 5-7) and Keener notes that, while "[i]nterpreters have proposed various structures for the sermon" and some "discernible structure exists" most clearly in "5:17-48, 6:1-18, and 6:19-34" as "the largest complete units," it is not necessary to "force the sermon into an unnatural structure" (*Ibid.*, 163). Examples of discussions as to its message may also be found in, for example, Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, eds., *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007); Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon On the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

[19] One of the more common ways of ascribing meaning to the Sermon in terms of an impossible ethical ideal, and the lack of consensus as to its meaning raises at least two important questions for this study: Is the Sermon appropriate to considerations for secular society, and does not the myriad of meanings hinder rather than help? On the first question it might be, as Dale C. Allison Jr. suggests, that the Sermon's depiction as "impossible ideal" might have arisen from "the unfortunate habit of viewing the Sermon in isolation," which fails to acknowledge that "most of the sentiments" it espouses also appear "in old Jewish sources," and that the latter therefore provide a context for interpreting the former (*Sermon*, xi). On the

Sermon's interpretation as, according to Dale C. Allison's claims, "partly a poetic text" that "seeks to instill a moral vision" via the "dramatic and pictorial."[20] Imagination helps the reader to 'see' in the text: someone offering a gift at an altar (Matt 5:23), a person being thrown into prison (v.25), a one-eyed or one-handed body (vv. 29-30), a cheek being slapped (v.39), the rising sun or falling rain (v.45), someone praying in a closet (6:6), a field of lilies (v.28), a log in an eye (7:4), and wolves dressed in sheep's clothes (v.15).[21] To interpret these literalistically—that is, "without imagination"—would produce "(mis)interpretation" and lead to "absurdities."[22] Allison opines that the

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latter question, it might be worth bearing in mind that the Sermon has more than one telos, "that its goals cannot be succinctly summarized" (*Ibid*., 7). Keener suggests that it is those who read "Jesus in light of Paul rather than the reverse" who "characterize Jesus' [*sic*] sermon as an impossible ideal meant only to drive disciples to grace" although the Gospel does "season his [Jesus's] teachings with grace" (*Socio-Rhetorical*, 161). Obviously, no consensus has emerged as to *the* meaning of the Sermon and multiple interpretations might be considered as chipping away at the whole block of meaning that it communicates, and therefore each "can be legitimate" rather than "comprehensive" in the sense of intending to refute all others (Allison, *Sermon*, xii). Hence, a single, 'correct,' meaning of the Sermon is not the concern in this section but, rather, to outline its instrumentality to employ the positive rhetorical identity of imagination in theology.

[20] *Ibid*., 11.

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] *Ibid*. The Sermon "does not obviously appeal to our common sense" (*Ibid*., 25). For example, the seemingly counterintuitive protases and the justifying apodoses of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12) suggest 'unnatural' hermeneutics and a new way of thinking. Conventional translations that render the "poor in spirit," "those who mourn," and the "persecuted," for example, as "blessed" or "happy" go against the grain of the 'natural' way in which humans normally consider states of poverty of any kind, or mourning, or persecution. Clearly, this was not the existential experience in first century Judea, nor is it in the twenty-first century West. In a similar manner, and especially in some cultures more than others, to look "at a woman with lust for her" (5:28) is no cause for antipathy, and certainly not censure for adultery. With the divorce rate in the United States—a country where 'alternative truths' appear to reap high rewards—hovering between forty to fifty percent of first marriages, this also suggests antithetical moral sentiments to those expressed in the Sermon regarding simple truth-telling and divorce. How can these biblical injunctions engage the sensibilities of persons living within a secular 3 context, where the principles are not remotely familiar and exemplars of high moral standing might be few and far between? There are also evident filters and tensions to understanding the exhortation not to lay up "treasures on earth" (6:19) or not to worry (v.25ff.). In a similar manner, neither the reigning Roman kingdom of the first century nor any that preceded it in Greece or Medio-Persia was characterized as the "kingdom of heaven" was presented. On what basis would these hearers understand and appreciate the message?

"Sermon's primary purpose is to instill principles and qualities through a vivid inspiration of the moral imagination."[23]

Second, imagination fosters both the conception of the Sermon as a 'system' and also its understanding when viewed as such. The Sermon's use of positive imagination is that its 'systematic' character and its locus in Matthew suggest its hermeneutical role in the Gospel.[24] On the one hand, the necessity to read the principles of the Sermon as a part of the Gospel constrains its imaginative understanding and, on the other hand, the topics in the Sermon appear later in the Gospel, "illumined by other verses,"[25] even as it is meant to "'kindle in us the most intent and vivid thought'."[26]

Third, with its centrality to the notion of social imaginary, imagination illuminates, and is illuminated by, the Sermon's usefulness in understanding and connecting themes of social imaginary potentialities for theological method. The Sermon highlights continuity: past-present-future—Jewish-Christian tradition and Jewish-Greek-Roman-Christian social imaginaries. In this respect, God's promise(s) to Israel in the OT (Chapter 2) should not be interpreted as being retracted nor contradicted by the apparently alternative themes in Jesus's "but I say" (Matt 5:21-47). Jesus's alternatives are best understood as congruent, absent "a literal-minded and legalistic observance of

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[23] *Ibid*., 11.

[24] Kinney reasons that the Sermon on the Mount "appears to be a compendium of Jesus's teaching" and that it "plays a significant role in the greater rhetorical structure of the whole Gospel" (*Hellenistic*, 156).

[25] Allison, *Sermon*, 9.

[26] *Ibid*., 11.

the Sermon"—though albeit "radical" and admirable—which would otherwise produce "fundamental, irreconcilable conflict with the Hebrew Bible."[27] This influential link with the past is also manifested in the so-called Golden Rule in Matt 7:12 that treats "the law [*sic*], the cult, and social issues"[28] and that "requires imaginative application."[29] On Allison's reading, the Beatitudes point to the promise of "true satisfaction" and "unprecedented intimacy with God" as humans experience "the fullness of God's presence."[30] This promise, Allison notes, "lessen[s] pain and anguish" in the present "through an exercise of the imagination" as people "use the eye of the mind" to foresee the promise in the future.[31]

From the foregoing brief survey and analysis—taking the above references to the elements in the Sermon that require imagination (rather than literal reading) as indicative—it seems reasonable to conclude that the Sermon, as "a picturesque means of shaping the moral imagination,"[32] calls for imaginative understanding. This is not to suggest irresponsible allegorical reading but, simply, to indicate that there is no *necessary* antagonism between imagination and Scripture. The positive instrumentality of

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[27] *Ibid.*, 9, 8.

[28] *Ibid.*, 35.

[29] *Ibid.*, 161.

[30] *Ibid.*, 57.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, 80.

imagination, as discussed in Chapter 2, bears potential utility in this regard for understanding the Sermon on the Mount.[33]

In general, biblical hermeneutics calls for the exercise of discernment which may call for the use of imagination.[34] In this regard, Richard Davidson, notes that:

> the Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely "from below" with sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive process, the book inspired by the Spirit can only be correctly understood "from above" by the illumination and transformation of the Spirit.[35]

In the process of illumination, transformation, and empowerment of a discerning and searching individual, the Holy Spirit undoubtedly engages the mind (imagination). Importantly, this means that the process of utilizing mental images does not automatically mean that "the authority of the text is thereby vitiated."[36] At the same time, the apostle Paul's exhortation is to avoid conformation to the principles of this age and to allow oneself to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2).[37]

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[33] It should be recalled that the Sermon, within the canon of Scripture, is not peculiar in this respect but is used intentionally here.

[34] For example, in seeking to understand the doctrine of creation as well as eschaton, the talking serpent of Genesis as well as the seven-headed beasts of Revelation, and baby Moses in the ark as well as baby Jesus in the manger.

[35] Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture," 9. Davidson argues for balance between dependence on the Spirit and "rigorous exegesis based on sound hermeneutical procedures" to escape "subjectivity" (*Ibid*.).

[36] Allison, *Sermon*, 175.

[37] In the context of theological method, this process of renewal is anticipated via the work of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical spiral. See Chapter 1 for a brief discussion on the spiral. For a detailed discussion see, for example, Osborne, *Hermeneutical*; Peckham, *Canonical Theology*). For an extension of this discussion see, also, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who argues for a "fusion of horizons" between the reader and the text but never complete recovery of the textual meaning by the interpreter (*Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. [New York: Crossroad, 1991]). Peckham discusses "the interplay between the horizon of the text and that of the reader/interpreter" as a spiral to recover intention in the text ("Analogy," 41, 49, 50). Interestingly, Charles Taylor uses αἰών, often translated "age" or "world" (Rom 12:2), to explain the condition and ethos of "secular" time/condition vis-à-vis "God's time" or condition (*A Secular Age*, 195,

It must also be stressed that this suggestion for imaginative instrumentality in no way indicates, or supports, casuistic reconstructions of Scripture over or against what is set out *in* the biblical text, but merely recognizes imagination in the process of apprehending the meaning in the text. Properly, within the hermeneutical spiral of understanding, imagination (and all human 'input') is understood as being increasingly transformed by the Holy Spirit *and* by Scripture (see Chapters 1 & 5). Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude the impracticality of writing off imagination *en bloc*, for since "we know that Christ and culture lay conflicting demands upon us" and "we can ignore neither," one must therefore acknowledge "the never-ending task of prayerfully deciding, in fear and trembling, what to give to Caesar, and what to give to God."[38]

In the next section, the chapter moves to an inductive reading of the biblical narrative of the rich young man, to explore a biblical reading of human flourishing and other themes in Charles Taylor's theses of exclusive humanism.

The Rich Young Man Narrative as a Human Flourishing Narrative

Situated within the juxtaposition of Hellenistic and Roman society, the narrative of the rich young man provides an excellent vantage point from which to view the complex constellation of cultural communities of the time. In the wake of social imaginaries with accounts of economic human flourishing predicated on a modern anthropology and advanced as the normative final end for human existence, this focused

264-5).

[38] *Ibid.*, 176.

and intentional biblical linkage between the economic state of affairs and the quest for

salvation aims to respond to the contemporary *desideratum*. In the biblical exegetical,

phenomenological, intertextual, and narrative analyses that follow, caution is exercised to

mitigate the imposition of contemporary presuppositions onto the biblical text while, at

the same time, approaching the biblical social imaginaries for potential lessons.

Accordingly, in this exercise of *epoché*, the approach is to focus on the predominant

impulses *in* the text and engage with other rhetorical nuances only as they arise naturally

from the analysis *of* the text.

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Human Flourishing Vocabulary as Soteriological
Tensions: The Questions

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The shifts and reformulations described in Chapter 3 reflect some long-standing,

possibly uneasy, tensions between economics and theology[39] which find expression in the

conversation between Jesus and an inquirer described as "young" and "having many

possessions" in the Gospel of Matthew (19:16-29).[40] A number of interpretive problems

from the soteriological *Tendenz* in the pericope expose the lack of a well-established *crux*

interpretum among schools of Christian scholars who have variously interpreted the

concatenation of "have eternal life" (v.16), "enter into life" (v.17), "keep the

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[39] On the tension see, for example, Ballor, "Theology and Economics." Charles Taylor speaks of "cross-pressures" to describe the simultaneous pull by this-worldly and other-worldly desires (Chapter 3).

[40] Synoptic descriptions of the inquirer vary: In Matthew, he is a young man (19:20, 22) who has many possessions (19:22); in Mark, a rich man (10:22); and in Luke, a ruler (18:18) who is very rich (18:23). There appears to be limited engagement with this tension in the literature. Nathan Eubank, for example, references "excellent commentaries" that are silent on the issues (*Wages*, 91n.106). Furthermore, there is apparent under-engagement with this enacted parable in extant discussions of parables about money despite its noticeable economic matrix (see discussion in Chapter 1 and see Table 1). This study is primarily concerned with the Matthean account, rather than trying to utilize or harmonize the Synoptic accounts, and prudently extends the exegetical boundary to v.29.

commandments" (v.17), "τέλειος"[41] (v.21) and "go and sell your possessions … treasure in heaven … and come, follow me" (v.21).[42]

Is Jesus asking everyone to "go and sell" or was the young man exceptional? Did the young man receive eternal life although he apparently declined to be "τέλειος"? Is Matthew implying soteriological diversity in the pericope? Moreover, in the light of the "striking preponderance of economic imagery" in Matthew relative to the other Synoptics,[43] and given the fact that Jesus speaks about "sell" and "possessions" in the context of salvation, what, if anything, is Matthew implying about the relationship between soteriology and human flourishing?

Human Flourishing Vocabulary as Soteriological *Tendenz*

That the central message from Jesus in the narrative is about salvation is not an issue. There is clear evidence of distinct theological and soteriological indicators in the narrative— "have eternal life" (v.16), "enter into life" (v.17), "treasure in heaven" (v.21),

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[41] Barring quotations, the untranslated τέλειος is used throughout because doing this facilitates, ultimately, the communication of its strong nuance of fullness.

[42] The pericope has sparked much controversy. See Daniel J. Harrington, "The Rich Young Man in Matthew 19,16-22: Another Way to God for Jews?," in *The Four Gospels, 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, Vol 2, ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al., Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1992), 1425-32. Harrington hails the seminal literary analysis of S. Légasse as "the most comprehensive study of the pericope of the rich young man" (see "L'appel du riche [Marc 10,17-31 et parallèles]," *Contribution á l'étude des fondements scripturaires de l'état religieux* [1966]). The scholarly literature burgeoned after Légasse, dominated initially by source and redaction analyses. Prominent topics have raised questions about the relationship among various texts (for example, J. W. Wenham, "Why Do You Ask Me About the Good? A Study of the Relation between Text and Source Criticism," *New Testament Studies* 28 [1982]: 116-25), the spiritual message(s) the pericope conveys, Jesus's teaching about the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy (for example, G. D. Kisner, "Jesus's Encounter with the Rich Young Ruler and its Implications for Theology and Development," *Journal of Religious Thought* 49, no. 2 [1992]: 81-86), and Jesus's appeal to the rich to aid in the betterment of life for all (for example, J. Galot, "Le fondement évangélique du voeu religieux de pauvreté," *Gregorianum* 56 [1975]: 441-67, in Harrington, "The Rich Young Man," 1427), and questions about salvation.

[43] Eubank, *Wages*, 1.

"enter the kingdom of heaven" (v.23), "enter the kingdom of God" (v.24) and "be saved" (v.25). The challenge lies in apprehending, from what Jesus said, the precise interpretation of how salvation works and its relationship to the Law and to possessions (read human flourishing) in Matthew. Is soteriological *Tendenz* implied by "τέλειος" (v.21) and, if so, do the semantic differences regarding how the passage presents soteriological *Tendenzen*, particularly in vv.17 and 21, have theological significance or are they simply literary variations?

The young man questions what good thing to do to "have eternal life" (v.16), and the "teacher" answers "to enter into life" (v.17). Klaus Haacker opines that "[w]hile 'entering' suggests the notion of salvation as a place or space offering security and blessing, ['having' seems] to view it as a desirable object to be given or denied."[44] Here Haacker's point is intensified by the suggestion that the context of "what … shall I *do* in order to *have*" (ποιήσω ἵνα σχῶ) in v.16 presents salvation as a desirable object that one may *earn*: a crude *quid pro quo*.[45] Indeed, Jesus's "keep the commandments" (v.17) intensifies the complication of the plot because it "remains within the thought-world of the questioner by listing things to 'do'."[46] Craig Evans notes that "the link between *life*

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[44] Klaus Haacker, ""What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?" Implicit Christology in Jesus' Sayings about Life and the Kingdom," in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorny (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 143.

[45] The focus on doing is not antithetical to the nexus of the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture of the first Gospel where doing "good" is not only apposite but is also central to the Jewish imaginary (see above). "Good" is a characteristically Matthean term that appears indexed to salvation as the young man's inquiry about a "good thing" to "do to have eternal life" (v.16) shows. Augustine Stock describes "eternal life" in the Matthean setting as the result of doing good: "life … in a coming aeon, *in which a person can win a share only through right conduct*" (*The Method and Message of Matthew* [Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 1994], 303; emphasis supplied).

[46] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 732. Cf. Matt 19:21. France notes that the young man "is expressing the 'Pelagian' view of salvation" (*Ibid*.). Jesus's

and the *commandments* is commonplace in Scripture and early Judaism,"[47] and that

ποιήσω in Matt 19:16 is linked to Lev 18:5 which promises that those who keep the

statutes of the Law will live.

Jesus's imperative to "keep the commandments" (v.17) aligns well with the

teaching on the Mount that only those who *do* the will of the Father in heaven will "enter

the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 7:21). However, the fact that "[a]s a formula [τήρησον τὰς

ἐντολάς] is *hapax* among the Synoptics"[48] adds uncertainty as to how it should be

understood, especially in the light of Matthew's earlier statement that Jesus would "save

his people from their sins" (1:21). What, really, is the relationship between salvation

through Jesus and keeping the commandments? Furthermore, if it is true that "have

eternal life" (v.16) equates with "enter into life" (v.17), be "τέλειος" (v.21), "enter the

kingdom" (v.23), and "be saved" (v.25),[49] then is there a relationship between keeping

the commandments and selling one's possessions, between human flourishing and having

treasure in heaven (v.21)?

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response maintains the focus on anthropocentricity and 'immanence.'

[47] Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 344; italics original. Both OT and NT speak to God's promise of eternal life as conditional on obedience to the commandments (or the will of God). The authority of the Law was critical to the social structure.

[48] Raymond F. Collins, "Matthew's ἐντολαί. Towards an Understanding of the Commandments in the First Gospel," in Van Segbroeck et al., *The Four Gospels*, 1328.

[49] Stock, *Method and Message*, 303. See, also, Roland Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew - An Ongoing Debate," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 53-84; Haacker, "What Must I Do?," 143, 148; Jonathan W. Lo, "Eternal Life in the Synoptic 'Call of the Rich Man' Narrative," *CGST Journal* 52 (Jan 2012): 153-72; and Keener, *Socio-Rhetorical*, 473. In this vein, history offers an incisive record of the birth of one, at the time when the political and economic burdens in Palestine had become almost unbearable and when the intensity of the human search for meaning and purpose was delirious and exhausted; "the fullness of time was come" (Gal 4:4).

Jesus presents the young man an option if he wishes to be τέλειος and have treasure in heaven (v.21). How does this understanding of "τέλειος" address the young man's original expressed wish to "have eternal life" (v.16) or his subsequent confession of "lack" (v.20)? This conditional invitation to the young man is peculiar to Matthew's record of Jesus's simple and unconditioned "follow me." What is implied regarding wealth and "τέλειος"?[50]

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Human Flourishing Vocabulary as Teleological
Tensions: The Answers

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Of particular interest to this study are three strands in the literature on the soteriological *Tendenz* in the narrative. First, against Tillard, Sacchi and others, J. Galot identifies two levels of discipleship in Jesus's imperatives: "Keep the commandments" (v. 17) is associated with (general) candidates for eternal life, while "go sell … come follow me" (v. 21) is allied to "higher level" discipleship.[51] Second, Alan P. Stanley concludes that the issue is about one's relationship with Jesus rather than with the Law.[52] Third, Daniel J. Harrington cites Christian interpretations and applications as erroneous,

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[50] Cf. Matt 4:19, 9:9. In Matt 8:22, Jesus relieves a potential disciple of a restraining condition by telling him to forget a burdensome task (burying the dead), and to just follow. The conditional invitation (19:21) is unmistakably a didactic reinforcement of Jesus's teachings to deny self, take up one's cross and follow (Matt 10:38; 16:34), within the context where τέλειος satisfies the young man's desire for *both* salvation *and* for human flourishing (see below).

[51] J. Galot, "Le fondement évangélique, 1427. See, also, Evans, *Matthew*; Keener, *Socio-Rhetorical*. (Cf. J.M.R. Tillard, "Le propos de pauvreté et l'exigence évangélique," *La nouvelle revue théologique* 100 [1978]: 207-32; A. Sacchi, "'Se vuoi essere perfetto' [Mt. 19,21]: perfezione e vita Christiana," *Rivista biblica italiana* 17 [1969]: 313-25; P.J. Riga, "Poverty as Counsel and as Precept," *The Bible Today* 65 [1973]: 1123-28 in Harrington, "The Rich Young Man," 1427).

[52] Alan P. Stanley, "The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 649 (2006): 46-62.

emphasizes the discourse's distinctive Jewish character, and concludes on "two ways to eternal life" for Jews: "the traditional way of keeping the commandments, and the 'perfect' way that involves following Jesus."[53]

This chapter utilizes narrative analysis, a close reading of the text, and intertextual exegesis to explore the narrator's intention in the two phrases "εἰ δὲ θέλεις εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν, τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς" (v.17)—"if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments"—and "εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι, ὕπαγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα" (v.21)—"if you wish to be τέλειος, go sell your possessions." Panoramically, the synchronic analysis produced some basic insights and fairly convincing support of the thesis to reject soteriological diversity in the pericope. However, to adequately explain the theological tension between vv.17 and 21 this chapter appeals to the wider interface of soteriological *Tendenzen* in Matthew and demonstrates interdependence with Matthew 5. The result is not only that Matthew 5 carries a hermeneutical key for Matt 19:16-29 but also, with Pennington, that such a key *necessarily* overlaps with considerations of human flourishing, highlighting Jesus's model of a life of 'true' human flourishing.[54]

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[53] Harrington, "The Rich Young Man," 1432, 1427.

[54] Premised on the belief that Jesus is the fulfillment and the incarnation of both human flourishing and the kingdom of God, Pennington posits that "a human flourishing reading of the Sermon … in fact makes sense in the ancient world," located as it is at the nexus of the Greco-Roman virtue tradition—which promoted human flourishing as an inner-person focus via lifelong, intentional pursuit of virtue—and the Second Temple Jewish traditions—which promoted human flourishing via a genuine relationship with God (*Sermon*, 15, 31, 59).

In Matthew, Jesus goes "about all Galilee, teaching … preaching the gospel of the kingdom … and healing" (4:23). The dramatic scene with a rich young man in Judea begins as "one" comes to Jesus as "Teacher" and inquires what good thing he must do in order to have eternal life (v.16).[55] Jesus's response to him initiates a maieutic, intense, and complex plot developed in their conversation and the ensuing instruction of the disciples, which follows Jesus's striking aphorism (v.26).

Plot

The three-pronged up-down-up progression of this double recognition (or discovery) plot[56] demonstrates continuity in the discourse and illustrates the unity of Jesus's "keep the commandments," the imperative to "go sell … come follow," and the later teaching to the disciples that everyone who has left 'possessions' on his account "will receive a hundredfold *and* will inherit eternal life" (v.29).[57] The initially unknowing

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[55] The significance of the opening "Καὶ ἰδοὺ" has been noted by, for example, France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 728.

[56] There is agreement with those who consider the master plot of the story as a failed quest. See, for example, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: T&T Clark, 1997), 16.

[57] If Jonathan Pennington is right that "the main point of a passage is usually found in the climax and the resolution and/or the following action/interpretation," there is further support for a double plot structure (*Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012], 175). The first climax occurs after Jesus's five-part imperative (v.21). As the young man leaves (v.22) and the tension dissipates, a resolution is reached. While Matt 19: 23-26 falls into Pennington's category of "following actions/lessons" as it brings closure to the story and "ties up any loose ends," it is unlikely to be classified as having "a level of tension like that of the introduction" (*Ibid*.). The level of tension here is somewhat more intense as is evident from the astonishment of the disciples (v.25). Arguably, the tension evident here is analogous to the tension just prior to a climax, with a second climax occurring as the disciples question Jesus regarding the possibility of salvation for anyone at all. When Jesus expresses confidence in God's power to save (v.26), a further resolution occurs releasing the tension. There are therefore two climaxes and resolutions within the boundaries Matt 19:16-26. The boundary markers are critical in determining structural features and the markers for this pericope appear pliable. Some scholars utilize Matt 19:16-22 (see, for example, James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005]); others utilize Matt 19:16-26 (see, for example,

inquirer ascends as he initiates a search about eternal life (v.16), and rises further as he confirms compliance with Jesus's requirements to "keep the commandments" (vv.17-20).[58] His question, "τί ἔτι ὑστερῶ;"[59] (v.20), increases tension and exposes his incompleteness even as Jesus's words, "εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι," provide the impetus for five imperatives: "go sell … give … come follow" (v.21) and initiate the reversal: despite his important discovery the young man rejects the solution to satisfy his lack in favor of the *status quo*. His *anagnōrisis* does not result in the anticipated serendipity usually associated with Jesus in Matthew. He plunges into downfall.

Matthew's tendency to highlight dialogue in a narrative magnifies the thundering silence of the young man as he "goes away grieving" (v.22) marking his *dénouement*, and a resolution is only evident to the onlooking disciples and the reader who benefit from his folly. The third arm of the plot advances upward. Jesus's comments to the onlooking disciples about the difficulty for the rich to enter into the kingdom increases tension, and intensifies the amazement of the disciples, climaxing with their astonished question: "who, then, can be saved?" (v.25). The resolution, which the young man misses, comes in Jesus's striking aphorism "with God all things are possible" (v.26). The unfolding of the plot reveals the consequence of choices and roles of each of the characters.

France, *The Gospel of Matthew*), or Matt 19:16-22 and also Matt 19:23-26 (see, for example, Evans, *Matthew*), and still others utilize Matt 19:16-30 (see, for example, Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical*). Where the boundary extends to Matt 19:30, three climaxes and resolutions occur: the third climax as Peter questions Jesus concerning reward for the disciples who left all and followed and the third resolution as Jesus explains the rewards for these and all other disciples (vv. 28-29).

[58] The use of πάντα (all) demonstrates a stark contrast between the young man, who wants to do good and who, despite "Πάντα ταῦτα ἐφύλαξα" (v.20), has a sense of lack, and Jesus, who speaks in relation to God (παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά, v.26), the only good One and who makes all things, including eternal life, possible.

[59] "The verb ὑστερῶ [lack]" is "*hapax* in Matthew" (Collins, "Matthew's ἐντολαί," 1329).

Characterization

Matthew's portrayal of the characters implies that the young man's incompleteness, anthropology, and theology, Jesus's authority, and the disciples's relationship with Jesus are critical factors to the narrative outcome.

Unlike some rich young men in the twenty-first century, the rich young man of the first century shows apparent greater concern for transcendent goals than for immanent human flourishing,[60] characterizing himself as one who is meticulously aware of, and compliant to, the Law[61] and who yearns for specific confirmation that his obedience will guarantee eternal life (v.20). The conditional "if you wish" (vv.17, 21) nuances Jesus's multiple singular invitations to him as one who *may* "enter into life" *and* be "τέλειος." That delayed character revelation emphasizes him as "ὁ νεανίσκος [the young man]" (vv.20, 22) and one "ἔχων κτήματα πολλά [having many possessions]" (v.22) appears to be deliberate.[62] It is closely aligned with the young man's claim of total obedience (v.20)

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[60] Whereas some rich young men in the twenty-first century are likely to be more concerned with speculation than with faith, with transient money market securities than with eternal security, and with futures trading than with an eternal future in the kingdom of God, the rich young man in first century Judea approaches Jesus and persists in finding out about having eternal life. The question seems to imply a context in which the structure of society exudes a vivifying influence of a transcendent telos, but his later actions highlight a tension.

[61] "Which?" (v.18) and "all these things I have kept" (v.20) intimate at legalism. France suggests that the question is a genuine search for clarity within the context of the myriad of commandments the rabbis introduced in excess of the Mosaic Law (*The Gospel of Matthew*). Davies and Allison suggest that the question confirms the importance of every part of the Torah (*Critical and Exegetical*, 3:45).

[62] Rich young men are uncommon in most societies. Here, the inexperience of youth appears to be combined with the seductive weight of riches. Rather than simply an indictment on "ὁ νεανίσκος"—after all, the inquirer initiated contact with Jesus and "kept" the commandments—Jesus's invitation to be "τέλειος" seems to be suggesting a need for something greater and deeper and more meaningful. Note that the general economic-situation-savior-quest was not apparently applicable to this young man, but the tension between the spiritual and the economic, described in Chapter 2, is nevertheless apparent.

and to the story's outcome. He leaves grieving (v.22) because, for him, the price of following Jesus is too high.[63]

There seems to be a certain disconnect in this account that bears striking resemblance to the secular individual Taylor describes as one that is adrift, having been cast into an anonymous, cold "universe," in a "dark abyss of time,"[64] apparently uncertain of either *arché* or telos. Why would a physically 'flourishing' (young, v.19), religiously compliant (v.20), and materially 'flourishing' (v.22) individual persist in asking: "what do I still lack?" Is this a reflection of existential lack of the kind to which Charles Taylor refers? Taylor notes that although "dissatisfaction and emptiness can propel a return to transcendence," unfortunately the quest often continues "*within immanence*"[65]—what Taylor describes as "cross-pressures."[66] Here, in the biblical narrative, the rich young man walks away sorrowful (v.22) after rejecting Jesus's apparently unsatisfactory 'transcendent' alternative.

Jesus's apparent hyperbole of the camel, the needle, the rich, and the kingdom (v.24) lends pointed emphasis to the underlying tensions: a young man behaving

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[63] Cf. 4:18-22; 8:21-22. David R. Bauer notes that "discipleship entails *genuine cost*, in that Simon and Andrew were forced to abandon the security of vocation, and James and John left both property and family" ("The Major Characters of Matthew's Story: Their Function and Significance," in *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical and Social Scientific Approaches*, ed. Jack Dean Kingsbury [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997], 32). Nevertheless, there is often a misplaced dichotomy between discipleship and 'true' flourishing.

[64] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 327.

[65] *Ibid.*, 310; emphasis supplied. Apparently, this is the tension that engenders heightened economic activities as the quest for meaning is redirected by, and within, the economic imaginary as, on Taylor's view, responding to increasing feelings of "flatness" and "emptiness," people accelerate the "cycle of desire and fulfilment, in consumer culture" (*Ibid.*, 309).

[66] *Ibid.*, 302-3.

paradoxically, hungering and thirsting after righteousness but refusing to be satisfied, poor in spirit but rejecting the kingdom of heaven, having many possessions but lacking fullness and flourishing, and knowledgeable about the letter of the law but ignorant of its purported Fulfillment. The rhetorical impact of this characterization is that it intensifies the sense of the young man's ignorance regarding 'true' flourishing and misplaced confidence in his doing and his riches rather than direct attention to a dualistic meaning in Jesus's exhortations in vv.17 and 21.[67]

Jesus is characterized as "teacher" (v.16) and the narrator seems to substantiate this with Jesus's rhetorical response (v.17) and in the general maieutic style thereafter. The use of imperatives (vv.17, 21) supports an authoritative character but the consistent accompaniment with "Εἰ θέλεις" exposes Jesus as sensitive to the young man's choice.[68] Jesus affirms the ethical standard of the Torah as a way for living in the world (vv.17-19). He is confident in a good (v.17), capable, and powerful God to save all those who "wish" to be saved (v.26). "As prophet and sage, Jesus is offering and inviting his hearers into *the way of being in the world that will result in their true and full flourishing now and in the age to come*."[69]

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[67] Jesus's words about the rich (vv. 23-24) indict the young man, but extend further. Their aphoristic nature universalizes them, illustrating the unity between Jesus's idea of commandment-keeping and call. Citing Charles Taylor's comment that Jesus's call to self-sacrifice "'doesn't negate the value of flourishing; it is rather a call to centre [*sic*] everything on God,'" Pennington presses home the point that Jesus's calls are always accompanied by the promise of future reward/recompense (Pennington, *Sermon*, 292; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 17). Taylor here was discussing "'true' flourishing versus "ordinary" flourishing.

[68] Richard A. Edwards notes that Jesus is an authoritative figure in Matthew whose reliability and status are unquestioned ("Characterization of the Disciples as a Feature of Matthew's Narrative," in Van Segbroeck et al., *The Four Gospels*, 1310).

[69] Pennington, *Sermon*, 144; emphasis original. Although beyond the scope of this chapter, one could reasonably question the significance of the young man's perception of Jesus as "teacher" to his

Although somewhat lacking in understanding and often rebuked for lack of faith, the disciples were, *ipso facto*, willing to follow Jesus.[70] For "his disciples," who apparently had a vision of God conditioned more by culture than by the Law, the difficulty for the rich to "enter into the kingdom" (vv.23-24) implied impossibility for everyone else less favored and blessed (v.25).[71]

Analyzing the above factors within the setting of the narrative bears further relevance on the denial of soteriological diversity and of the knowledge of 'true' flourishing.

Settings

While spatial, temporal, and religio-cultural settings do not specifically adjudicate between claims that there are single or multiple ways to salvation, their frequency and variety emphasize a dominance of interwoven allusions to the soteriological *Tendenz*.[72]

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response, because he fails to see Jesus as the "arbiter" of the message.

[70] See, for example, Matt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8.

[71] Jesus's apparent hyperbole (v.24) transforms the Synoptic *hapax* "δυσκόλως" (v.23) into "ἀδύνατον" (v.26). Some scholars agree that the disciple's question and doubt was consistent with a culture in which wealth was a sign of favor and blessing from God (Keener, *Socio-Rhetorical*, 477-78; Evans, *Matthew*, 345-46).

[72] Taken as cognates, these would occur would multiple singularity: "have eternal life" (v.16), "enter into life" (v.17), "treasure in heaven" (v.21), "enter into the kingdom of heaven" (v.23), and "enter into the kingdom of God" (v.24), "be saved" (v.25). There is an ongoing discussion in the literature concerning the nomenclature and the nature of the "kingdom of heaven"—is it a spatial idea or is it more about the reign or rule of God? Is Matthew reticent to use the term "kingdom of God," (though he does so in 19:24 and elsewhere) and is this likely out of deference for the divine name? Donald A. Hagner, argues in favor of "heaven" as a circumlocution for "God" (*The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012], 201). On the other hand, Jonathan Pennington argues against circumlocution noting equivalence in the terms and stating that the kingdom of God which is in heaven will eschatologically replace all other kingdoms on the earth (*Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009], 330). Haacker notes that "the kingdom of God is not territory but an age to come" ("What Must I Do?," 148). In any case, the idea of "getting in" connotes a

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Distinctive spatial expressions emphasize the will as the seat of decisions: it is the young man's behavior that will be held accountable—to go sell, give, come, follow and have treasure in heaven (v.21), or to go away sorrowful (v.22). Despite having "kept" the Law, he acts in antithesis to it.[73]

Temporal settings marking the progress of the plot appear vaguely important, and suggest a contextual immediacy and brevity via the pace of the discourse and the extensive usage of tableau and summary statements. The young man appears to move quickly to his choice: although "he went away grieving" (v.22), the decision to go appears expeditious. Suspense both grows and dissipates quickly when Jesus answers the young man's question of v.20. It is an ironic and frustrating surprise when the young man—seeking out Jesus and persisting to know what he needed to do to satisfy his lack—chooses *not* to do what he needed to do. It reinforces the point about "cross-pressures" and that sustained doing flows out of a person's inner being and by what moral authority that person chooses to live in the world.

The dominant salvation motif in these settings accords with the Matthean theme of the "kingdom of heaven" and Jesus's audience would have been familiar with both its provisions and its requirements. The thing to "do" to enter into the kingdom is to follow

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certain frontier and implies voluntary submission to a defined authority and full access to defined benefits.

[73] The props in the story are also all linked to the complications in the plot and to the human will: possessions (v.21, 22), treasure (v.21), camel (v.24), and eye of a needle (v.24). It is the will that decides whether or not to let go of possessions and that, ultimately, motivates him to vote with his feet. Observing the Law, as he claims to have done, should motivate obedience to Jesus. It does not. Like the Pharisees, he appears self-deceived and "lawless" for he does not really understand what the Law is about (Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 107).

Jesus and therefore to decide to respond in the affirmative to his multiple singular invitations.

Narrative Structure

The structure of the narrative reveals two major interpretive clues that advanced understanding about the question of soteriological diversity. First, consideration of the critical boundary markers. Collins argues that the *inclusio* formed by "came … and said" and "heard … went away" (vv.16, 22) frames the narrative.[74] If so, a major gap remains as to what really happened to the young man after he "went away grieving" (v.22). A chiastic perspective of the same frame (19:16-22) identifies the commandments as the focal point.[75]

A 16a	Someone came (εἷς προσελθὼν)	
B 17b	If you wish to enter into life (εἰ δὲ θέλεις εἰς τὴν ζωὴν εἰσελθεῖν)	
C 17c	Keep the commandments (τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς)	
D18b	Commandments of Decalogue plus one	
C' 20a	All these things I have kept (πάντα ταῦτα ἐφύλαξα)	
B' 21a	If you wish to be τέλειος (εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι)	
A' 22b	he went away (ἀπῆλθεν)	

This being so, did the young man receive eternal life since he "kept" all (v.20) the commandments? Did he, irrespective, forfeit eternal life by refusing to "follow" Jesus? Within this context, one could potentially argue for the former, making the gap (after v.22) an appeal to the disciples and the reader to make any necessary change in their lives.

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[74] Collins, "Matthew's ἐντολαί," 1326.

[75] This chiastic arrangement emphasizes that "enter into life" mirrors "τέλειος." A number of chiasms constructed for Matt 19:16-22 converge on the commandments as the central focus (Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical*, 3:38).

Second, the apparent ambiguity of the fate of the young man in the text is interesting. Jesus said to "keep the commandments" in order to enter life (v.17) and to "go sell … follow" in order to be τέλειος (v.21). Should v.21 be construed as antithesis or as analogue to v.17? Did Jesus outline two separate and distinct requirements, or was the second a restatement of the first? Is "τέλειος" for those who want to do more than "keep the commandments" (cf. 5:48)? Is there yet another explanation? Was Jesus speaking to the young man in a discrete, isolated, and peculiar context or was Jesus speaking to any "one" and therefore everyone who would ask? Pennington asserts that Jesus's invitation was to "all humans … that the ones with ears to hear and eyes to see will follow as a result."[76]

The semantic ambiguity concerning salvation and τέλειος is symptomatic of the tension within different scholarly perspectives about Jesus and the Law in Matthew.[77] As suggested above, an atomistic reading of the narrative could, conceivably, suggest that the young man received eternal life because he "kept" the Law although he, apparently, did not θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι (19.21, 22). If v.17 is considered antithetical to v.21, then there is implicit support for soteriological diversity in Matthew. If the verses are indeed analogical, Jesus simply expounds "follow me" with, "keep the commandments" and "τέλειος" with "enter into life."[78] Jesus is suggested as the center of people's relation

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[76] Pennington, *Sermon*, 161.

[77] For a more detailed discussion on the issues see, for example, Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law"; and Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah."

[78] Jesus's alternative use of the phrases "enter into life" (v.17) and be "τέλειος" (v.21) to the young man, and the later "enter the kingdom of heaven" (v.23) and "enter the kingdom of God" (v.24) strongly suggests equivalence. The disciples's question about being "saved" (v.25) in response to Jesus comments about "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" appears to equate all five phrases (vv.16, 17,

with the good God (v.17), and the author of the Law who makes eternal life possible

(v.26). Scrutiny of Jesus and the Law to address the tension between v.17 and v.21

follows in the next section, demonstrating support for denial of soteriological diversity

and a necessary linkage to human flourishing, as a close reading of the soteriological

indicators from the narrative is juxtaposed with the wider Gospel.

Social Imaginary: Law, Life, and Jesus

The Law was an indelible icon of Jewish culture, central to Jewish identity and

Sitz im Leben. Keener notes that for Jewish teachers, God's commandments and their

intent were considered good in a similar way that God was praised as good. Thus, Jesus's

"keep the commandments" (19:17) is typical: a person shows "fidelity toward God's

covenant by obeying his laws."[79] In the Jewish culture of the first century, some Jewish

leaders emphasized strict adherence to the Law and there was an implicit understanding

that *all* commands should be kept.[80] The young man's "all … kept" (19.20) suggests

confidence in meeting all the Law's requirements. Perhaps a central issue to this chapter

then, in the light of the recognition of the Law's significance, is whether Jesus is

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21, 23, 24) with "be saved" (v.25). This reasoning is dependent on a narrative frame that extends to at least 19:26.

[79] Keener, *Socio-Rhetorical*, 474.

[80] See, for example, Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah" and Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 119, for a discussion of these issues. Snodgrass suggests tensions from diversity in the Law with "some laws pointing in different directions" (*Ibid.*, 125) but Keener argues that citation of apparently conflicting laws was to serve selfish ends, as in Matt 19:6-9 (*Socio-Rhetorical*, xliii). On the question of referring to the Jewish leaders as a collective, Jack Dean Kingsbury posits that "[b]ecause all of [the] groups are presented in Matthew's story as forming a united front opposed to Jesus, they can be treated as a single character" (*Matthew as Story,* rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 18).

(subversively) seeking to abrogate the Law in 19:21 and presenting an alternative route to salvation. Is Matthew vacillating between Jesus and the Law?

Matthew's phrasing of several verses in the pericope and the Sermon on the Mount alerts the reader to clues that suggest what is taking place in the Gospel in regard to the Law and Jesus, and salvation and τέλειος. First, it appears that "good thing [works]" (19:16) accords with "good works" (5:16). Second, "only one who is good … keep the commandments" (19:17) reveals Jesus's point of view of God, reinforces that God's will and purpose are expressed in the commandments, and reveals Jesus's commitment to them (5:17-20). Third, the inclusion of the extra-Decalogue "love your neighbor as yourself" (19:19) parallels Jesus's "reappropriated, clear exposition of the true intent of the Law" in the Sermon on the Mount (5:43-47).[81] Fourth, Jesus's invitation to be "τέλειος" (19:21) in response to the young man's expressed "lack" (19:20), echoes the exhortation to be "τέλειος" like God (5:48). Fifth, the imperative to "sell … and give to the poor" (19:21) parallels comments on almsgiving (5:42). These clues are minimally indicative of deeper allusions in Jesus's responses to the young man, and the links to Matt 5 suggest an interpretive key to the apparent linguistic, epistemological, and soteriological awkwardness between 19:17 and 21.

If it is true that Matt 5:21-48 is an exposition of 5:17-20,[82] then it appears that the linkages identified in the foregoing analysis support Deines's proposition (at least

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[81] Pennington, "Biblical," 14. This also portends the response as to which is the greatest commandment (Matt 22:39).

[82] Matt 5:17-20 may be seen as the "optic" to understand vv. 21-48 (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2005], 217).

ostensibly) that Matt 5:17-20 is the "hermeneutical introduction to the Matthean theology of the law" (*sic*).[83] In 5:17, Jesus declares a commitment to the Law by aligning with meeting its requirements: not to abrogate (καταλῦσαι) but to fulfill (πληρῶσαι).[84] Furthermore, in 5:18-19 Jesus reinforces a commitment to the *minutiae* of the Law, its permanency, and, because of its role in expressing the will of God, the value that God places on its proper teaching and observance.[85]

Significant diversity exists among scholars regarding the interpretation of the syntax of 5:20 but this does not detract from Jesus's simple teaching that "more righteousness" is required of those listening than that of the scribes and Pharisees.[86] Righteousness is a central theme in Matthew, especially in the Sermon. In 5:21-47, Jesus elucidates "more" to embrace an extraordinarily *new understanding*, climaxing with the need to be "τέλειος" (5:48).[87] Indeed, Pennington asserts that "the idea of greater righteousness" is "a meta-category that" is "intimately connected … with *makarios* and

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[83] Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 70.

[84] Snodgrass believes "accomplish" clarifies that "Jesus did not … nullify the scriptures … [but] came so that people would live according to the scriptures" ("Matthew and the Law," 115). "Jesus came to affirm and to bring the law and the prophets into reality by what was taught and lived. The intent of 'fulfill' must include the idea of doing or accomplishing" ("Matthew's Understanding of the Law," *Interpretation* 46, no. 4 [October 1992]: 372). Pennington is at pains to emphasize that human flourishing is the result of being a certain way in the world and that macarisms are implicit invitations to this kind of life (*Sermon*).

[85] Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 117. "[I]n his teaching Jesus reveals ('fulfills') the divine will that stands behind the letter of the law" (Bauer, "The Major Characters," 30).

[86] See Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 223-226, for a discussion of some of the syntactical and grammatical interpretations.

[87] Cf. Hagner who notes that although "Jesus radicalizes the law [*sic*], focusing not merely on actions but even on the thoughts that underlie the actions" he "does not multiply the commandments or engage in any casuistry" (Donald A. Hagner, "Holiness and Ecclesiology: The Church in Matthew," in Gurtner and Nolland, 178).

teleios" such that "[t]he righteous person is the whole/*teleios* person."[88] These comments reflect Pennington's model of reading the Sermon on the Mount as "a vision of what true human flourishing can look like,"[89] because "one of the key ideas—if not *the* key idea— in the Sermon on the Mount is 'wholeness,' 'completeness,' or 'singular devotion'."[90] If Pennington is right, then Matt 5 as interpretive key for Matt 19:16-29 alludes to a nexus between soteriology and true human flourishing.[91] Indeed, in the language of social imaginary, Matt 5 suggests "a hermeneutic tending towards a prescriptive."[92]

Therefore, to unlock Matt 19:16-29 using 5:17-20, a narrow reading of 5:17-20[93] should be replaced by an eclectic canonical reading, grasping the contextual *caveat* that understanding 5:21-48 holds some clues to 19:16-29. Against proponents of Jesus's abrogation of the Mosaic Law, it is plausible to infer that Jesus inaugurates *a new way of*

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[88] Pennington, *Sermon*, 89, 91. Pennington identifies "*makarios*" (which he translates as "flourishing") and "*teleios*" as "simultaneously two of the most important ideas for understanding the Sermon *and* the most misunderstood elements" (*Ibid.*, 87). *Makarios*, often used synonymously with *eudaimonia* in Hellenism, he identifies as "the *state* of happiness, privilege, or fortune that is upon someone *as observed by someone else*, a bystander, not the one providing or initiating the blessing" ("Biblical," 11). Pennington eschews the usual narrow translation of *makarios* as "blessed" as it "obscures the sense of human flourishing that ʾ*ashrê* [OT counterpart which gives strong support for *makarios* as "flourishing"] and *makarios* communicate" (*Ibid.*, 10). In this vein, Keener notes that "'it will be well with' may convey the point of the Hebrew ʾ*ashrê* and its Greek translation *makarios* better than 'blessed' or 'happy'" (*Socio-Rhetorical*, 165-66).

[89] Pennington, "Biblical," 17. Pennington's model of biblical flourishing includes ʾ*ashrê/makarios*, *tāmîm/teleios*, *dikaiosunē, hē basileia tōn ouranōn*, and *misthos/thēsauros/apodidōmi*.

[90] *Ibid.*, 14; emphasis original.

[91] Cf. Charles Taylor frequently implies a tension between them (for example, *A Secular Age*, 21).

[92] To borrow language from Taylor, used in a different context (*Ibid.*, 162).

[93] A narrow reading involves a priori inference of conflict in, or invalidation of, the Law. On this the literature is strongly divided. Brice L. Martin, "Matthew on Christ and the Law," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 54-70, for example, argues against abrogation in the Sermon. Proponents of abrogation include, for example, M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

understanding the Law.[94] While Jesus's radical "reappropriations" (especially 5:43-47)

highlight the inconsistency of the Pharisees (cf. 23:23)—what Anthony J. Saldarini

considers "Matthew's attack on his opponents" and "part of an ongoing

confrontation"[95]—their central purpose is to provide an exegesis of the Law in a way that

clearly expresses the will of God and exposes Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and of

Scripture, within the overall context of God's love and provision for humanity. It is in

and through Jesus's life and example that the Law is fulfilled: "Jesus … is the complete

[τέλειος], blessed [flourishing] … man in whose image Christians are being remade."[96]

By practical fulfillment of the Law, Jesus exemplifies a way of being in the world that

enables "God's people to live out the Law more effectively"[97] and to flourish.

Matthew presents the kingdom and (eternal) life as typological fulfillment of "the

'great stories' of Israel's history with God"[98] and scholars note the Gospel's role to

introduce Jesus as the promised One of the OT.[99] According to Keener:

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[94] The issues involved here are undoubtedly complex: Matt 5:17-20 has been called an "exegetical mine field" (Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 103). Viewing 5:21-47 from the wider lenses, in the case of murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, *lex talionis*, and love for enemies, Jesus builds on the spirit of the Law but outlines fundamental *extensions* of its intentions (see, for example, Martin, "Matthew on Christ").

[95] Anthony J. Saldarini, "Reading Matthew without Anti-Semitism," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 180. Saldarini pleads for sensitivity to Jews and a "[b]lunting [of] Matthew's polemics" (*Ibid*., 182-84).

[96] Pennington, "Biblical," 15.

[97] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 219.

[98] Haacker, "What Must I Do," 148.

[99] Matthew's thought patterns and general style appear typically Hebraic. Bauer notes that the Gospel's genealogical structure presents Jesus as the anointed one of God to bring salvation history to its climax (1:16) and "thereby giving meaning to the history of Israel … and the history of every individual within the world" ("The Major Characters," 28-9).

> One of the most prominent characteristics of Matthew's Jesus is how he fulfills
> Scripture, sometimes literally and sometimes as the embodiment of Israel's history …
> Matthew is clear that Jesus is the goal of the law and the prophets, hence anyone
> faithful to the heritage of the Bible of Israel must [acknowledge] and follow.[100]

Jesus's "keep the commandments" (19:17) shows that, in Matthew, commandment-keeping is necessary "to have eternal life" but not determinative for doing so: it is Jesus who saves (1:21; 20:28; 26:28), but commandment-keeping and deeds of service are required of disciples (7:21).

Jesus presents in his ministry, both contemporaneous and eschatological allusions of the kingdom.[101] Hence, the invitation to true human flourishing must be understood now as experienced only in part "in a paradoxical way that combines loss, longing, suffering … with true happiness … satisfaction … and ultimately [then, and fully] when God reestablishes the kingdom."[102] Pennington links frequent references to "the kingdom of heaven" to macarisms (Beatitudes) in the Sermon and interprets them within the context of "God's reign and particularly the Jewish expectation of its eschatological consummation … deeply interwoven with the vision of virtue and human flourishing" but realizable only in relationship with God.[103]

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[100] Keener, *Socio-Rhetorical*, 68.

[101] Matt 12:28 speaks of present fulfillment. Eschatological allusions are present in 16:28.

[102] Pennington, *Sermon*, 296.

[103] *Ibid*., 101. Pennington emphasizes Hebrew *ashrê* as a state—"a way of being in the world" that brings certain desirable results; this understanding extends to *makarios* ("Biblical," 8). He posits the nine occurrences of *makarios* in the Beatitudes as marking "most important uses," (*Ibid*., 9) as Jesus uses them to launch a public ministry by "making an appeal and casting an inspiring vision … for what true well-being looks like through God's coming kingdom … understood in the context of the Greek philosophical tradition with its appeal to flourishing and happiness" (*Ibid*., 10).

Not only does Jesus's ministry point to full human flourishing in the kingdom, but Matthew also presents Jesus as the goal and fulfillment of the Law, satisfying its requirements and standing as humanity's advocate as his blood is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Fulfillment of the Law in Jesus—the good God's sacrifice—surpasses the Law and makes possible the impossible: humans may have eternal life, enter into the kingdom, and be τέλειος.[104] Indeed, the kingdom's representation of God's salvation of all people into his sovereign rule describes the gospel of salvation in which Jesus invites *everyone* to participate through repentance from sin (4:17). It is the Law that enables humans to recognize sin and, thus, the impossibility of their efforts—however compliant—to save themselves.[105] By its *practice* according to the way that Jesus taught, both in the holy and in the mundane, the Law is etched on individual hearts continuously transforming, increasing wholeness, and preparing individuals for eternal life in the kingdom of God. This *process* appears to contrast the young man's decision and departure, which appear more immediate.

Social Imaginary: Human Flourishing

The critical question within the narratological frame of the rich young man is whether the young man really understands the truth about humans and possessions or about Jesus and the Law. It does not appear that this is the case, and he therefore fails to

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[104] As discussed earlier, Jesus's interpretation of the Law contextualizes its requirements in love for God and for neighbor, extending it beyond mere legalism.

[105] While this is not explicitly stated in the Gospel, the role of the Law in identifying divergence from God's requirements is demonstrated in Matt 5 and the impossibility of human actions to actualize salvation is evident from Jesus's conversation with the rich young man in Matt 19 and elsewhere in Scripture.

follow Jesus even when invited to do so (vv.21-22).[106] Absent right understanding, the

necessary condition (to keep the commandments) is also insufficient, because "a

righteousness that comes from keeping the law [only] is inadequate for entering the

kingdom."[107] The young man's attempt at obedience is commendable and correct but

epistemologically flawed. The punctiliar aorist indicative "Πάντα ταῦτα ἐφύλαξα"

(19:20) succinctly summarizes the young man's *achievements* as seemingly detached

from internal transformation and a relationship with the Lawgiver.

Matthew's use of the future indicative (19:18-19) to record Jesus's quotation of

the Law, and the imperative and participial phrases (19:21) suggests that Jesus was

calling the rich young man to a *continuing*, transforming relationship. What Jesus means

(ἔφη, 19:21) is that to *keep* the commandments mandates a certain *habitus*: not just to *do*

them as a one-off performance; not intellectual or legal self-righteousness, but outward

reflection of inner transformation in relationship with God. If Jonathan Pennington is

right, then the best reading of a biblical vision of human flourishing in the Sermon on the

Mount is predicated on an understanding that God is the only source of "true, full, and

enduring human flourishing available in the world" and "humanity can only find [its]

telos … through relationship"[108] with God (and others). If Jesus is indeed the central link

between the Law and God, then the young man needed Jesus, as his *doing* had produced a

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[106] As a Jew who has "kept" all the Law (19:20), he rejects Jesus—the Fulfillment of the Law.

[107] Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 113.

[108] Pennington, *Sermon*, 291.

persistent "lack" (19:20). His question implies *anagnōrisis* and the effect of Jesus's

pedagogy allows him to express his need for "more."

If it is true that Jesus's extraordinary response (19:21) "provides a hermeneutic

for reading the scriptures [*sic*] … in light of the requirements of love and mercy"[109]

already alluded to in 19:19, then, unsurprisingly, there is an implicit connection between

19:21 and the ethos of the Sermon. The dichotomous love and mercy hermeneutic is

applicable both to God and to "neighbor": expression to the former when one "keep[s]

the commandments" by faith that comes from following Jesus (cf. 5:48), and to the latter

when one "sell[s] … and give[s]" to the poor (cf. 5:42). It is clear:

> in 5:20 and in its exposition in 5:21-48 that simply to fulfill the requirements of the
> law as the scribes and Pharisees understood them is not yet to have met the demands
> of the kingdom of heaven, and in the light of that teaching we are probably justified
> in seeing "follow me" (v.21) not simply as another thing to "do," but as the
> inauguration of a new and life-changing relationship with Jesus. To follow Jesus will
> lead the inquirer along the path of discipleship which entails the "greater
> righteousness" that God requires and which is the way to "eternal life."[110]

More pointedly, Pennington concludes that "*teleios*" plays a "foundational" role: the

"call on humanity is to be … *teleios* or whole,"[111] a most profound expression of which is

found in 5:48 (cf. 19:21). Because "*teleios* … communicates wholeness, maturity,

completeness, and perfection"[112] it makes a powerful contribution to understanding

biblical human flourishing that is predicated on a right relationship with God because

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[109] Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 111.

[110] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 732.

[111] Pennington, "Biblical," 14.

[112] *Ibid.*, 12.

"true flourishing … is God's activity that invites us back to full humanity and well-being through … Jesus."[113]

The rich young man's persistence to identify his lack exposed his uncertainty as to the sufficiency of his accumulated good works. His response to Jesus's invitation to be τέλειος shows the impossibility of satisfying the requirements of the Law independently of Jesus, for Jesus is indeed the one who makes us whole (τελειωτής) and who is intent on us bringing faith to wholeness (τελειότης). What is necessary is a better understanding of self, of Jesus, of God, and of what is being offered vis-à-vis what one is to "sell." Pennington highlights that wholeness is the means to human flourishing and that wholeness is evidenced, not in perfect ethics and morals, but in "integrity and singleness of heart and dedication"[114] to obey God by following Jesus's way of being in the world.

In harmony with the objective to use 5:17-20 as the hermeneutical key to unlock 19:17 and 19:21, the conclusion is that in 5:17-20 a broad context of the soteriological motif is employed to underline the completeness of Jesus's fulfillment of the Law but also to emphasize Jesus's support for the character and longevity of the Law. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to infer that Jesus introduces a *new understanding* of the Law. In 19:21, τέλειος is presented as wholehearted obedience of the Law through Jesus: an enhanced, and better, understanding of the commandments, not a separate or higher-level commandment. Hence, because the young man's inquiry remained a velleity, he

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[113] *Ibid*., 14-15. Volf makes a similar point: "God's relation to human beings and human beings' [*sic*] relation to God" is "the condition of possibility for human life and flourishing in all dimensions" (*Flourishing*, 9).

[114] Pennington, "Biblical," 16. This is a persistent existential challenge due to pressures from, and contradictions within, the cultural *milieu* and demands a purposeful intent to submit to the authority of God.

failed in his quest for eternal life. Accordingly, the hermeneutical engagement with 5:17-20 leads to the rejection of soteriological diversity in 19:16-29 for both Christians and Jews. The overarching spirit of God's Law is obedience to the requirements out of love and relationship. The "thing" to do to "have eternal life," and to enjoy fullness and flourishing, is for everyone to live in obedience to God's plan for salvation.

Social Imaginary, Savior Quest, and Human Flourishing

The literary analysis presented above produced evidence of a double recognition plot, and multiple allusions to soteriological *Tendenzen* via literary variation and spatial, temporal, and religio-cultural settings. This analysis was in the context of a rich young man's quest for eternal life and his interaction with an authoritative but respectful "Teacher" as they were observed by the Teacher's disciples. Literary variation was further examined by analogical juxtaposition with the Gospel to address an apparent ambiguity in the Teacher's responses regarding eternal life and τέλειος (19:17, 21). For this, reliance was placed on 5:17-20 as hermeneutical key; there was found no evidence to support the presence of soteriological diversity.

For the rich young man, Jesus's invitation to make an investment in heavenly treasure was, apparently, incongruous with his understanding to "*have* eternal life" predicated on human efforts and capability. Jesus invites him to wholeness, to be made complete. What he wanted and what Jesus offered are impossible by human means or stratagem. Jesus said so (19:25). However, it is possible "with God" (v.26). God's availability to the young man—and to Jesus's disciples and to readers of all epochs— offers a more consistent and complete life experience. However, to accomplish this, Jesus invites him to trade: human purchasing power for divine power, commodity for

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community, and disconnection for discipleship, for "it is the *telos* which proves the *archê*."[115] By refusing to follow Jesus and pursue the good he chose evil, for "whoever is not with [Jesus] is against [Jesus]" (12:30).[116]

The analyses suggest that Jesus's teaching on salvation in Matt 19:16-29 does not support the presence of soteriological diversity, evident either as a dichotomous "promise of eternal life and the call to discipleship" with a distinct hierarchy for Christians, or "two ways to eternal life" for Jews. The rejection of soteriological diversity in the narrative and, ultimately, in first century Judea, and, by extension, twenty-first century western society, actualizes into a rejection of a return to a secularity 1 reading as a viable option for the social imaginary model.[117] There are substantive arguments in support of the claim that Jesus's statement in 19:21 carries broad applicability to the 'Jew first and also to the Greek,' even in the absence of a comprehensive examination of the disagreements on the question of the abrogation of the Law (5:17-48). In 19:21 the necessity for everyone to have faith in Jesus, to keep the commandments and live, is indicated. Therefore, the conclusion is that Jesus's invitation in 5:48 to everyone "on a mountain"

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[115] Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1995), 7.

[116] In this one finds allusions to a cosmic controversy motif. Mark Allan Powell agrees with this broad theme of the conflict between God and Satan ("The Plots and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 38, no. 2 [1992]: 187-204). See, also, Robert Charles Branden, *Satanic Conflict and the Plot of Matthew* (New York: Lang, 2006).

[117] Recall that Charles Taylor describes secularity 1 as prevailing within the context of dichotomous sacred-secular distinctions in vocations thought to be reflecting a divine hierarchy. The "butcher, baker and candlestick maker" in their "secular" vocations would be subject to different ethical requirements than the "priest" in his "sacred" vocation (Smith, *How (Not)*, 20-21; see Taylor *A Secular Age*, 265).

(5:1) to be "τέλειος" (5:48), is the goal for everyone who would follow.[118] Thus, in 19:21 Jesus does not present a superior level directive to the rich young man. What he offers is a commentary on 19:17 for the young man to understand the *intention* of the commandments and the nature of their praxis. While references to the kingdom were interpreted within the context of Jesus's fulfillment of OT typology and the concomitant "greater righteousness" and faith in Jesus, there is no evidence to suggest normative diversity for salvation.

Was the rich young man required to sell his possessions in order to be whole or to have eternal life? The rich young man's quest for 'savior' and meaning and fulness may be seen as a continual thread through history (see Chapter 2). From the earliest civilizations, through the earliest philosophers until now, humans have been preoccupied with a relentless search for meaning, happiness, guidance for the present life, and reassurance about the afterlife. The tension among the various ends, evident in first century Judea—and also present in twenty-first century Western societies—often leads to a narrow view of fullness and flourishing and a focus on 'many possessions' at the expense of everything else. The complementary analyses in this chapter suggest that what the rich young man needed to 'do' was to believe that God is indeed good (19:17) and that "with God all things are possible" (19:26). God is able to satisfy with eternal life *and* human flourishing (19:27- 29) even if he asks for one to "sell your possessions." In fact, it seems apparent that eternal life is embraced within the flourishing that God intends for humans. The analysis also points to the unity in Jesus's commands and to the inquirer's

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[118] Not restricted to an élite but to disciples in general. Not just the Twelve, but "the *crowds*" (7:28).

deficiency, disobedience to the call to discipleship, and rejection of true human flourishing.

God's wholistic view of flourishing for emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, financial—complete—well-being for everyone supersedes the bountifulness of any limited individual strategy for 'many possessions.' To access this benefit and flourish, humans are invited to accept the invitation to live in the world according to the way Jesus suggests, according to a reoriented conception of flourishing that "true human flourishing is found [even] in the midst of … persecution and suffering."[119] Certainly, this calls for an exercise in humility, for humans do not understand all the ways of God and must trust God's 'good'-ness and God's overall providential plan to prosper. In Pennington's words, true human flourishing is experienced only through "faithful, heart-deep, whole-person discipleship, following Jesus's teachings and life, which situate the disciple into God's community or kingdom."[120]

Although wealth was the decisive factor in the young man's (dis)obedience (v.22), one need not be concerned about wealth, per se, because while the details vary, each person is tempted to replace God with something which impedes full surrender. [121]

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[119] Pennington, *Sermon*, 159. Kaiser makes an interesting observation with regard to wisdom sayings and *eudaimonism*. Citing Prov 10:4, he notes that the "wise [person] was the one who observed a divine plan and order established in all things" (*Old Testament*, 179). Therefore, neither was "the goal nor the motive" to be considered "in the blessing and reward itself" and so "prosperity and blessing were not sought as ends in themselves" but everything—apparent outward inequities, adversity and affliction, as well as prosperity and material success—was to be experienced and interpreted within the context of God's divine providential and good plan (*Ibid.*).

[120] Pennington, *Sermon*, 14-15.

[121] There is substantial evidence to suggest that wealth presents a peculiar obstacle to discipleship and that Jesus directed many teachings towards the wealthy (see, for example, George Wesley Buchanan, "Jesus and the Upper Class," *Novum Testamentum* 7, no. 3 [1964]: 195-209). However, Jesus's encounter with the rich young man mirrors an encounter with each person—the challenge to acknowledge and to

Moreover, these challenges are not limited to the first century. In every age—and possibly even more so in twenty-first century modern social imaginaries—those who would have eternal life must seek the kingdom of God first (6:33) and choose between the narrow or the broad gate (7:13, 14) building on the rock or on the sand (7:24-27), confessing allegiance for or against Jesus (12:30). Those who wish to enter life in the kingdom will be willing to "love the Lord … God with all … heart and … soul and … mind … and … neighbor as [self] because it is on these that … all the Law and the Prophets [stand]" (22:37-40).[122] Those who would be τέλειος must acknowledge Jesus as "the authoritative interpreter of the Law … who lives in conformity to God's will and Law and who teaches others to do so as well."[123] "Following Jesus and obeying God's law … belong together,"[124] and both redound to true human flourishing. Accordingly, Pennington offers this exhortation to Christians, individual and corporate:

"sell" what hinders a fully-surrendered relationship. Any temptation to feel excluded by the lack of youthfulness and/or wealth should be disavowed by the recollection that the temptation to find security in an 'other' than God is ever present, even in the pride and self-assurance of '*makarios*-ness' in suffering.

[122] The tendency to a myopic focus on flourishing as *only* possessions (wealth), restricts the lesson in the story and emphasizes the misunderstanding of hierarchy or duality in 19:21. Where Jesus's invitation to "sell … come follow" is *also* understood as a principle (exemplified in this instance by possessions), then the analogue with 5:48 is strengthened and the application of the invitation to a general audience emerges more clearly.

[123] Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," 125-6.

[124] Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," 376.

We should cease thinking of spirituality and godliness as something that has nothing to do with human well-being and flourishing, including in a physical, *economic*, psychological, and relational sense. … Our theological reflections and their practical outworking must be to bring true human flourishing to individuals and society as a whole. … How precisely to go about promoting this human flourishing in society will always be a matter of debate among theologians, pastors, *economists*, psychologists, and politicians. But whether this is the mission of the Church should never be a question.[125]

Like Jesus's invitation, this appeal is to any "one" and therefore everyone who may or may not choose to accept.

In the wake of the increasing anthropocentric turn and the eclipse of God and the transcendent, particularly since the eighteenth century, this section has used the Matthean narrative of the rich young man to offer one solution to the question as to how theology might reconcile the seemingly unbridgeable cultural abyss between conceptions of human flourishing and the quest for salvation and, in so doing, has provided potential lessons for an optional reading of some secular ontic fundamentals.

Toward addressing two overlapping goals of this study—to describe, explore, and evaluate the complex concept of modern social imaginaries and to apply it to a theological vision for secular society—the next section summarizes, from the foregoing analyses in this chapter, a number of fruitful avenues for lessons toward methodological application in contemporary society.

Conceptual and Practical Redeployments

This section seeks to throw some light on potential lessons from the data from the exegetical and phenomenological analyses above that may be appropriate for practical

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[125] Pennington, "Biblical," 17; emphasis supplied.

application in theological method. Some general methodological lessons are discussed first, followed by four broad lessons that may also be inferred with regard to the rereading of variables from modern social imaginaries.

<div align="center">

Matthean Social Imaginaries and Christian
Theology: Methodological Issues
</div>

Panoramically, Jesus's 'teaching' in the narrative of the rich young man suggests some general methodological principles.

While it is arguable whether the Gospel *intends* to offer a hermeneutical didactic via rhetorical strategies of how Scripture ought to be read and interpreted, Jesus would consistently interpret his parabolic discourse and highlight lessons for the benefit of his disciples. Thus, Jesus interprets the enacted parable with the rich young man in Matt 19—a historical real-life event—to his disciples according to his custom. Lessons for methodological application may thus be inferred from Jesus's words and actions in the narrative. Identifying *how* Jesus interpreted his conversation with the rich young man to his observing disciples also suggests lessons for theological method. In general, Jesus's methodology appears grounded in historical reality, and thus presupposes the reality and existence of 'God' and the 'kingdom.'

Jesus's methodology also reflects sound hermeneutical principles. In the narrative of the rich young man, Matthew's Jesus exemplifies his characterization as the 'Teacher' via the literary forms and techniques identifiable in his didactic encounter with the young man (vv.16-22) and with his disciples (vv.23-29). Matthew's Jesus appears to employ deliberate language and human parallels to demonstrate divine realities, appealing to the sensibilities of his hearers and that which compels their quest, but moving further to the

grander and greater reality of the kingdom.[126] Within the traditions of what was

acceptable and understandable in the culture, Jesus's hearers seem to understand.

Evidently, one reason why theological overtures to the secular may be overlooked

is the absence of, or apparent insensitivity to, cultural factors by which people measure

the quality of their cultural and social experience. Frederick C. Grant suggests that Jesus

exploited the quest and deliverance tropes within the culture of his time.[127] If twenty-first

century disciples are to effectively mimic the method of the Master Teacher, then there

must be intentionality of purpose to utilize *every available niche* to be intellectually

appealing in responding to the specific needs of society while extending the horizons to

God's grand scheme in salvation history.

The analyses also suggest that Jesus's method and teachings had implications for

people beyond the immediate audience. However, is it reasonable that the audience(s) of

Matthew could be extended to the twenty-first century? A few indicative scholarly

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[126] In contemporary terms, within this enacted parable, Matthew's Jesus utilizes the following elements of narrative patterns: repetition (vv.23-24), hyperbole (vv. 24, 29), aphorism (v.26), indicative formula (vv.23, 28), and *inclusio* (v.16 and v.29). Sensitive to his audience, Jesus uses words like "sell," "possessions," and "treasure" (v.21) to connect with the man's focus on wealth and human flourishing.

[127] Grant, *Economic Background*. Appearing in 'the fullness of time,' Jesus was aware of his mission and of the people's belief (hope), and the attendant challenges. Against this background, Jesus appealed to those sorely oppressed for generations, those inflicted with poverty and starvation, those alienated in an incomprehensible, uncontrollable, and uncertain world, those facing the paradox of an unbearable life and the fear of death, and those suffering from loneliness in the crowd of increasing cosmopolitanism. In excess of their hopes, Jesus offered salvation from sin (Matt 1:21), not for a nebulous 'nation' but for individuals who had become depersonalized and lost in the nation. Jesus satisfied those who wanted a personal faith more intellectually appealing, those hungering for security (in the present life and in the hereafter), for rich and poor, Jew and non-Jew, civilian and statesman (Cf. Gal 3:28). Certainly, Jesus offered a kingdom—what the people sought—where freedom, plenty, and deliverance was the ethos, and which exceeded the expectations of the quest for economic, political, or social reform. "The solution which He found was … a triumphant and universal, because primarily spiritual, Kingdom of God" (*Ibid*., 141). For Grant, Jesus counsels "[n]othing short of a complete revision of human standards" and with it "the whole-hearted adoption of the new principles of living which He expounded and exemplified" (*Ibid*., 13).

responses are instructive. Cedric Vine argues that the "inadequate" but dominant "local audience scenarios" for Matthew have supporting arguments that are "hermeneutically ambiguous" and concludes that "we cannot currently determine the audience of the Gospel."[128] Richard Bauckham argues "for the likelihood that Gospels would have been written for general circulation," though he emphasizes Christians.[129] Stephen Barton's perspective is that "the Gospels themselves do not allow us to identify, beyond a high level of generality, the audiences for which they were written."[130] On Barton's view, while "the quest for the Gospel *audiences*" is a legitimate and "important act of the historical and social-scientific imagination" it "would be a serious mistake" if this "tempted us to reduce the Gospel texts from their role as primary witnesses to God-in-Christ," especially if "we foreclose prematurely on the possibility that the Gospels are open texts intended, not only for audiences of believers, but for audiences of unbelievers as well."[131] Following the example of Jesus on contextualization, then, the next section utilizes a human flourishing motif to extract lessons from the rich young man narrative and the Sermon. These are further developed and applied in Chapter 5.

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[128] Cedric E. W. Vine, *The Audience of Matthew: An Appraisal of the Local Audience Thesis* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 1, back cover.

[129] Richard Bauckham, ed., "For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 30.

[130] Stephen C. Barton, "Can we Identify the Gospel Audiences?" in Bauckham, *Gospels*, 193.

[131] *Ibid.*, 194; emphasis original.

<center>Matthew's Image of 'True'[132] Human Flourishing
Invites a Particular Philosophy</center>

'True' human flourishing, of the type suggested from the narrative discussion

above, is coherent with God's nature and providence. If Jesus's promised rewards to the

young man and to the disciples are to be credible, then they must also be free from

tensions or conflicts with God's nature (ontology), or capability, or will, or with other

'divine' goals. 'True' human flourishing emerges from one's way of being in the world

and, based on Jesus's discussion, it appears to derive from the same source as to be

"saved" but without competition. There is no apparent tension in Scripture between 'true'

human flourishing and salvation or other "goals beyond" as evident in Taylor's story.[133]

<center>Matthew's Image of 'True' Human Flourishing
Invites a Particular Anthropology</center>

'True' human flourishing implicit in the rich young man narrative invites a

particular anthropology and associated teleology that is exponentially greater than

economic flourishing. Human flourishing in economic terms only is partial, and

incomparable with the quality and quantity of human flourishing that Jesus offers (19:21,

28-29). A broad 'historicity' sweep in Jesus's purview peppers the promise-rewards

utterances and, importantly, points to the extent of flourishing from the divine

perspective. Beyond connecting one era to the next, and one Testament to the next,

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[132] There are evident problems with the use of "true." However, "true" is used here to reflect its use by both Pennington and Taylor as antithesis of, or complement to, "ordinary" human flourishing. Taylor speaks of "ordinary human flourishing," "'true' flourishing," and "fuller flourishing" (*A Secular Age,* 17).

[133] Taylor speaks about "aspiration to some higher good than flourishing" such as "salvation, or eternal life, or Nirvana" (*Ibid*., 439).

Jesus's use of OT-type conditional language, and delineation of rewards within an eschatological kingdom framework, carries strong implications of a cosmic worldview— the grand providential design—expressed in a continuing flow of history of a divine tapestry from creation to eschaton. Such a breadth of promises, blessings, and rewards is, undoubtedly, greater than the economic. Moreover, economic flourishing does not emerge as contingent on superior economic activities. The reading in the narrative appears to promise flourishing—including economic flourishing—even in the *absence* of economic activities: Jesus promised the rich young man that he would have "treasure" after he would have sold all his possessions. Evidently, biblical flourishing is not contingent on current circumstances or outcomes.[134]

Matthew's Jesus suggests that humans are more than *homo economicus*. By its very nature, the philosophy of *homo economicus* implicit in modern social imaginaries imagines a human nature of pure rationality which ignores or devalues other aspects of what it means to be human.[135] By explicit and implicit emphasis on the human-divine connection, Jesus suggests an anthropology that is best understood vis-à-vis God.

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[134] Hence, a perceived 'negative' result is not equivalent to the absence of human flourishing. The magnanimity of biblical flourishing is such that the mitigation, or absence, of economic flourishing is not tantamount to the absence of flourishing. Allusions of a juxtaposition with theodicy appear, but exceed the scope of this work.

[135] For a sample discussion of anthropology and economic models see, for example, D. Glenn Butner Jr., "Transformative Models: Economic Modeling, Relational Ontology, and the Image of God,"*Journal of Markets and Morality* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 368-70.

Matthew's Image of 'True' Human Flourishing
Invites a Particular Sociology

'True' human flourishing occurs in relationship with God. Absent the necessary relationship with God, any apparent flourishing is, at best, "derivative and temporary."[136] Furthermore, it is only in relationship that humans can truly appreciate the—sometimes apparently conflicting—nature of human flourishing.

Jesus's imperative for the young man to "sell" and "give to the poor" (19:21) is strongly suggestive of a communal dimension to the existential context (social imaginary). Moreover, Jesus consistently projects flourishing as part of an eternal plan, and entrance into the 'kingdom' community as life's most important normative goal (19:23-24), indicating the kingdom's interplay with the quest for salvation and, ultimately, its context as the locus for the fullest expression and actualization of human flourishing. Jesus makes no attempt to explain what he means by "the kingdom," per se, but the disciples demonstrate their understanding, by retorting with the term "saved" (19:25). As J. Andrew Overman notes, that "[Matt] 5-7 is instruction intended for community is evidenced by the high concentration of the term 'brother' in this section" and "the purpose of the Sermon [is] a means of communal instruction and guidance."[137]

Within the context of an apparent reversal theme where "then" becomes a context for "now" (19:28-29; cf. v.21), Jesus's eschatology and invitation to the kingdom implies judgment: when "the twelve tribes of Israel" will be assessed in terms of their

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[136] Pennington, *Sermon*, 295.

[137] J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 210-11.

qualification to receive the promised rewards based on choices of the present which find

their meaning, fulfillment, and reward in having regard for the future. Like Jesus's talk

on "the mountain," the "twelve tribes of Israel" (v.28) implies an appeal to a large

audience to whom the (favored) rewards are available by choice. The authoritative Jesus

exhibits foreknowledge, and makes prophetic utterances (v.29; cf. v.21). He interprets

temporal as well as eternal implications—the present and future benefits for those who

are willing to make the investment now and follow him. Jesus does not 'spiritualize

away' the lessons. He does not ignore or rebuke the disciple's question about reward

(v.27) as a distraction from the 'real spiritual' issue. Jesus utilizes the opportunity, and

the question, to emphasize the rewards that accrue to those who follow him (vv.28-29).[138]

Matthew's Image of 'True' Human Flourishing
Invites a Particular Theology

'True' human flourishing, with its reoriented understanding of reality, humanity,

and social relations, occurs even within the context of what might be considered

'negative' experiences because of a reoriented theology. Jesus's reassuring aphorism in

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[138] In contemporary practice, an investor must literally place wealth in the hands of others and allow some autonomy to those others to manage the funds while expecting that the rewards will accumulate as promised and be available in the future. However, stock market and real estate crashes, bank failures and Ponzi schemes, and scams of various types that promise high yields but yield only promises have become commonplace in recent years. These are exemplary investment failures. (See, for example, Jenifer A. Daley, *Bank Failure in Developing Countries: Lessons from Jamaica* [Kingston, Jamaica: Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, 2007]). In Financial Analysis, risk and returns are correlated: high returns are usually accompanied by high risk of loss. Jesus promises returns that are not only incommensurately higher than the initial investment but which are also guaranteed and therefore risk-free. His promise excels above every other investment an individual could possibly make. In the past, treasury bills (loans to governments) were considered to be risk-free as government payments were considered as guaranteed. With the recent default by several governments, treasury bills are no longer perceived as risk-free (no risk-free investments are identifiable) (http://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0811/are-u.s.-bonds-really-risk-free.aspx?header_alt=true [accessed October 19, 2015]). In contrast, any follower of Jesus who 'invests' more in the kingdom should confidently expect disproportionately more in return.

19:26 highlights humanity's powerlessness while (re)affirming and (re)emphasizing God's saving power and will. Evidently, only God can produce results to truly satisfy the human quest—not individual effort. Jesus also affirms the ethical standard of the Torah and points to it as the way to God, pointing the way of life. Further, the covenant-kingdom promise-reward link that Jesus establishes, promotes God as the author of salvation [flourishing] (vv.17, 26), grounded upon certain knowledge of God's capability (v.26), God's character as good (v.17), and God as promise-keeper (v.29). God not only desires human flourishing but is available to the human experience (immanent) in order to provide it.

Evidently, human flourishing encompasses the whole life—"'social and material as well as moral and spiritual, temporal as well as eternal'"[139]—so that what is necessary from a theological perspective is a balance that "integrates the primacy of the spiritual reality with real-life engagement in the world."[140]

<div align="center">A Way Forward</div>

In a way, Pennington's model of human flourishing offers a set of lenses through which one may understand the context of the Gospel of Matthew that is not antithetical to social imaginary that Taylor offers for understanding contemporary society. Indeed, by positing the creation of a "'moral imagination' for a way of being in the world that

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[139] Stephen J. Pope, "Jesus Christ and Human Flourishing: An Incarnational Perspective," (paper presented at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture), quoted in Pennington, *Sermon*, 310.

[140] Pennington, *Sermon*, 310. How this balance is addressed is part of the focus of the following chapter. Indeed, the stage has already been set by the favorable indications from the fresh readings from the Bible in this chapter.

promises true human flourishing"[141] from the combined themes of *makarios*, *teleios*,

δικαιοσύνη, μισθὸς/θησαυρος/ἀπόδιδωμαι and others, Pennington analogizes Taylor's

modern social imaginaries as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social

surroundings,"[142] with human flourishing as the normative end.

Ultimately, the analyses in this dissertation presuppose that the Gospel stories are

written "with a dual focus: they report what happened *there* and why it is important *here*,

what happened *then* and why it is important *now*."[143] The larger point is that to the extent

that human flourishing can, with responsible biblical hermeneutics, be identified and be

considered as sharing the features indicated, then methodological possibilities appear for

its collaboration with biblical theological method for the present epoch. Nevertheless, a

very important *caveat* is warranted. Notwithstanding the recognition of the pivotal role of

human flourishing in social imaginaries, the role is limited to a fissure to turn the focus to

the transcendent—not to yield to "the temptation to morph into 'prosperity [religion]'"

and turn "transcendence into a means of affirming the world"—and, thus, to avoid

"malfunction" of religion in relation to the social order.[144] Ultimately, by using human

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[141] *Ibid.*, 290.

[142] Taylor, *Modern*, 23.

[143] Powell, *Introducing*, 45; emphasis original.

[144] Volf, *Flourishing*, 88, 76-7. Volf discusses "'the prosperity gospel' promise" in two ways: that "God will empower people so they can make themselves prosperous," and, also, that God will "hand over the wealth of the wicked to them" (*Ibid.*, 89). He notes that despite acknowledged historical (and contemporaneous) linkages between economics and religion/theology, it is "not entirely clear what role Christian faith played in the emergence of a capitalist economy" (*Ibid.*, 88). However, Volf believes that any "boost" that the Christian faith [Protestant ethic] may have given "to the capitalist economy" would have "occurred in the framework of the primacy of transcendent goals" unlike current temptations "to turn religion into a maidservant of the economy" which link religion "tightly to ordinary flourishing" and "without situating these ends within a broader account of human flourishing" (*Ibid.*, 88, 89, 90).

flourishing in this way, the intent is to "foreground and pursue the questions of the character of [a] truly flourishing life and of [what should be] the ultimate goal of all our desires and loves."[145]

There is perhaps no facile progression from identifying significant methodological patterns in Jesus's teaching in the pericope to their efficacious contextualization across chronological contexts. The following chapter builds on these central themes of human flourishing and reoriented PAST variables (philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and theological) identified in this chapter toward crafting a methodological model for engaging the secular.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has reported the results of two biblical explorations toward responding to the proposal for a fresh reading of fundamental ontic components from the model of modern social imaginaries. Accordingly, the explorations have focused on identifying biblical data for the model based on the relationship between Scripture and imagination, and between economics (as human flourishing) and Scripture. The Sermon on the Mount was utilized in two main ways in this chapter: to explore the positive instrumentality of imagination, and, because of rhetorical—and subsequent teleological—analogies identified, as hermeneutical key for the narrative of the rich young man.

The selective engagement with the Sermon on the Mount and imagination suggests that a surrendered imagination in continual transformation by the Holy Spirit and Scripture—avoiding extreme positions via denunciation as irreversibly immoral or by

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[145] *Ibid.*, 90.

unquestioning embrace—appears indispensable in theological method. Thus, identified advantages of social imaginaries, as constitutive of imagination, may be cautiously optimized. Not only does the Sermon highlight positive potentialities of imagination but it also transforms into a powerful hermeneutic for interpreting the narrative of the rich young man. Using the Sermon, the analysis produced two major conclusions: first, the rejection of soteriological diversity in the narrative and, secondly, that the call to embrace human flourishing as a biblical ideal is, in principle, divinely and providentially intentional for every 'one.' The Sermon "is at the epicenter and, simultaneously, the forefront of … Scripture's answer" to the enduring question as to how humans can experience flourishing now and forever.[146] Every 'one' benefits to the extent of the choice to follow on what each has been called to do as both recipient and channel of wholistic flourishing.

Scripture also seems to suggest that its promises and principles are not restricted to the past but are also applicable to those "on whom the ends of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Therefore, contextualization of the promises and principles of Scripture might also be justified based on built-in mechanisms in Scripture itself, as well as an apparent analogicity of ancient and modern social imaginaries. The biblical reading therefore suggests lessons for contemporary extrapolation evident in certain understandings of the PAST variables. Importantly, and unsurprisingly, the secularity 3 understanding of human flourishing is more limited than the way in which human flourishing is read from Scripture. Scripture seems to suggest several dimensions to

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[146] Pennington, *Sermon*, 14.

God's plan for human flourishing and economic flourishing does not emerge as a superior element. Nevertheless, the biblical lessons and data appear valid and reliable for a rereading of the secular model in such a way that it might be philosophically, phenomenologically, and linguistically palatable to secularity 3 imaginaries.

Ultimately, the methodological themes identified in this chapter imply two overarching key concerns for multidimensionality in theological method: first, *explicit* sensitivity to, and inclusion of, human telos generally, and also specifically as human flourishing. Second, the need for Scripture because, as the narrative of the rich young man suggests, the wholistic flourishing that the Bible articulates exceeds the flourishing that is imagined by secularists but the biblical articulation does not appear (at least ostensibly) to carry similar problematic incoherencies and inconsistencies.[147]

Details of the precise application of the findings of this chapter are addressed in the following chapter in the model proposed by this study, as the dissertation moves toward providing partial and tentative responses to some of the questions and respond to some of the issues raised in this and previous chapters.

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[147] While superficially this lean summary apparently excludes concerns about God and divine providence, inter alia, noted in various stages of the analysis, these concepts are inextricably linked such that, as in a bouquet, the understanding of one influences, and is influenced by, the other.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARD A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL

FOR ENGAGING THE SECULAR

Introduction and Background

A number of issues raised in this dissertation suggest that contemporary secularity

3 demands paradigm shifts in theological method and underscore the need for a

multidimensional approach to doing theology.[1] The biblical analyses in Chapter 4 suggest

that if the objective of secularists is maximal human flourishing, then there is also need

for reorientation of certain ontic variables (PAST—philosophy, anthropology, sociology,

theology) which have been subject to paradigmatic shifts in secularity 3 because of an

imagined misalignment with the telos of economic human flourishing and because of "the

need to make God more fully present in everyday life and all its contexts"[2] (Chapter 3).

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[1] A multidimensional model is one that is explicitly comprised of embedded sub-models. The model in this study is comprised of three dimensions: secular, canonical, and stewardship. Ingolf U. Dalferth, for example, supports a change in how theology is done. He posits that "Christian theology must learn to relate in more differentiated ways to contemporary society than it normally does" ("Post-Secular Society," 337). James H. Kroeger suggests that "[b]ecause all reality is multi-dimensional, employing a variety of forms (models) enables greater focus and specificity" and notes that "many theologians are convinced of their relevance within theological disciplines" ("The Theological Models Approach: Its Relevance Today," *African Ecclesial Review* 43, no. 3 [June 2001]: 89). Millard J. Erickson suggests that theological method should be sensitive to culture and suggests that in theology "a degree of eclecticism is both possible and desirable" (*Christian Theology*, 69).

[2] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 145.

Thus, Chapter 4 recommends a canonical rereading of these fundamental secular variables for redeployment through social imaginaries toward secular engagement.

This chapter moves to address the rereading suggested in Chapter 4, toward responding to the problem of the need for a multidimensional model that addresses critical elements of social imaginaries, particularly the economic. It proposes an alternative to the 'conventional' approach to theological method by way of explicit multidimensionality. The goal of this chapter is to pull together several themes and to offer theoretical assertions that are rooted in human flourishing to serve as provisional guidelines as to how Christian theology might engender secular engagement and, thus, to construct a multidimensional model toward engagement in secularity 3. The chapter delineates how the proposed model is constructed based on progressive redeployment of the arguments and findings of preceding chapters and, ultimately, sketches critical elements of a three-dimensional model toward secular engagement: secular, canonical, and stewardship. The model is deliberately conceptual to facilitate flexibility.

The model is informed by the discussion of imagination, social imaginary, and theological imagination (Chapter 2), and rearticulates lessons garnered from the biblical analyses of human flourishing and PAST (Chapter 4) to reread and complement Taylor's articulation of secularity 3 (Chapter 3). The rereading is extended to include οἰκονόμος—the Greek root of 'economics' (see Chapters 1 & 2)—as used in Scripture, because of the centrality of economics to human flourishing and modern social imaginaries. The rereading illustrates how οἰκονόμος emerges as a powerful and dynamic dimension to the model.

The remainder of chapter is organized as follows: toward instrumentalizing social imaginaries in theological method, the next section offers a response to potential questions about extrapolating lessons from first to twenty-first century social imaginaries. That is to say, it seeks to do two things: first, it seeks to address the applicability of lessons across cultural epochs. Second, it seeks to further address the compatibility of social imaginary and Scripture given tensions between theology and imagination, which is inherent in social imaginary. Three sections follow that progressively lay the groundwork for each subsequent section in building the model: the biblical rereading of basic presuppositional secular variables, outlining each of the three dimensions and sketching the model, and summarizing a 4-S Multidimensional Model in conceptual form (named Secular-*sola Scriptura*-Stewardship). Some concluding remarks close the chapter.

Making Sense of sola Scriptura in Secular Engagement

Chapter 4 suggests that the lessons from Jesus's method and teachings in Matthew may legitimately be applied to a larger audience than the rich young man and Jesus's disciples. However, is it reasonable to affirm that that potential for theistic extrapolation extends to secularists 3?[3] Because the utility of the model as a whole is contingent on the

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[3] Despite this study's canonical stance, it is worth noting that, while historically there was tacit agreement on the biblical canon as *the* source of revealed truth and theological data, such an assumption in contemporary society is viewed as naïve at best. There exists a multiplicity of data sources for theology—Scripture, philosophy, reason, tradition, science, experience of various kinds (including gender, anthropological and economic data)—and with each variously defined and occupying a lesser or greater degree of significance within the theological matrix of different traditions. (For a discussion on these issues, see, for example, Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* [Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2005]). In fact, Scripture has, apparently, been displaced. According to Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten, biblical data as the source of theology can no longer be taken for granted. "Today we encounter everywhere the triumph of the category

feasibility to redeploy lessons from first to twenty-first century social imaginaries, this

section addresses the question of the compatibility of the 'biblical' and secular epochs,

and of secularity 3 with the Scripture only principle—*sola Scriptura*. It does this by

moving in two directions before moving to employ social imaginary as part of the

synthetic model that this study proposes: First, it identifies and articulates thematic

parallels between Greco-Roman social imaginaries (Chapters 2 & 4)—as proxy for the

biblical context—and modern social imaginaries (Chapter 3)—as proxy for the secular

context—to support the proposed secular-canonical collaboration. Second, it seeks to

address potential concerns remaining about imagination by illustrating its positive

hermeneutical use with Scripture via the Great Commission.

Engaging the Secular: Social Imaginary in Prospect

This section presents a broad-based comparison of selected parallels between four

cogent features of Greco-Roman and modern social imaginaries toward the prospective

application of secular social imaginaries in biblical theological method to the secular.

First, it is clear that the context in which the rich young man lived and in which

the "Teacher" taught (Greco-Roman imaginaries—Chapters 2 & 4) bears similarities to

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of experience in theology … As with Schleiermacher, only those contents of the Christian faith that
emanate from one's own religious experience and conform to today's culture-religion are acceptable. The
rest is jettisoned" ("Scripture, Church and Dogma: An Essay on Theological Method," *Interpretation* 50,
no. 2 [1996]: 142). Avery Dulles notes that the "concept of revelation as a permanently valid body of truths
communicated by God in biblical times, preserved and commented on by the Church, is still accepted by
many Christians, but is widely questioned in the twentieth century" (*Models of Revelation*, 2nd ed.
[Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992], 6). Dulles cites "philosophical agnosticism" (whether human
capacity reaches beyond "the phenomena of worldly experience") and the "modern epistemology" (which
undermines revealed versus experiential knowledge) among contemporary problems with revelation (*Ibid.*)

secular 3 imaginaries (Chapter 3): Undoubtedly, there is a striking similarity in the centrality and constancy of human flourishing.

Second, there are striking analogies in the social *milieux*. The story of modern social imaginaries is redolent with the pluralism, complexity, uncertainty, and quest analogous to Greco-Roman society's Roman political rule, dominant Greek language, culture and philosophy, and strong underlying linkages to a Jewish heritage.

Third, in both first and twenty-first century imaginaries, inextricable, but broad, linkages may be identified between 'economics' and religion with each influencing how the other is understood. Interestingly, in both cases, 'economics' appears to have enjoyed dominance by influencing whether, and how, religion is embraced and practiced.

Fourth, and closely related to the above, Taylor's thesis of a tension between secularity 3 and belief in the context of the dominant mood of modern social imaginaries is also plausible in the first century. Taylor notes that the lived experience of *believers* is different in secularity 3—*how* believers believe is different because the background has shifted.[4] The rich young man's quest for salvation in Greco-Roman society also appears to have been constrained by a belief about possessions.[5] Even the followers of the Messiah—those disciples who voluntarily left all to follow him—appear to have been motivated by material rewards.[6] Simultaneously, and despite the pervasiveness of

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[4] See, for example, *Ibid.*, 13-14.

[5] As noted in Chapter 4, the rich young man is likely to have been influenced by the general belief in the social imaginaries that wealth was to be interpreted as blessing from God. To be asked to 'sell' one's wealth to have eternal life (with God) would create a tension with this belief.

[6] This motivation was evident in Peter's question in Matt 19:27. Further, the broader context of Jesus's passion predictions to his disciples often went ununderstood consequent on their hopes for political deliverance and earthly sovereignty and they were slow to accept a suffering servant Messiah (for example,

Hellenism,[7] Grant Osborne cautions against inferences that "the Jewish people Hellenized their religion" and argues, instead, that the Hellenistic influence evident "on a cultural and linguistic level" did not weaken Jewish faithfulness to "their God and *their distinctive way of life*."[8] Correspondingly, Osborne notes that although the "economic influence was very well defined … diasporate Judaism as a whole stressed its separateness," and his observation that Philo's contextualization "sought to show that Judaism was palatable with Hellenistic philosophy"[9] suggests a possible response to Taylor's similar articulation of the co-existence of belief and unbelief in secularity 3.

This brief reflection on ancient Greco-Roman and modern social imaginaries suggests the longevity of the human quest for 'salvation' in *this* world. The ancient expectation of a Messiah with socio-political, socio-economic, and sociological aspirations and capabilities was held by even those closest to the Messiah-Man, the Twelve, who were sometimes chided for their failure to understand the real mission of the Messiah (see, for example, Matt 17:20). Apparently, anthropocentric misalignment prevailed long before modernity and, that there is an apparent intensification since then, may be contingent on the effects of previous occurrences. This important inference

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Matt 16:21ff). Belief in a creator God whose death and sacrifice guarantees human salvation from sin, who was evidently present (immanent) but also transcendent (see Chapter 4 and below), whose call to a new life demands a new moral, ethical, and social order but who guarantees human flourishing—alternatively understood—was difficult, unlikely, and going against the social grain.

[7] See Hengel's thesis mentioned in Chapter 4.

[8] Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 412; emphasis supplied. Indeed, Kinney asserts that although *Jewish* may refer to ethnicity, culture or ideology of ancient societies, "what holds the idea of *Judaism* together is the religious element" (*Hellenistic*, 27; emphasis original).

[9] Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 412-13.

mitigates potential objections of anachronism in this study's (re)articulation of potential

lessons from the Greco-Roman context in contemporary theology and method.[10]

Simultaneously, Osborne's point about the tenacity of the Jews in maintaining a

"distinctive way of life" is an invaluable lesson, and conveys significant implications for

twenty-first century Christian believers. In fact, Osborne cites the Greco-Roman period

as a prime example of ancient contextualization that might provide guidelines adaptable

by contemporary theology. He notes that the Torah "did not readily apply to the

cosmopolitan culture of the Greco-Roman period" and, thus, "the Jews developed an

'oral Torah' to contextualize the laws for the new situation."[11]

The foregoing discussion indicates the similarities between the character of the

social imaginaries in which attempts were first made to obey the Great Commission

(Matt 28:19-20), and those in which it must contemporaneously be obeyed. Because this

study's proposal to instrumentalize social imaginary involves, *ipso facto*, an appeal to,

imagination, the next section illustrates positive imagination in the Great Commission as

part of reorienting perspectives toward imagination and theology.

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[10] Both societies seem to mirror each other in fundamental ways. If the above analysis is plausible, then contemporary western society presents no new challenge to those who would share the gospel message. (Does the literal presence of a man claiming to be God strengthen or sabotage impulses to belief?). Evidently, enabling resources are available in the example of the Messiah in Scripture. What was his method and how might these be rearticulated in twenty-first century society? Should the same challenges be anticipated? Should the same results be expected? How might the answers to these questions consciously or unconsciously influence attitudes, methods, and attempts toward secular engagement?

[11] Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 412. This has an important bearing on the stewardship dimension emphasized in this study (see below).

Engaging the Secular: Imagination in Prospect

In the summary of imagination in retrospect (Chapter 2), alternative positive and negative perspectives of imagination with respect to theology were outlined. Chapter 4 illustrates positive imagination via the Sermon before applying it in the analyses. In this section, the positive role is revisited as a prelude to the application of imagination (via social imaginaries) in sketching a multidimensional model toward secular engagement.

Theology's engagement with culture seems to require imagination. The Great Commission has emerged as the Christian's clarion call and, simultaneously, as a remarkable example of "the usefulness and inescapability of imagination in theology."[12] By it, Jesus exhorts the 'called out' disciples to 'call' others by strategically utilizing lessons he taught them about living life with 'the kingdom' in view—a reoriented telos (Chapter 4). The passage implies the possibility of a reality other than that which was present or apparent. What Walter Brueggemann calls "regime imagination" allows for the imagination, and ultimate realization, of alternative 'regimes' and makes possible the presumption of a 'regime' that is more adequate and true to the kind of flourishing to which Scripture alludes. [13]

Therefore, it is possible to imagine in the Great Commission passage that Jesus implies at least seven potentialities. First, that new disciples will be found 'outside' the

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[12] Law, "Theological Imagination," 285.

[13] Walter Brueggemann, "Prophetic Imagination toward Social Flourishing," in Higton, Law, and Rowland, *Essays*, 24. Indeed, Brueggemann notes that "prophetic oracles of promise imagine a social reality in which there can be *social* flourishing and that "where there is no such promissory imagination, *social* flourishing is all but impossible" (*Ibid.*; emphasis supplied). The emphasis on *social* flourishing is noteworthy. Brueggemann utilizes the OT book of Micah to demonstrate that "in the promise of God … the potential … is not confined to the scope of dominant imagination … it is rather characterized by a new resolve on God's part" to actualize a new environment (*Ibid.*, 25).

group, for whom the current ones should "go." Second, that outside the group are people who are teachable and who need to be taught: making new disciples is possible. Third, that new disciples will come from "all nations": a diverse intake. Fourth, that "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" was recognizable as real being who, somehow, plays a pivotal role in the change experience of the newcomer disciples. Fifth, that it is possible to obey the commandments. Sixth, that the present "age" will end. Seventh, the constancy of his presence, and availability, to the disciples, as they make more disciples until the age comes to an end.

Matthew 28:19-20 therefore embodies a remarkable act of imagination with assurances of new events, results, and people, in contradistinction to that observed, given the then nascent stage of Christianity. The disciples—then and now—should imagine this potential for change and be inspired to act and evoke the 'contradictory' results that will, with Jesus's power, ultimately, erode the *status quo* and progressively introduce a new vision of human flourishing and a new way of being in the world (Chapter 4). According to Brueggemann, "the hard work of the imagination (that claims divine rootage and divine propulsion) is a fundamental precondition for a society that can flourish."[14] At the same time, he laments "[t]he sad reality of our contemporary society" because the most likely agents for change propelled by such imagination, "perhaps the university" and/or "the church … have largely succumbed to the dictates of acquisitiveness" that is characteristic of contemporary secular society with an ethos of economic flourishing.[15]

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[14] *Ibid.*, 28.

[15] *Ibid*.

As James K. A. Smith echoes in response to Charles Taylor's story: "[w]e're all secular now."[16]

Within this context, Christian theology arguably requires more imagination to inspire obedience so as to make disciples in contemporary secularity 3 contexts many centuries since the Commission was given. Evidently, modern social imaginaries are such that many in the West are presumed to be non-disciples, no explicit consideration is given to "the end of the age" or to the commandments, or Scripture is rejected or denied as the word of God. Ultimately, secularity 3 rejects the presumptions of the Great Commission in contexts dominated by human flourishing as the normative end of humans and measured in purely economic terms. Thus, the need for Christians to obey the Commission carries urgency and significance. Jesus's imperatives in the Great Commission may be said to reflect "a language of protest against the present. It is an expression of hope that things will be otherwise than they are."[17] Jesus's 'protest' and hope are illuminated when one imagines the outcomes implicit in the Commission. Hence, in the Commission, it is possible to see a critical impetus for positive imagination.

How, then, should the "called out" disciples—the church of the twenty-first century—execute the Great Commission bearing in mind that "[t]heology takes different forms according to the starting points, backgrounds, antecedent convictions, conceptual structures, concerns, and objectives of different groups of practitioners"?[18] If fulfilling

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[16] Smith, *How (Not)*, 28.

[17] Law, "Theological Imagination," 283. Positive imagination appears as a key motif in Jesus's teachings about the kingdom and elsewhere (as in the rich young man narrative discussed in Chapter 4).

[18] Avery Dulles, "Ecumenism and Theological Method," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (1980): 47. This is a stark reflection of the symbiotic nature of the cognitive principle of theology which is

the Commission can be properly summed up as doing Christian theology, then what, if

any, peculiar features attend Christian theology in secularity 3 given this study's

situatedness in the secularity 3 ethos of human flourishing? This consideration evokes

questions about theological method's explicit inclusion of human flourishing with ontic

variables defined by Scripture. How does the juxtaposition of these themes accord with

the intent to utilize *sola Scriptura* methodology in this study (Chapter 1)? Does an

engagement with social imagination imply an *overarching* allegorical approach to

Scripture? This dissertation explicitly denies that.

Based on the nature of the secular issues and the conditions influencing their

resolution, it appears efficacious for theology to adapt secular instruments to cross the

philosophical and ideological frontiers of the present epoch. By utilizing the advantages

of social imaginaries, theology might be better able to address the challenges the

contemporary context brings to the theological enterprise. With Walter Kasper, this study

proceeds on the basis that "[t]heology can tackle this situation only by taking a close look

at fundamentals again … Theology must take a new look at its methods."[19] Among some

Christians, the challenge seems to be the need for theological method that seeks to

maintain a high view of Scripture.[20] Accordingly, how should theology that is based on

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influenced by both the object of study and the bundle of a prioris of the theologian engaged in study. Critical to this cognitive principle, then, are the procedures utilized for understanding and articulating theological data in addition to defining the data per se.

[19] Walter Kasper, *The Methods of Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1969), 1.

[20] Steve W. Lemke outlines a high view of Scripture via several affirmations of a high view biblical inspiration: truth of all Scripture (2 Tim 3:16); presupposition of a confessional stance (hermeneutic of affirmation versus a hermeneutic of suspicion); mandate of "good hermeneutics"; resistance to imposing modern standards of truth [on] the author's purpose; acknowledgement of both the doctrine and phenomena of Scripture; and acknowledgement of inconsistencies in the phenomena of

sola Scriptura principles be constituted such that it is sensitive to the secularity 3 ethos of human flourishing and, simultaneously, to discrete groups within the church?

As indicated in Chapter 1, a tripartite harmonizing interpretive Scripture principle superintends this study: spiritual discernment with *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura*, canonical hermeneutics (hermeneutical exegesis and phenomenological exegesis), and a canonical goal (correspondence to the canon and internal coherence). Thus, the emphasis on the Bible as norming norm reorients the data from the *zeitgeist*, such that secular philosophy has significant direct, but controlled (as far as possible), influence on theological method. While the secular philosophy informs the focus on human flourishing and also some aspects of the analyses by the way in which the canonical data are articulated and redeployed, the secular data are reread from Scripture.[21] The rereading of secular fundamentals from Scripture must be understood against the backdrop of, and guided by, the integrative Scripture methodology and giving heed to "*targeted* epoché."[22]

Scripture ("The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2nd ed., ed. Bruce Corley, Grant Lovejoy, and Steve W. Lemke [Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2002], 176-93). On the other hand, Craig D. Allert argues from a community canon viewpoint that the implications surrounding the formation of the Bible affects the view of Scripture:

> Essentially what has happened is that the definition of a high view of Scripture has simply become synonymous with the verbal plenary doctrine of Scripture. And since evangelicals traditionally hold a high view of Scripture, all evangelicals are virtually locked into this view for fear of espousing the dreaded low view of Scripture … yet surely what the Bible *is* has much importance for what the Bible *says*, and a high view needs to take this into consideration (*A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007], 11).

[21] Although given primacy to drive the model, after the biblical rereading, the secular dominance is effectively "jettisoned once it gains the orbit of biblical understanding" (Alfred A. Glenn, "Criteria for Theological Models," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25, no. 3 [1972]: 299). See discussion of the rereading principle and results below.

[22] Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 248; emphasis original. By this he suggests reducing the effect of presuppositional filters as far as possible on interpretation of the text. See also Chapter 1 of this

The next section summarizes precisely how the Scripture principle is applied in the

rereading of human flourishing, and the PAST and other secular variables from

Scripture.[23]

<center>Engaging the Secular: Social Imaginary,
Imagination, and Scripture</center>

As indicated in Chapter 1, each of the five elements of the spiritual discernment

with *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura* hermeneutical framework is presumed to have a

unique role in understanding Scripture and, thus, it is important to understand each part

and its relation to the whole in the analysis of the canonical data and in the rereading of

the PAST and other variables. The deconstruction of the framework below is, thus,

deliberately indicative of the scriptural-secular 3 juxtaposition.

Spiritual Discernment for Secular Engagement

Spiritual discernment must be understood as the interface within which the entire

process of theology is couched and not as an appendage. Acknowledging that "spiritual

things are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:10-14), then, the Spirit is presumed to first

begin the process of transformation on the theologian and then, and continually, along

with the entire the process of model development. Sourcing and interpreting

information—both extra-canonical and canonical—and their subsequent juxtaposition in

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dissertation.

[23] As is often the case with theological constructs, the *sola Scriptura* principle may conjure a continuum of meanings. There are subtle but significant differences from one conception to another. For example, the perspective adopted in this project does not fully align with that of Protestant Reformer Martin Luther's because he effectively created a canon within the canon by, for example, his "marginalization of the book of James" (Gregory, *Unintended*, 89).

the process of contextualization, as well as the redeployment for doing theology in modern social imaginaries of secularity 3, are framed within a context of reliance on the Holy Spirit.[24]

Social Imaginary and Sola Scriptura

As noted in Chapter 1, *Sola Scriptura* literally means "by Scripture alone."[25] By rejecting *solo Scriptura*—where all extra-canonical sources are purposefully rejected[26]—'*sola*' normatively proposes that, as far as possible, extra-canonical secularity 3 sources given primacy to *drive* the model, and presuppositions utilized in constructing the model, are purposefully and consistently judged by the uniquely authoritative Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; John 17:17).[27] That the principle highlights the sufficiency of Scripture—"the Bible alone is sufficient in clarity so that no external source is required to rightly interpret it"[28]—should not be interpreted as the need for *explicit* biblical statements in Scripture about individual belief or praxis, such as human flourishing or philosophy.[29] Ultimately,

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[24] Not only is the Holy Spirit accorded primacy to provide discernment for strategy in general, but also to guide in terms of appropriate appeals to Scripture and also the interpretation of Scripture and the use of secondary exegetical and phenomenological hermeneutical data (John 14:26; 16:13).

[25] Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 353. Appealing to Isa 8:20, Davidson opts for "by the Bible and the Bible only" ("Interpreting Scripture," 2).

[26] On this, see discussion in Anthony N. S. Lane, "*Sola Scriptura*? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 297-328.

[27] See, for example, Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 411.

[28] Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture," 3. Puts it this way: "although the Bible is an authoritative source for the faith and practice of Christians, its authority does not operate in a vacuum" (N. Clayton Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011], xlv).

[29] On this, *sola Scriptura* does not negate the proper use of reason in the work of doing theology as

on this view, a reading of human flourishing, PAST variables, and οἰκονόμος that is faithful to responsible biblical hermeneutics would benefit from various sources, but all subject to Scripture, with the understanding that specific constructs—like human flourishing—may be an indirect inference. Utilizing social imaginary in theological method does not appear to refute *sola Scriptura*.

Social Imaginary and Prima Scriptura

Although modern social imaginaries of secularity 3 provide a primary *context*, and contextualization has a primary purview in directing the model development, positing *prima Scriptura*—"Scripture first" or "Scripture as the primary authority"[30]—suggests that a responsible reading of human flourishing, PAST variables, and οἰκονόμος from Scripture assumes primacy for Christian theology and method over secularity 3 or other alternative readings or sources of knowledge (cf. Matt 15:3; Col 2:8).

Social Imaginary and Tota Scriptura

The model development recognizes the role of the totality of Scripture and Scripture's 'self-validating qualities'[31] because *tota Scriptura*—literally 'all of Scripture'—relies on all of Scripture as a unified whole (2 Tim 3:16).[32] Thus, the

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a necessary tool for understanding and interpreting Scripture, but based on faith and subject to Scripture.

[30] Croy, *Prima Scriptura*, xlv. Croy suggests that "Scripture is to be evaluated" through "the lens of the person and work of Jesus Christ" (*Ibid*., 160). On this, note Hanna's very important emphasis that the "Bible defines the authority of the revelations of Christ, Scripture, and the cosmos" (*Cosmic Christ*, 45).

[31] See, for example, Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," 79-80.

[32] Cf. Neil Ormerod, who posits that although "all biblical texts may claim to be inspired, they do not therefore necessarily contain the same revelatory significance, though they may continue to be fruitful as religious texts ("What is the Task of Systematic Theology?," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 8, no. 1

conception of human flourishing, PAST variables, and οἰκονόμος espoused in the model

is, in principle, evident throughout the entire canon and provides the canonical stance.

Social Imaginary and Analogia Scriptura

Because the entire canon was not read or surveyed for the model, the analogy or

harmony of Scripture—*analogia Scriptura*—is very important, as it hangs on Scripture's

character as an inspired, infallible whole. Further, because Scripture is internally

coherent, any Scriptural text can, and should, be understood in the light of others.[33] For

example, in Pennington's model that is utilized to exegete human flourishing in Chapter

4, the use and meaning of the macarisms from Matt 5 derive from, and are directed by,

OT usage of the Hebraic *ʾashrê*. This principle of harmony works because the OT and the

NT share a reciprocally illuminating relationship (cf. Matt 5:17; John 5:39), although the

NT is tested by the OT (cf. Acts 17:11; Luke 24:25-27).[34] This understanding mitigates

apparent inconsistencies between conceptions of human flourishing between the

Testaments.

Scripture and Secular Engagement

Ultimately, the integrative methodological framework employed in this

dissertation makes possible a multidimensional approach such that extra-biblical modern

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[October 2006]: 6, http://aejt.com.au/2006/issue_8/?article=378662 [accessed August 9, 2017]). Thus Ormerod argues that the "theologian need not therefore take all biblical texts with the same degree of interest or seriousness" (*Ibid.*).

[33] Luke 24:27, 44, 45; John 10:35; 1 Cor 2:13. Cf. Deut 30:11-14; Isa 8:20; Luke 1:3-4; John 16:25, 29; John 20:31; Rom 10:17.

[34] See discussion in Chapter 4.

social imaginaries are not irreconcilably incompatible with *sola Scriptura*. In other words, recommendations for explicit sensitivity to the cultural ethos—human flourishing of modern social imaginaries—are facilitated by this dissertation's articulation of the Scripture principle for theological method.[35] With the foregoing discussion in mind, the remainder of this chapter presents a partial and tentative response to the need for theological method sensitive to secular imaginaries. This response includes explicit considerations about human flourishing according to the Spirit-guided principle of *sola-tota-prima-analogia Scriptura* outlined above, applied in the rereading of major concepts of modern social imaginaries.

Engaging the Secular: Rereading Modern Social Imaginaries

Before summarizing the proposed model, this section outlines a biblical rereading of some principal concepts of modern social imaginaries based on the inferences from the analyses in Chapter 4.[36]

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[35] A s*ola Scriptura* agenda is considered reasonable for Christian theology to pursue for secularity 3 because, as Lindbeck claims, "canonical texts are a condition, not only for the survival of a religion but for the very possibility of normative theological description" (*Nature of Doctrine*, 116). Richard A. Muller argues that if the "Reformation battle cry of *sola Scriptura* still echoes at the heart of Protestantism, then the interpretation of Scripture must be the foundation of our evaluation and use of the materials of historical and systematic theology" ("The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation," in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moises Silva [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 540).

[36] This section is not a defense of the origin, truthfulness or accuracy of Scripture, nor its inerrancy, inspiration or interpretation. It modestly seeks to identify, using the Scripture principle outlined, indicators to support the plausibility of the model of human flourishing inferred from Matthew's Gospel in Chapter 4 and, consequently, of the rereading of the PAST variables. From the perspective of Christian theology and theological method, these rereadings helpfully foster faithfulness to Scripture.

Ultimately, this chapter (and this dissertation) is about objective theology.[37] Thus, this study's theology is realist, aligned with the belief that "[i]ndividuals normally know the world pretty much as it is" and positing that people can have knowledge of God with some degree of assurance via divine revelation.[38] The rereading of secular variables in this section aims to follow careful and responsible hermeneutical practices along the lines outlined by the Scripture principle above. Aside from a fresh rereading, secularists may wish to consider the alternative rereading of the fundamental PAST and other concepts based deliberately on biblical referents in the light of inconsistencies and internal incoherencies identified in the secularity 3 model (Chapter 3), and in view of the goal of

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[37] Objective theologies might be contrasted with subjective theologies which purport to preclude the possibility of a knowledge of God consequent on Immanuel Kant's epistemological reformulations. On the subjective view, theology must therefore be grounded in reason alone. Such a predication might appear self-defeating but theologies that are mainly subjective are aligned with Immanuel Kant's belief that humans can only have knowledge of things as they appear and not what they are in themselves (the phenomena-noumena dichotomy). The history of Christian theology was markedly different before and after Immanuel Kant. Religion, for Kant, was restricted to practical reason—limited to ethics and morality and not dependent on metaphysics—and hence need not conflict with science: the fact-value dichotomy which has become "prevalent in modern Christian thought" (Olson, *Journey*, 89). As Norman R. Gulley notes, Kant's thesis is self-defeating: the very statement that we cannot know reality is a statement that presupposes knowledge about reality (*Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003]). However, this does not appear to have mitigated Kant's enduring effect on Christian theology. Although Kant emphasized special revelation as the only source of knowledge of God to the exclusion of reason or natural theology (Olson, *Journey*, 89-90), revelation (as with so many other Christian tenets) was redefined. Kant, however, was not the only mitigating influence on theology. In fact, it is arguable that Kant's own dualisms were responding to centuries-old dualisms: science and religion, faith and reason, Scripture and tradition. However, Kant's dualisms were definitive and denied humans any cognitive contact with God within the context of the Platonic-Aristotelian ontology. This led to a non-cognitive understanding of revelation and a progressive denial of the Bible as the word of God (subjective theology).

[38] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 20. Unlike subjective theologies which seek to respond to questions about God and humanity, *inter alia*, by appealing to the realm of humans (theology from below), objective theologies appeal to 'transcendent truth' (theology from above). Aside from the complexities of secularity 3, the issue of how to do theology—theological method— remains a vexed question in contemporary society because theology and its goal(s) have been conceived and defined in various ways within, across, and outside of, religious traditions. See, for example, Paul L. Allen, *Theological Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

maximal human flourishing noted (Chapter 4). In what follows, the rereading presumes

(with secularity 3) a telos of human flourishing, and then aligns, and systematizes, the

PAST variables and οἰκονόμος to this goal from a canonical perspective.

Human Flourishing

Human flourishing appears in the Sermon as *makarios* in Pennington's model that

was utilized in the analyses of the rich young man narrative (Chapter 4).[39] Pennington

asserts that "[t]he Bible is about human flourishing."[40] Although Scripture does not

explicitly mention the phrase 'human flourishing,' it explicitly states that God owns

every desirable treasure (Ps 50:10-12; Hag 2:8) and assures of God's willing intentions

toward human well-being, fulfilment, abundance, and, therefore, flourishing (Gen 32:9;

Jer 29:11; John 10:10).[41] Further, Scripture is replete with direct and indirect imagery of

God's desires, will, plan, and acts toward human flourishing, prosperity, and security—

all of which Taylor cites as the most important goals for secularity 3.[42] The following are

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[39] This Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *ʾashrê* is consistently found in LXX and also in the NT. Pennington notes that the consistent translation of *ʾashrê* into *makarios* in LXX is unusual and striking and therefore increases the level of confidence in interpreting *makarios* as communicating "the same *ʾashrê* idea of human flourishing and well-being" or "fullness of *earthly* life" ("Biblical," 9; emphasis supplied). Furthermore, he notes that in the Greco-Roman context of the first-century, *makarios* was often used synonymously with the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*; the latter has been cited by Hurka, for example, as the Greek philosophical foundation for human flourishing ("Three Faces of Flourishing," 44-71).

[40] Pennington, *Sermon*, 290. This is the primary thesis of Pennington's model of flourishing applied in the narrative of the rich young man. Pennington urges that if "God's goal in redemption is the restoration of our full humanity and our God-centered human flourishing, then there is no doubt that the mission of the Church—God's people on earth—should be the same" ("Biblical," 17; emphasis supplied).

[41] On Pennington's view that μακάριος is best translated as "flourishing," Scripture is peppered with references of "flourishing" in both the OT and the NT. In addition to those above, see, for example: Deut 33:29; Ps 1:1-3; Matt 5:3-11; Rom 4:8; 1 Tim 6:15; Jas 1:12.

[42] It might be assumed that Jesus's promise about abundant life (John 10:10) *included*, but was not limited to, security, productivity, and earthly human flourishing as philosophically or ideologically defined.

indicative: 'possessing land' (Exod 3:8; Deut 6:1, 11:10), 'multiply greatly' (Deut 6:3, 30:1-10 ; Matt 19:29; Luke 6:38), "milk and honey" (Deut 6:3; 11:9), "houses full of good things" (Deut 6:11), 'prosperity and success' (Josh 1:8; 1 Cor 16:2), 'will lack nothing' (Ps 23:1; Ps 84:11), 'joy following sorrow' (Ps 30:5), 'protection, strength, refreshing' (Isa 58), 'restoration, health, and healing' (Jer 33:1-9), 'coregency' (Matt 19:28; 2 Tim 2:12), and "eternal life" (Matt 19:29; John 3:16). Scripture thus attests to a divine promise of human flourishing as the telos of humanity, but the *nature and extent* of this biblical flourishing is otherwise, and more broadly, defined than it is in modern social imaginaries to encompass the entire human experience—to the glory of God.

Furthermore, Scripture suggests that true maximal human flourishing is to be understood as contingent on a relationship with God and with other humans (understood according to a responsible reading of Scripture as God's self-revelation to humanity).[43]

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[43] The conditional nature of God's promises for blessing reflects the covenantal/relational nature of the promises for blessings (for example, Deut 6; 11:8). Furthermore, in the Matthean narrative discussed earlier, Jesus cannot give the inquirer an answer as to how to 'flourish' apart from himself, for that would be antithetical to the nature of being. Arguably, many of the typical economics models, including "the basic demand curve, functioned as images" and were founded on a framework of assumptions about the nature and behavior of humans within a predefined context (see Butner, "Transformative Models," 357). Butner is correct: "Many economic models distort the human being by replacing properly theological means of relation and individuation for inadequate and incomplete alternative means of relation and individuation" (*Ibid*., 356). (What Butner means by 'individuation' is important but that is not critical in the immediate context). Butner argues that "[i]f the transition from script to electronic media can help to transform the *homo economicus* into the *homo socioeconomicus*, it seems plausible that a widespread acceptance of a particular economic model and corresponding transformation of economic interactions could also change human nature" (*Ibid*., 368). The thesis of this project in relation to this issue is that theology *qua* theology contributes significantly to economics by offering a clearer depiction of human nature. Nevertheless, it might be true that "[e]conomic models are an idealized representation of human beings based on a particular identical attribute shared between the model and the economic agent" (*Ibid*., 361); they therefore do not account for the effects of, or the proclivity to, sin or, alternatively, the magnificence of God's love to humans. In this regard, such models promote the modern omnicompetence of humans without acknowledging the work of the God via the *imago Dei* in the fulfillment of human destiny. For example, there is an interesting facet as to how Michel Callon imagines "performative economics" models as embracing theories that can "create the realities they describe" (*Ibid*., 359): a striking resemblance to social imaginaries as discussed above.

God's Law explicitly states in Deut 6 that a relationship of obedience to God is a prerequisite to prosperity. In this, God reassures the covenant people that the promise of flourishing is *guaranteed* only on the condition of their remaining in relationship with him (cf. Exod 19:3-5; Hos 14).[44] Existential experience exposes the inadequacy of an economistic reformulation of human telos even for secularists 3 because of what Taylor calls the 'pull to transcendence,' or the 'cross-pressures.' It might reasonably be assumed that the young man with "many possessions" (Matt 19:22) had a similar concern which explains why he was driven to ask: "what do I still lack?" (v.20).

As suggested in Chapter 4, a reoriented view of flourishing is contingent on a reoriented (and systematic) understanding of the PAST variables. Apparently, the rich young man's philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology, thwarted his opportunity to maximal flourishing. He did not seem to *truly* understand the God speaking with him, the offer made to him, that Jesus was interested in human flourishing and so much more (cf. John 10:10), that Jesus is the way to the life he sought, or that Jesus was not suggesting that flourishing and eternal life are mutually exclusive. Because Jesus makes both flourishing and eternal life possible, there is no conflict with Jesus's offer of flourishing and other 'eternal goals.' The tension Taylor highlights between "total transformation" and flourishing is surmountable by accepting Jesus's solution.[45] In

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[44] The impact of this guarantee to human flourishing is best understood against the background of covenant. Unlike a contract which requires all parties to 'perform' to secure its validity, OT covenant was contingent on the faithfulness and performance of the 'covenantor'—the one initiating the covenant and usually the 'superior party.' However, if the 'covenantee' should sever the relationship for any reason, then the covenant is automatically broken and that party relinquishes any potential rewards. On this view, the rich young man relinquished his rewards—a conclusion the analysis in Chapter 4 also supports.

[45] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 44-46.

the conversation with the disciples (Matt 19:23-29), Jesus explains that to sell everything

and follow him is an investment with a guaranteed return: 'one hundredfold' and eternal

life. It is also possible to infer a *guarantee* from the Sermon; μακάριος in the Beatitudes

seems to communicate a present-tensed joy based on profound acknowledgement of

future-tensed reward. Pennington posits that flourishing is now certain and guaranteed

"*because*" of the future expectation and the "unexpected claim of flourishing found in

each protasis [of each Beatitude] needs an explanation or else it makes no sense. The

apodosis of each Beatitude explains why the apparently paradoxical protasis is true and

not meaningless."[46]

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[46] Pennington, *Sermon*, 155. 156; emphasis original. From the perspective of benefits with economics or challenges with the biblical perspective, secularists might prefer an economic understanding of human flourishing despite the broader biblical understanding of human flourishing outlined. Challenges with the biblical understanding may be summarized in at least two major categories centering around images present in the OT tabernacle (Exod 25ff). Regarding the first category, it might be argued that the biblical account is not trustworthy because of its ambivalence regarding money. On the one hand, Scriptures assert that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10) and, on the other hand, in the instructions regarding the tabernacle, "The Lord" had commanded Moses that the people of Israel should "give a ransom … half a shekel … to make atonement" (Exod 30:11-16). Regarding the second category, the biblical account is, arguably, not trustworthy because of its ambivalence regarding iconoclasm. On the one hand, Scriptures forbid "graven images" (Exod 20:4) and, on the other hand, God commanded Moses that among the furniture of the tabernacle, he was to build an Ark and the covering was to have two golden cherubim mounted on it. Furthermore, this occurred in close chronology with Israel's incident with the Golden Calf. Both situations carried significant risk to temptation. Why did God use these 'forbidden' entities with deeply enigmatic characters in this most sacred place where he was purportedly demonstrating his love for, plan to save, and desire to dwell with, sinful humanity? Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Shocken Books, 2005), discusses these points. Indeed, the enigmatic quality of money is well demonstrated and, apparently, money always emerges as the *de facto telos* of humans. For example, Rapp explores ideals and realities of bishops in late antiquity and highlights increasingly stringent measures taken against bishops with regard to financial cupidity (*Holy Bishops*, 216-18). Space forbids a comprehensive response via a reprise of biblical hermeneutics beyond what has already been discussed, but this section offers some pointed responses on several points of special importance which adjudicate the issue in favor of a biblical understanding of flourishing. Fundamentally, a correct understanding of God's self-revelation (Scripture) begins with understanding the nature of God as a God of love (1 John 4:8) who is omnibenevolent and omniscient (see below). On this premise, Scripture exposes this love of God that is willing to take radical risks in order for humanity to understand and experience it. With the ransom money, God models to Israel the cost of redemption. The cherubim on the Ark served to enclose God's presence on the Day of Atonement. If the ultimate outcome was that the ransom money fueled heretical beliefs about the ability of humans to save themselves, and the golden cherubim restored memories of idol worship as people lost sight of the true message of salvation, "[w]hat shall we say then? Is the Law sin?" (Rom 7:7). On the contrary, this risk that

Philosophy

It may be said that minimal aspects of a biblical philosophy or social imaginary is

discernible from Jesus's commentary to the disciples in Matt 19:23-29 from three angles:

first, an epistemological foundation in the existence, presence, and authority of God;

second, the reality of God's work in history in temporal divine-human transactions; and

third, a general principle of reversal—that the present is best understood within the

context of the future—which requires a present perspective that is antithetical to the

'natural' way of being in the world (see Chapter 4). In Matthew 19, Jesus's speech-acts

manifest an overarching *modus operandi* of reversal. His language indicates that the

explicit reference to alternate contrasts: "with difficulty … easier" (vv.23-24), and

"impossible … possible" (v.26) and the allusion—by stylistic imitation—to then-now-

then (v.28), provides strong evidence of a deliberate rhetorical strategy to convey an

expectation of reversal. (See also "last … first … first … last" [v.30] that was not

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God was willing to take, demonstrates the extent of his great love for humanity. True love demands freedom. Irrespective of what symbols God would have chosen, it is possible—within the context of libertarian freedom—that they could have become perverted and made instruments of sin. The "commandment, which was to result in life, [could prove] to result in death … for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, [could deceive] … and through it [could kill]" (Rom 7:10-11). Although this brief engagement may seem to jettison the issues or to belie the complexity of these concerns, because God "does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13), the simple response to this situation may be that God took the risk of the birth of sin because of his love and the potential reward of salvation for, and habitation with, humans. Secularists insisting on an economic understanding of flourishing should understand well the concepts of risk and return: returns are usually greatest where the risk is highest. True love also demands risk-taking and God took big risks to save his people. Apparently, there is nothing inherently wrong with money or with images. That "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10) is best understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive. Negatively, these situations reveal that in those places where humanity may communicate with God in the most intimate ways, one risks finding the greatest temptations. Positively, it is possible to find that whenever humans face severe temptations (to idolatry or otherwise), God is always close by and available to help to save his people and to secure their flourishing. However, it must be stressed, as discussed obliquely in Chapter 4, that "'entering the kingdom' is not the result of a financial transaction between Jesus and God" nor worse yet between humans and God; "it requires one to become like a child, like Jesus, like God" (Eubank, *Wages*, 204). Entering the kingdom—and experiencing maximal human flourishing—requires obedience to follow Jesus.

included in the exegesis above). Jesus locates his response to Peter in the future (vv. 27-29). With sincerity, authority and finality, Jesus responds by first articulating the eschatological timing of the reward in "the renewal" ('then,' v.28), returns to the temporal considerations of what is invested ('now'), and then emphasizes the exponential rewards, hundredfold, and the eternal reward, "eternal life" ('then,' v.29).[47] Paradoxically, to *have* all this, one must be willing to *give* all away (cf. Matt 13:44-46). As with the Beatitudes, Jesus demonstrates the epistemological principle that 'now' only makes sense in the light of 'then.' Indeed, the telos proves the *archê*. Thus, Jesus's promise of rewards (human flourishing) presupposes humanity's telos to flourish maximally, his own authority to make such surreal promises,[48] and a divine providential plan within which such promises and rewards "are possible." One of the central features of the OT is a trajectory toward a settlement in secure place to enjoy a time of plenty—a land flowing with milk and honey (for example, Exod 3:8ff.). A NT counterpart is the

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[47] Cf. Mark 10:30. Here, the "hundredfold" is a reward of "this time" but "with persecutions."

[48] Jesus alludes to his own authority as God's representative in the signature formula "truly I say to you" ("ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν"). Robert H. Stein posits that by its use "Jesus claimed the absolute certainty of what he was saying" and that the words that follow it are "unparalleled," but notes that the validity resides in the fact that "Jesus is saying it" (*The Method and Message of Jesus's Teachings*, rev. ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 121). Stein classifies Jesus's use as a "formula" unique both to Jewish literature and the rest of the NT (cf. Matt 7:28-29). He notes that this formula is found twenty-nine times in the first Gospel of a total of sixty-six times in the NT. The "formula" carries both literary and theological significance of Jesus presenting himself as the divine, authoritative, and final interpreter of the Word. Similarly, Robert S. Kinney notes that "the Sermon is not only successful in presenting Jesus as an authoritative mediator of both law and heavenly reward for those who follow his exhortations to righteousness; it is also successful in presenting Jesus" as a figure "who gathers disciples, teaches disciples, and so mediates their development for *the good*" (*Hellenistic*, 215; emphasis original). See, also, Edwards, "Characterization of the Disciples," 1310.

programmatic, eschatological kingdom (of heaven or of God)—this place of God's reign, righteousness, and human flourishing (Matt 3:2ff.).[49]

Based on this, a *sola Scriptura* reading presupposes a critical realist theory of truth—corresponding to the perception of the actual state of affairs—based on the trustworthiness of God's revealed knowledge.[50] While the revelation in Scripture is subject to interpretation and interpreter-presuppositions, and therefore constrains understanding to a progressive hermeneutical spiraling process (Chapter 1), the epistemological framework suggests a redemptive-historical biblical philosophy in which history is ultimate reality, God is a historical entity, and man passes life in a historical process and is able to relate to God in a historical environment (see, for example, Ezek 37:26-28 discussed in Chapter 2). This undergirding philosophy informs the anthropological, sociological, and theological assertions necessary for the maximal human flourishing inferred from the Gospel of Matthew.

Anthropology

What does it mean to be human and what is the telos of humanity? Matthew's Jesus suggests an anthropology that promotes humans as more than the *homo economicus* implied in modern social imaginaries. Even if Jesus's promise of 'hundredfold' (Matt 19:29) is economic, his inclusion of the inheritance of "eternal life" extends maximal

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[49] Pennington posits that "themes of virtue leading to human flourishing and the kingdom of God are mutually informing and deeply related" (*Sermon*, 45).

[50] For more on critical realist and other theories of truth, see, for example, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 118-140.

flourishing beyond the economic and implies a necessary divine connection: God's providential activity in the future, as in history, and God's purposeful, redemptive initiatives, and gift of freedom of choice to humans. Pennington suggests that in the quest to balance freedom and flourishing with "'God-centeredness,'" humans face at least two great challenges because of the tendency to overemphasize in either direction.[51] He recommends a modification to a theological anthropology that promotes "a human-flourishing understanding of the Bible and its message" so that rather than as primarily "sinful," humans should understand themselves as God does—as, probably, first "'loved' or even 'beautiful.'"[52]

From God's perspective, Scripture asserts that human beings were consciously and deliberately created by, and in the image and likeness of, God (Gen 1:26, 27; 2:7, 21-22), formed from the dust (Gen 2:7; Ps 103:14) for God's pleasure and glory (Isa 43:1, 6-7; Rev 4:11).[53] A *sola Scriptura* anthropology suggests that the ultimate understanding of

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[51] The idea that secularists who find the Scriptures antithetical to freedom and also find 'God's agency' intrusive (see Chapter 3) seems to align with Pennington's view that Christians rightly emphasizing "'God-centeredness'" have a tendency toward an anthropology of humans as primarily 'sinful,' and may develop a "latent *fear*" towards human flourishing (Pennington, *Sermon*, 291). However, it appears that in the bequeath of libertarian freedom to choose otherwise, God may 'invite' and 'encourage' but does not 'overpower.' Obviously, the rich young man was able to choose otherwise and walk away, relinquishing the benefit of the reward—maximal, human flourishing (Matt 19:28-29). Evidently, 'true' human flourishing fosters human freedom. Cf. Erickson, who posits that Christians need not "minimize human ability and accomplishments in order to give greater glory to God" because "it is not necessary to protect God against competition from his highest creature" as human greatness [and flourishing] "can glorify God the more" as long as they are "kept in proper perspective" (*Christian Theology*, 516, 513).

[52] Pennington, *Sermon*, 291-3.

[53] This "living soul" (Gen 2:7) created by God is able to appreciate that s/he has been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14-16); is equal with others (of one blood, Acts 17:26-28); endowed with intelligence (Gen 2:19-20) and the ability to make moral choices; and is therefore superior to animals over which s/he has been given dominion (Gen 1:28).

the value and personhood of "human" is encapsulated in the concept of the *imago Dei*—

the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26, 27; 5:1). While categorizations of "image and

likeness" vary, usually as "relational," "substantive," or "functional,"[54] with important

implications for understanding the God-world relationship,[55] Scripture suggests that the

imago Dei originates in God as a gift in the nature of what it means to *be* human rather

than what humans *do*.[56] Despite the lack of a precisely expressed meaning of *imago Dei*

and of distinguishable nuances between 'image' and 'likeness,' it does not seem likely

that its meaning would exclude the purposefulness and indivisible 'wholeness' and

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[54] See, for example, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 517-536. Modern anthropology often excludes considerations of *imago Dei*. Erickson summarizes seven contemporary images of human as: machine (instrument view), animal (view from behavioristic psychology), sexual being (Freud), economic being (Marx), pawn in the universe (Satre, Camus), free being (Friedman), and social being (Oden) (*Ibid*., 479-495).

[55] Richard Kearney notes that "the matter [of *imago Dei*] is by no means clear cut" (*Wake*, 62). A relational view interprets the image of God in terms of the experience that "is present when a relationship is active" rather than "something resident within human nature" (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 527, 523). Karl Barth and Emil Brunner were supporters of this view and linked humanity to purely sexual relationships. Two schools emerged from the substantive view. The first school, which was short-lived, proposed that the image and likeness were in reference to the physical characteristics of the human and so it was rebutted on the argument that 'God is spirit.' The second school proposed that the image and likeness referred to abstract characteristics such as reason and freewill. Plato and Aristotle supported this view. Irenaeus separated the image and linked it to reason and freewill; the likeness he accorded the character of a special supernatural gift. Ultimately, a substantive view identifies the image as "some definite characteristic or quality within the makeup of the human" (*Ibid*., 520-21) irrespective of whether those humans "recognize God's existence or work" (*Ibid*., 523). Against the substantive view Ray S. Anderson argues that *imago* does not arise to a person "by virtue of being a creature" because the essence of "*imago* is an endowment the human person bears as a distinctive of creaturely being, but that … cannot be inferred or derived from creaturely being itself" (*On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010], 105, 104). The functional view of human beings focused on the 'dominion' of Gen 1:28 and the *function* of humans, and also produced two schools. The first school posited that the image is like an icon such as a king or higher authority. The second school posited that the image referred to humans as God's representatives. The likeness was thought to refer to moral capacity and, unlike the image, could be destroyed (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 527-30).

[56] Gen 1:26; 2:28. See, also, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532. Therefore, Smith's observations of "epistemic Pelagianism … the confidence that *we* can figure everything out" and "civilizational or cultural Pelagianism—the confidence that *we* make *this* world meaningful" (*How (Not)*, 55, 60) reflect the secularist's (mis)understanding of human's place and goal in the cosmos (see Chapter 3).

'relationality' inherent in the "let Us" process of creation (Gen 1:26. Cf. 2:18).[57] Hence, a canonical reading of *imago Dei* suggests that humans are a reflection of God, and that all humans share a common origin and purpose—in "a brotherhood" of love[58]—to fulfil divine responsibilities and glorify God. Furthermore, Erickson suggests that "God intends that a similar sense of fellowship, obedience, and love characterize humans' [*sic*] relationship to God" as that which characterized Jesus's character and actions in relation to the Father.[59] Among the implications of *imago Dei*, Erickson notes that humans "experience full humanity" only when "properly related to God" as "redeemed disciple[s] of God" because this "is the human telos, for which they are created."[60]

It is perhaps true, as Godzieba suggests, that a discussion about "faith and secularity" is really "a discussion about anthropology" because it is really about "which view of *the person* governs the claims made about self and society."[61] However, it

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[57] It also seems clear that the challenges to secular engagement increase across social imaginaries, consequent on divergent anthropological and teleological conceptions arising from this, even where it is not acknowledged. Erickson, suggests six theses to the *imago Dei*: it is universal to humans, it has not been lost as a result of sin, it is not present to a greater degree in some persons than others, it is not correlated with any variable, it refers to something a human *is*, rather than *has* or *does*, and it refers to elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfilment of human destiny (*Christian Theology*, 532).

[58] *Ibid.*, 512. Cf. Acts 17:26.

[59] *Ibid.*, 534. "Studying the human nature of Jesus will also give us a more complete understanding of what humanity was really intended to be" (*Ibid.*, 481).

[60] *Ibid.*, 534-5.

[61] Godzieba, "Imagination," 217; emphasis original. Evidently, the model for theological method is heavily influenced by considerations of human nature and telos (see, also, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 480-557). Because of the strong and pervasive influence of beliefs held regarding human origin and telos on every other area of life, it is reasonable to assume that addressing concerns regarding those two primary areas will also address many pressing concerns for theologians as well as secularists because it is "a point where the biblical revelation and human concerns converge" (*Ibid.*, 481. See, also, Anderson, *On Being Human*, for a discussion on this). Therefore, the theological model sketched is purposefully sensitive to the economic element of human flourishing within the social imaginary. No attempt is made to isolate or

appears that because of the *imago Dei*, humans cannot be divested of 'transcendent'

linkages even within a social imaginary context that fails to acknowledge those linkages.

Pennington is right: Although humans are now tainted by a proclivity to sin (Gen 6:5;

Rom 5:12-14, 7:15-24),[62] God's "everlasting love" for humanity is strong (Jer 31:3; Luke

15:3-7) and propels his plan to prosper them (Jer 29:11; John 3:16). Indeed, Scripture

declares that God's people experience flourishing *because* they are saved (Deut 33:29;

μακάριος in the LXX).[63] Thus, Scripture reveals that human beings are more than discrete

or isolated facets of social, physical, economic, or free beings—they are wholistic beings.

Hence, the buffered and primarily economic secular human being is incongruent with the

existential being who experiences, desires, and flourishes in multiple facets and, more so,

with the essential being who bears a key divine dimension.

Sociology

Jesus's reminder to the rich young man of the command about love of 'neighbor'

(Matt 19:18), his invitation to him to be τέλειος (flourishing via wholeness) by selling his

possessions and sharing with the poor (v.21), his comments to his disciples about the

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(re)state economic sub-models, per se, other than via sensitivity to human flourishing.

[62] Scripture teaches that as a result of the Fall, humans are conceived in sin (Ps 51:5), "all have sinned" (Rom 3:23), are subject to death "even … those who had not sinned" like Adam (Rom 5:14), and do not naturally accept the things of God (1 Cor 2:14) although they have been created in the image and likeness of God, bear His moral, spiritual and intellectual nature, and are imbued with His intrinsic value (Cf. Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997]).

[63] God's plan to prosper his people with a future (Jer 29:11) is expressed in his desire for the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:3-4). In Deut 33:29, Moses declares the 'μακάριος-ness' (flourishing) of Israel.

importance of 'the kingdom community' (vv.23-4), and his summary of the Law as love of God and love of neighbor (Matt 22:35) all imply a social dimension to true flourishing.

The tendency toward individuality in contemporary society does not correlate with the sociology of Scripture. From the pronouncement that "it is not good" (Gen 2:18) and the implication that each person is his/her "brother's keeper" (Gen 4:9), to the one-body analogy (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12), Scripture is replete with a sociological ethos of 'community.'[64] By identifying all humans with a single source, the nature of *imago Dei* suggests its manifestation via healthy, mutual, and productive, relationships among humans beyond selfish goals, and also suggests intimate relationships between humans and God. The prescribed 'self-interest' for flourishing (in mutual relations) in modern social imaginaries does not accord with the foregoing ethos. Neither does it accord with the model of the Hebraic 'tent of meeting' (tabernacle): the invitation to divine-human fellowship, Exod 25:8 (cf. John 14:1-3); God's initiative to establish fellowship, Exod 25:10-22 (cf. John 1:14); access to God via prayer, Exod 30:1-10; or to Jesus's removal of the barrier to divine-human fellowship, Matt 27:51 (cf. Heb 10:19-25). The 'self-interest' model also does not accord with the Greco-Roman model on the mountain when Jesus organized and fed the people (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:33-44; Luke 9:12-17), or to the model in which the people organized themselves for their mutual benefit (Acts 2:44-5; 6:1-6).[65] Therefore, it seems prudent for humans, created in God's image, to mimic the godly pattern of relationship (John 17:22-24) in the quest for true human flourishing.

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[64] Osborne notes that "[t]rue theology is lived, not just believed" and theology "is meant to be lived out in community" (*Hermeneutical*, 403). See discussion below on οἰκονόμος below.

[65] Walter Brueggemann asserts that "[s]ocial flourishing depends upon passion for and

Theology

Lessons from Jesus and the rich young man suggest that God is good (Matt 19:17), available and capable to save (v.26), and that he plans, and will keep his promises, to bless and flourish those who trust him (v.29).

Jesus's lessons do not cohere with the secularity 3 theology of an utterly transcendent deist god that is eclipsed from everyday human experiences but occasionally intervenes, or the alternative non-existent 'god' (if possible).[66] A *sola Scriptura* reading suggests God as a personal being who chooses to be intimate—immanent—to the human experience (Ps 139:7-12) as creator (Gen 2:7), healer (Exod 15:26), one who will neither leave nor forsake (Josh 1:5), parent (Hos 11:1), shepherd (Ps 23:1), heavenly father (Matt 6:26), dweller among people (John 1:14), and one who desires and initiates relationship with humans (see immediately preceding discussion and references on sociology). Scripture suggests that God *also* surpasses the human experience—is transcendent—as

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commitment to the common good. It is axiomatic that coercive exploitation—whether by the state … or market economy—cannot create an environment for such flourishing" ("Prophetic Imagination," 19).

[66] Taylor narrates an understanding of competing conceptions of God prevailing within the nova of options of secularity 3. From a contemporary perspective, three dominant viewpoints may be identified. First, 'conventional' understandings may be loosely aligned with a Classical Thomistic understanding of God as utterly transcendent—and also as timeless, incorporeal, perfect, immense, self-sufficient, utterly immutable, impassible and who loves humans essentially, omnipotent and omniscient. For a discussion on this see, for example, Nash, *Concept of God*. Presumably, this is the view rejected in modern social imaginaries. Second, a Panentheistic Process view posits God as utterly immanent and supremely passible—and also temporal, corporeal, perfect, constantly growing in process, ethically immutable, ontologically dependent on some world, possessing all power that it is possible to possess but not omnipotent, and omniscient but does not know the future. For a discussion on this see, for example, Griffin, Cobb, and Pinnock, *Searching*. A third view from Open Theists who, among other things, generally views biblical descriptions of God as "metaphor," emphasizes "significant freedom" God grants to humans, denies foreknowledge, and acknowledges that "God is both transcendent and immanent" as evidenced in the "genuine interaction between God and human beings" in the Christian life (Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 17, 7, 105).

most high (Gen 14:18-22), great and mighty God (Jer 32:18), inscrutable (Isa 55:8-9; Rom 11:33), potentate (1 Tim 6:15), and omnipotent (Rev 19:6) head over all (1 Chr 29:11).[67]

A *sola Scriptura* reading also suggests an understanding of divine providence that is incoherent with the intermittent economic intervention implied by secularity 3; the latter is, as noted above, also incoherent with a deist god. While the term 'providence' does not appear in Scripture, the notion of divine government, care, or guidance is pervasive, as is evident in the above discussion. On this view, providential activity collaborates with human freedom to foster choice.[68] In contrast to the secular implication of divine providence *aligning with the human will* for economic prosperity, Fernando Canale suggests that the purpose of providence "is to *change the mind of free human beings* by allowing them to understand and freely choose God's revealed will"[69] (see, also, 1 Chr 29:12; Prov 3:6). The change in humans becomes evident as they are continually transformed into the image of God (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10), such that history develops freely according to God's plan (Jer 29). On this understanding, those who

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[67] John Peckham's comprehensive canonical reading via *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura* with spiritual discernment suggests God as analogically temporal, unrestricted by the presence or absence of a body, omnibenevolent, omnipresent but also locally present, dynamically constant, passible but not passive, omnipotent but voluntarily withholds power, omniscient, and possessing bilateral significant freedom (*Love of God*). Peckham's conclusions, along with those of Classical Thomists, Panentheists, and Open Theists raise interesting considerations for modern social imaginaries and opens up possibilities for fruitful work in the future.

[68] Nuances of indirect providential activity are evident in divine restraint—for example, allowing sin to take its natural course (Gen 3:8-15) or limiting sin's reach (Job 1:12); nuances of direct providential activity are evident divine in intervention—for example, God's choice to dwell with his people (Exod 25:8), the incarnation (John 1:14), or other miracles.

[69] Fernando L. Canale, "Doctrine of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 12:120; emphasis supplied.

would experience maximal flourishing desire more than the economic and find their desire fully satisfied when they recognize God in the fulness of God *qua* God and live according to God's way of being in the world.

In view of the importance of the economic to modern social imaginaries and in view of the proposal to introduce modern social imaginaries into theological method, the next section previews a biblical view of οἰκονόμος.

Οἰκονόμος

Οἰκονόμος was introduced in Chapter 1 as the Greek term from which 'economy' (and economics) is derived.[70] Further discussion about οἰκονόμος as part of the discussion of Greco-Roman imaginaries in Chapter 2 offers a window into how the developing post-apostolic ecclesiastical situation might have influenced modern outcomes. This section focuses on its biblical (and some ecclesiastical) reading, from reference works and secondary sources, and draws implications for the model development for secular engagement.

The biblical usage of the term οἰκονόμος presents some interesting considerations for the model. There are ten occurrences of the noun form of οἰκονόμος in the NT.[71] Unsurprisingly, Scripture's usage of οἰκονόμος reflects similarities with, and striking differences from, its common and broad ordinary usage. In theological discourse, as in

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[70] Because of the long-established relationship between religion and economics and because the quest for meaning and savior may be seen as a continual thread through history, there is, arguably, an implicit and delicate interplay with underlying social structures and a degree of continuity may reasonably be extrapolated to support the usefulness of this model for contemporary secularity.

[71] They are: οἰκονόμος (Luke 12:42, 16:3; Rom 16:23); οἰκονόμον (Luke 16:1, 8; Tit 1:7); οἰκονόμους (1Cor 4:1, Gal 4:2); οἰκονόμοις (1 Cor 4:2); οἰκονόμοι (1 Pet 4 :10).

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Scripture, οἰκονόμος and its cognate οἰκονομία carry a similar contextual meaning—that of a responsible administrator or 'steward' engaged in 'management' or 'administration' or 'stewardship' (see, for example, 1 Cor 9:17; Col 1:25).[72] Bruce Corley notes that before the semantic domain of οἰκονόμος was widened, it was generally understood and translated *only* as 'steward' in Greek literature from as early as the 5th century BC.[73] According to M. Douglas Meeks, the Christian Scriptures "are replete with concerns of economy (*oikonomia*, *oikos* + *nomos*, the management of the household), that is, the production, distribution, and consumption of the means of livelihood."[74] Meeks notes

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[72] Theologically, οἰκονομία (stewardship, management) is sometimes used in relation to God's deliberate and ordered plan (management) of salvation (Eph 1:10; 3:9), as in the distinction 'economic Trinity' (Vanhoozer, *Drama*, 42).

[73] Corley, "Intertestamental." He notes that in "Ptolemaic times, 'steward' was a technical designation for the manager of an estate or an official of the government" (*Ibid*., 17). The emphasis on steward and management reflects the etymology of the word οἰκονόμος. It is a compound of two Greek roots: οἰκέω (to live, dwell in) + νομίζω (according to rules, custom) (Danker, et al., "οἰκονόμος," BDAG). This is closely related to the cognates οἶκος and νόμος, house (or household) and law, respectively (Corley, "Intertestamental," 17). There are implications of someone operating or managing a 'unit' according to predetermined rules or expectations, guidelines or norms. Corley highlights fifteen occurrences of the word οἰκονόμος in LXX in the books of the Kings, Esther, and Isaiah, with denotations centered around "royal servant," "trustee," "chief slave," "treasurer," "town-clerk," and "slave" (Corley, "Intertestamental," 17). Occurrences of οἰκονόμος in the OT are almost always in relation to one in charge of a palace or a household. Of the noted fifteen occurrences in LXX, only two are divergently conceived—as court official or royal governor. Corley notes that OT usage is similar in principle to NT using סֹכֵן (*cakan*) to mean a steward or one familiar with a particular situation (e.g. Isa 22:15) (*Ibid*.). NT usage of οἰκονόμος is diverse in reference to a role, such as "stewards of God" (1 Cor 4:1, 2), as a title, or in reference to a characteristic which overseers or believers in general should possess. John Reumann notes that commentaries "point out an obvious background in the ubiquitous *oikonomos* of Hellenistic estates, societies, and governments, who played a key part in the total οἰκονομία or management of the household, club, or state" ("'Stewards of God'," 339). Reumann's suggestion that use of οἰκονόμος in the NT may have originated in pre-Christian Greek literature presumes its general understanding in the Hellenistic society and the expectation that the first century audience would understand it according to its conventional usage. In fact, "NT usage has been established which has two main different aspects": there is "a technical sense" as in Luke 12:42; 16:1 and it is also used "as a title with the name" as in Rom. 16:23 (Colin Brown, ed., "House," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:254).

[74] M. Douglas Meeks, "Economics in the Christian Scriptures," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3; emphasis supplied.

further that "[e]conomy in the Christian Scriptures" also includes "*relations* that serve God's purposes for life in the whole creation" in addition to "physical means of life."[75]

In the locus of church structure and leadership, οἰκονόμος—as manager of a 'household'—appears as a dynamic manifestation of trust, responsibility, and collaboration, rather than a static office or concept.[76] While οἰκονόμος may stand independently as a distinct function (for example as treasurer or bishop), its character is such in the life and work of the Christian community that it is necessarily infused in leadership, in liturgy, and in fellowship, and thus in the mission of the church. Fabian Udoh's conclusion that the "ideological prop" is the "topos of servile 'virtues': loyalty or faithfulness (*fides*), obedience (*obsequium*), goodwill (*benevolentia*), and dutifulness (*pietas*)"[77] suggests that these are the historically and commonly understood 'ideal' characteristics of οἰκονόμος as it was adapted into the church.

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[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Thus, minimal equivalence and interchangeability and mutuality of roles may be inferred. It is noteworthy that bishops (ἐπίσκοπο[ς]) are called to be οἰκονόμο[ς] of God *inter alia* in Titus 1:7ff which detail the responsibilities of one who is "as a steward of God." In executing their roles, these overseers are called to be 'stewards.' This apparent synonymity in function or in the execution of roles among elders, bishops and pastors is also noted by, for example, Stewart, *Original Bishops*; Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (New York: Paulist, 2001); and Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969). Use in Acts 20:17-28 corroborates the inference of the close relationship among roles by describing elders (πρεσβυτέρους) as bishops (ἐπίσκοπους) who are called to shepherd or pastor (ποιμαίνω) the sheep. Since Titus 1:7ff. states that ἐπίσκοπον should be οἰκονόμον, then, evidently, οἰκονόμον carries linkages to all three functions.

[77] Fabian E. Udoh, "The Tale of an Unrighteous Slave (Luke 16: 1-8 [13])," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 2 (2009): 328-9. Udoh also draws historical inferences and equates Xenophon's and Pseudo-Aristotle's επίτροπος in the fourth century B.C.E, with Columella's *vilicus* of the mid-first century CE and that of Varro and Cato in the late first century B.C.E., with the οἰκονόμος of Luke 16. Both *vilicus* (Latin) and the Greek equivalent επίτροπος refer to a servant with superintendent responsibilities. Additionally, Udoh notes that the title οἰκονόμος "used to designate people of servile status" who were household slaves was also used for persons "'active in the world of business and commerce as agents, or as managers of enterprises'" and also "'as bankers, shopkeepers, traders and craftsmen'" (*Ibid.*, 320).

The biblical usage and philosophy of οἰκονόμος thus brings into focus an important linkage with Christian stewardship. Against conceptions of stewardship as "limited connotation" to "voluntary donations such as tithing,"[78] this dissertation emphasizes stewardship as a way of being in the world that acknowledges the creature-Creator relationship between humans and God as outlined in Scripture. It is the lifestyle lived in union and partnership with God that, as Brent Waters states, "embraces a much larger range of activities involving the allocation, use, and purposes of one's time, work, and financial resources."[79] Using the integrated Scripture framework, the analyses of the Sermon on the Mount and the narrative of the rich young man suggest that, aside from expositing themes of ontic components of PAST variables and of human flourishing, both pericopes record principles for a way of living in the world so as to experience maximal human flourishing (see Chapter 4).

Collin Brown suggests that to understand the concepts of οἰκονόμος and οἰκονομία "one must refer to their root in the house" as "God's people, God's community, is his house" that is built "through the work of those he has called to the task" and entrusted "the stewardship of the house."[80] Furthermore, Kevin J. Vanhoozer's claim that "the body of Christ is the unique dwelling place of God's Spirit, a new

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[78] Brent Waters, *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 11.

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Brown, "House," 255. In theological discourse οἰκονόμος is also sometimes used metaphorically. The interest in this study excludes discussion of οἰκονόμος as dispensation, describing God's relationship to the world, as for example, in Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993).

oikonomia (household) of the Spirit,"[81] facilitates the important question as to how the

peculiarity of individual and corporate Christian stewardship can potentially influence

social imaginaries. More pointedly, these considerations question the relevance to secular

engagement, if any, of the Christian's (presumably unnatural and counter-cultural) way

of life as οἰκονόμος. Interestingly, Charles Taylor posits that:

> In the nature of things, Christianity offers no global solution, no general organization of things here and now which will fully resolve the dilemma and meet the maximal demand [of the secular 3 age]. It can only show ways in which we can, as individuals, and as churches, hold open the path to the fullness of the kingdom … [by pointing] to the exemplary lives of certain trail-blazing people and communities.[82]

From this, Taylor seems to suggest potentially paradigmatic possibilities from Christians

reflecting particular standards in their ordinary lives in this secular 3 age.

Christian stewardship, represented by the concept and philosophy of οἰκονόμος,

thus emerges as a strong and influential dynamic to the model. Despite secular

uninterestedness in Scripture, secularists may be able to existentially 'discover' an

alternative version of human flourishing that is compatible with (actually derived from)

Scripture because Christians effectively model fulness and 'true' human flourishing

within modern social imaginaries as stewards (οἰκονόμος) rather than as 'economists'

(οἰκονόμος).[83] It may be, that by means of this 'discovery' each Christian/church

"'through the Holy Spirit, continually challenges, incorporates, and transforms elements

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[81] Vanhoozer, *Drama*, 55.

[82] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 643. At the same time, Taylor also concedes that a "new poetic language can serve to find a way back to the God of Abraham" (*Ibid.*, 757).

[83] It should be recalled that, on Taylor's account, secularists are primarily interested in the "productive, material aspects of human activity"—that is, economics (*A Secular Age*, 111).

of the culture in order to bring them under the lordship of Christ'"[84] and occasion the knowledge of God.

Because true human flourishing is presumed for the Christian (see Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter), because it is wholistic and covering all facets of life and not just the economic, and because its realization is contingent on the way a person chooses to live in the world—whether according to the contexts Matthew invites or otherwise—this dissertation frames human flourishing according to the way one chooses to manage one's life. That is, human flourishing adopts a dependence on οἰκονόμος—Christian steward—because choosing a way of being in the world according to the principles the Gospel of Matthew suggests for maximal human flourishing, leads to the acknowledgement of God as Creator/Owner of everything and therefore every human as *de facto* 'manager' rather than 'owner.' Indeed, Meeks posits that "[b]iblically speaking, what economy is and how it functions cannot be construed in abstraction from who God is and how God works in history and nature."[85] Christian stewardship—οἰκονομία—can thus be conceived as engendering, executing, and enhancing human flourishing.

Since creation, God has called on his people to model his love and flourishing in their daily lives, in their relationship with him, and in their interactions with each other. The first humans could live freely and enjoy all the fruits in the garden, and their obedience (for example, to abstain from the tree "in the middle of the garden" [Gen 3:3])

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[84] Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 225, quoted in Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 410-11.

[85] Meeks, "Economics in the Christian Scriptures," 5.

was a condition to their continued flourishing. Christian stewards should, thus, embrace and promote the model of wholistic flourishing Jesus offers from the Scriptures in every facet of everyday life (cf. Hos 4:7-8). It is not insignificant to find that "household"—which is linked to οἰκονόμος—is considered a key concept in the gospel message.[86]

Claudia Rapp's narrative of οἰκονόμος in church structure and leadership (Chapter 2) suggests that the tendency in the twenty-first century church to reflect the general societal mood that "has given material wealth first priority in our life,"[87] is an unfortunate legacy from the medieval church. This characteristic does not appear to fit the image that Matthew's Jesus sought to bring in focus to the rich young man, that material possessions should not direct people's lives. In fact, Jesus stressed that money, poorly managed, can be an obstacle to the kingdom (Matt 19:24; cf. 6:19-24; 13:3-9, 18-23). Jesus emphasized that the management of possessions is not incidental to keeping the commandments (or *vice versa*), since the way a person chooses to live in the world reflects one's characteristic values. In other words, everyone is a manager—a steward—and one's master depends on one's choice (Matt 6:24). Each person chooses to be either οἰκονόμος (economist and manage as master/owner) or οἰκονόμος (steward and manage with God as owner).

While both οἰκονόμος (economy) and οἰκονομία (stewardship) require the exercise of responsible management, Jesus sought to emphasize biblical stewardship to

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[86] Hendrikus Berkhof and Philip Potter, *Key Words of the Gospel* (London: Edinburgh House, 1964), 65-74. Berkhof and Potter note that "house" as the NT Greek οἶκος corresponds with the OT Hebrew בית (which "usually represents the covenant people of God and the place where they gather for worship" [*Ibid*., 65]).

[87] Jacob Needleman, *Money and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 22.

the rich young man. Jesus invited him to the lifestyle lived in union and partnership with God that is best understood as enabling freedom to be the best person possible, living to one's fullest potential, as responsible, accountable, and interdependent entities, individually and corporately. In other words, to live according to the principles of biblical stewardship fosters full and true human flourishing. Humans, created in God's image, have a responsibility to practice and promote wholistic, canonical stewardship as a way of life, and to do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), such that God's people attract others on account of their flourishing lives (Isa 42:7-9; 49:8-10). In this way, canonical οἰκονομία makes known God's word (Col 1:25), God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1-2), and God's manifold grace (1 Pet 4:10, 11).

Evidently, the above presumptions for Christians are unrealistic for secularists. Hence, they are converted into invitations for Christians who are being transformed to participate in the transformation of the way people imagine the world (Rom 12:2). They are invitations for Christians to "[t]hink carefully how to live as well as what to say" because "we witness with our transformed lives as much as with our transformed lips," and also for Christians to exercise care to "avoid the materialism" of this age.[88] The issues of stewardship—as way of life—and the responsibility of God's community thus emerge as very important to this study: it is an emerging thesis that there is a perceived, peculiar, and primary role for the ecclesiastical community upon which progress in secular engagement necessarily depends (cf. Rom 10:1). In this present epoch when the church appears challenged to identify a strategy to efficaciously communicate with

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[88] Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 404.

secularity 3, especially with regard to liturgy, apologetics, and evangelism, it seems

necessary to imagine strategic, organizational, and ethical amendments in the context of

οἰκονομία—Christian stewardship as a way of life—as potential responses.

Christian believers are called and tasked with a solemn responsibility to actualize

an imaginary in which "theological imagination constructs an alternative" to challenge

"the present cultural, political, social, economic" age, and to offer "a better story to tell

than the perpetuation of the *status quo*"[89] (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Indeed, Kathryn Tanner calls for

the present system to be "undermined."[90] Among numerous potential avenues

necessitated by an equal number of injustices and inhibitors to true human flourishing,

four types are noted here that might facilitate this challenge.[91] One plausible approach is

for Christians to courageously 'think outside the box' and attempt to foster relationships

with civil society as to how to balance the tension between enhancing human flourishing

and mitigating threatening systemic structures. Equally fundamental is that Christians

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[89] Law, "Theological Imagination," 285.

[90] Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 7-8. Tanner asserts: "I am critical of the present spirit of capitalism … the way its spirit hampers recognition" of its "especially egregious faults" (*Ibid*., 7). Thus, Tanner asserts that "[t]he present-day spirit of capitalism needs to be undermined … by a counter-spirit of similar power" (*Ibid*., 7-8). Tanner believes that "religion might remain a critical force against it" because religion is "one of the few alternative outlooks on life with a capacity to shape life conduct to a comparable degree" (*Ibid*., 8). In saying this, Tanner "shares with [Max] Weber the idea that religious beliefs (Christian beliefs specifically) have the capacity to provide powerful psychological sanctions for economic behaviour, whether intentionally or not" (*Ibid*., 4). She notes that "Weber might still be right about religion's practical efficacy, its ability to shape believers' [*sic*] conduct in everyday life, and in that way have a bearing on their economic behaviour" (*Ibid*., 4), although she acknowledges that "[t]he spirit of capitalism today is not the same as the spirit Weber discusses" (*Ibid*., 10).

[91] The avenues noted here are considered indicative of the most important. They are not detailed here because doing so would distract from the intended conceptual character of the model proposed.

bear in mind that "the ramifications of Christian witness are global."[92] Even as Christians

continue to face issues for which no easy answers present themselves, Christians should

continue to live as distinct "salt" and "light" (Matt 5:13-14) and reflect standards of

justice, mercy, humility, and obedience (Mic 6:8). Thirdly, a biblical perspective of

stewardship of the type discussed in this dissertation mandates due consideration to the

value of humans beyond the typical profiling; to model, as Gordon Menzies and Donald

Hay describe, "a new valuation of other-regarding behavior"[93] and transform social

imaginaries. Finally, Christians can exercise prudence and integrity in handling wealth

(for example, investing wisely in the work of the gospel [3 John 1:5-8] or in the global

economy toward alleviating poverty[94]), demonstrating stewardship concern for the

environment, choosing vocations in influential positions in civil society, and exercising

strong and prudent influence over those who lead.[95]

Propelled by Jesus's aphorism that "with God all things are possible" (Matt

19:26), Christians may respond to the Great Commission with "courageous

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[92] Waters, *Just Capitalism*, 12.

[93] Gordon Menzies and Donald Hay, "Human Nature, Identity, and Motivation," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christianity and Economics*, ed. Paul Oslington (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014), 600.

[94] Waters, *Just Capitalism*, 11.

[95] For more on these issues see, for example, Michael Barram, *Missional Economics: Biblical Justice and Christian Formation*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018); Laura M. Hartman, ed., *That All May Flourish: Comparative Religious Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Catherine Loy, *Development Beyond the Secular: Theological Approaches to Inequality* (London: SCM Press, 2017); and Graeme Maxton, *The End of Progress: How Modern Economics Has Failed Us* (Singapore: Wiley, 2011).

intentionality"[96] and initiate or support visions toward true human flourishing. "Such flourishing is possible, granted God-given nerve."[97] In the next section this study moves to sketch a possible model toward actualizing 'regime imagination' via strategic canonical οἰκονομία and other canonically-defined variables, for penetrating and transforming modern social imaginaries.

Engaging the Secular: Multidimensionality in Theological Method

Taking the cue from modern social imaginaries, this study seeks, ultimately, to forge an interaction between the secular and its various interests and theology and its various interests. Building on the above analyses, a model is developed from the data that are redeployed from the rereading of secular 3 fundamentals, so as to strategically, directly, and sensitively respond to the ethos of that cultural imaginary: to sketch a multidimensional model true to principles of *sola Scriptura* for engaging secular 3 society that imagines human flourishing as the normative end for humans.

To speak of multidimensionality in method for secular engagement is to speak of finding *explicit* ways to give attention to data from different facets of life that influence the efficacy of theological method. 'Conventional' theological models, especially those claiming ground in *sola Scriptura*, typically 'frontload' a single dimension—a canonical dimension. Other methodological influences—such as, reason, experience, and

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[96] Brueggemann, "Prophetic Imagination," 28.

[97] *Ibid.*, 29.

tradition—remain implicit to the process.[98] This study employs the novel combination of explicitly multiple dimensions for theological data. Two dimensions were envisaged at the outset of this study: one dimension embracing the secular philosophy—both out of genuine interest to inform theological method and out of consideration of their potential instrumentality in theological method—and another dimension embracing 'conventional' canonical theological sources and data. The multidimensional model in this chapter provides for richer analyses than the 'conventional' approaches because, ultimately, it comprises three explicit dimensions: secular, canonical, and stewardship (as Christian praxis). Each dimension is briefly described in turn.

Engaging the Secular: The Secular Dimension

The sketch of the multidimensional model is explicitly sensitive to, and, in fact, originates from, the ethos of secularity 3.[99] This is a novel feature, as Christian theological models typically focus on, and 'frontload,' theological considerations, and an understanding of the audience is generally *presumed* rather than self-referential. It is based on this primacy afforded to the secular dimension as part of the process of model synthesis, that the chapter acknowledges the centrality of human flourishing in economic terms (Chapter 3), and anchors the entire model building process on the theme of human flourishing, offering a biblical reorientation of variables toward application in Christian theological method.

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[98] Interestingly, Kathryn Tanner discusses this point in a chapter "What Has Christianity to do with Economics?," in *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

[99] In this dissertation, theological method is considered as instrumental to the gospel—"τό εὐαγγέλιον"—the good news with which Christian theology seeks to engage the secular.

Finding explicit ways to give attention to secular philosophy in theological

method is atypical in Christian theology and explicitly contributes the contextualization

that is proposed toward multidimensionality for engagement in secularity 3.[100] Thus, this

secularity 3 contextualization drives the proposed model and has a broad and primary

purview in the task of identifying a model that sensitively and, ultimately, effectively,

woos secularists 3 with the gospel, although such data are obviously not theonomous.

However, by virtue of the fact that this dissertation is grounded in canonical Christian

theism, this use of non-canonical (secular) data is managed to preserve the character of

Scripture, and the most appropriate canonical data are selected to complement, and to

communicate with(in), the secular context.[101]

<center>Engaging the Secular: The Canonical Dimension[102]</center>

Chapters 2 and 3 provide strong support for the methodological advantages of

Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries. Due to the apparent historical

mutations in modern social imaginaries via a variety of philosophical, anthropological,

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[100] Contextualization in this context is to be understood as the use secular instruments in theology; the "'dynamic process which interprets the significance of a religion or cultural norm for a group with a different (or developed) cultural heritage'" (Gilliland, "Contextualization," 225). Although following the example of "the early church [that] looked at contextualization as an evangelistic tool" (Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 414), this study also, with Osborne, insists on the inviolability of the *message*, despite the theologian's use of the *form* of the "receptor cultures" (*Ibid*., 413).

[101] Glenn refers to models that satisfy these criteria as "co-relational" because he posits that they "must correlate both with the biblical source of truth *and* with modern man who is to receive and hopefully to understand the truth" ("Criteria," 298; emphasis original). He labels the two criteria as "reference" and "preference," respectively.

[102] In this context, 'canonical' and 'biblical' are used synonymously. The objective is to ensure that canonical data are in harmony with the doctrine and phenomena of Scripture as a whole—the closed canon of 66 books in the OT and NT—based on the integrative framework employed although the entire canon was not explicitly read or surveyed.

sociological, and theological constellations (PAST), the model in this chapter emerges partly from rereading, and restating, these components via Scripture and analyzing the canonical data for redeployment.[103]

Three notable serendipitous outcomes emerged from the reading of the canonical data, with remarkable consequences for the model: First, the canonical— exegetical, phenomenological, narratological, and literary—close reading of the rich young man narrative naturally led to the Sermon as hermeneutical key. Second, identified separately and subsequently, is the link between the Sermon and human flourishing as *makarios*, and the links to the Hebraic *ʾashrê*. While broad economic allusions and presuppositions initiated the reading, there were no expectations of explicit linkages to human flourishing, per se.[104] These two noteworthy serendipitous findings caution against an attitude of finality toward lessons from the biblical data. In fact, the hermeneutical spiral (Chapter 1) presupposes continuing effect, as the theologian is influenced by the text and, thus informed, returns to the text for further illumination.[105] The third serendipitous finding is

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[103] It will be recalled that the lessons directing the rereading were the result of inductive canonical reading, in Chapter 4, of the Sermon on the Mount—because it intuitively prompts positive imagination—and the rich young man narrative—because of *prima facie* economic imagery identified and aligned with human flourishing (see Chapter 1). As noted earlier, although the entire canon is not surveyed, the approach is nevertheless considered 'canonical' because of its faithfulness to *sola-prima-tota-analogia* principles (see Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter).

[104] To the best knowledge, both the former finding, and this latter finding facilitated by the use of Jonathan Pennington's model of human flourishing in the Sermon, are novel. They have been suggested as joining a conversation on new directions in Matthean studies. This was inferred from the theme "New Light on the First Gospel," SBL Matthew Section, at which the substantive sections of Chapter 4 were presented as a paper. See Jenifer A. Daley, "'Keep the commandments … Sell your possessions': Soteriology and Human Flourishing in the Narrative of the Rich Young Man (Matt 19:16-29)" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Denver, CO, November 18, 2018).

[105] See, also, Osborne, *Hermeneutical*; Peckham, *Canonical Theology*. Within the context of the hermeneutical spiral, the results of this analysis are not considered final.

in relation to Christian stewardship. There were no theses, presuppositions, or plans to include a practical aspect in the model beyond what may be considered intuitive and implicit to theology. The formalized stewardship dimension in its explicit and substantiated form as οἰκονόμος, emerged unexpectedly from the rereading of οἰκονόμος (economics) from Scripture. Hence, the model is augmented by this, third, stewardship dimension.

<div align="center">Engaging the Secular: The Stewardship Dimension</div>

Modeling an explicit stewardship dimension in theological method is atypical. In this study, Christian stewardship ultimately plays a central and dynamic role in the model both in a discrete sense as well as serving as the critical linkage between the secular and the canonical dimensions. If by choosing to live according to Jesus's way of being in the world individuals enjoy the fulness of true flourishing (Chapter 4), and if by choosing to live in the world in partnership and union with God one exhibits true Christian stewardship, then the resulting connection makes a very important point. By choosing to live as a good οἰκονόμος, one is able to enjoy true human flourishing. Human flourishing, as the anchor of the model, provides both the presuppositions of the model and the impetus for a response via a theology of stewardship. Evidently, stewardship encompasses the totality of one's life, both in the holy and in the mundane. Like human flourishing, anything less than this wholeness which Jesus sought to engender falls short of the fulness that is possible by choosing Jesus's way of being in the world.

On Taylor's account, secularists 3 identify their telos in economics (οἰκονόμος)—

"productive, material aspects of human activity."[106] From the vantage point of Christian

theism and, based on the tentative findings above proposing that the divine 'economy' is

organized around eternal and maximal human flourishing (see Chapter 4; John 16–17),

this dissertation asserts that Christians are invited to organize the 'economy' of their lives

(as οἰκονόμοι—stewards) so as to effectively model true human flourishing within

modern social imaginaries. Presumably, by demonstrating a consistent model, each

Christian/church "'through the Holy Spirit, continually challenges, incorporates, and

transforms elements of the culture in order to bring them under the lordship of

Christ'."[107]

Accordingly, towards leveraging the long-established relationship between

economics and theology to inform theological method in this epoch, economics,

theology, and Christian stewardship work in tandem—collaborating toward secular

engagement rather than competing.

Engaging the Secular: Sketching a Multidimensional Model

The narrative of the rich young man appears as an effective bridge between

contemporary secularity 3 culture and Scripture more generally, and thus proposes

Scripture as a potentially veritable source for a contextualized reading of secular

fundamentals anchored in human flourishing. The canonical rereading suggests that

human flourishing is wholistic, redemptive, unmerited, historical, eternal, social,

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[106] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 111.

[107] Gilliland, "Contextualization," 225.

conditional, and freely accessible to all who choose to live with a particular understanding of reality and recognize a personal God who is love, immanent and transcendent, and desiring fellowship with humans who are created in God's image for God's glory. The lessons from the canonical dimension via the analyses of Jesus's apparent model of human flourishing in the rich young man narrative pervade all three dimensions of the theological model proposed in this study. This multidimensional model using principles from the lessons from the rich young man narrative, therefore, might potentially provide a palatable option for secularists, because it seems to overcome the incoherencies apparent in the secular model (see Chapter 3) while maintaining the focus on the essential—human flourishing—although more broadly defined. The lessons are thus apt for redeployment as both doctrine and praxis, and the call to praxis works in at least two directions: Christians live based on Scripture to secure their own flourishing and, *in so doing*, also model true flourishing to secularists.

Within the context of this study's focus on modern social imaginaries as, on Smith's account, "affective, noncognitive … and fueled by the stuff of the imagination rather than the intellect,"[108] the model proposed in this study is a hybrid of two types of theological models. On the one hand, the model is configured as "a relatively simple, artificially constructed case, which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated"[109] by applying economic influences

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[108] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 68.

[109] Dulles, *Models*, 30. Kroeger, along similar lines, defines a model as "a conceptual or symbolic representation, system or framework by which a reality or a part of reality is both *grasped* and *expressed*" ("Theological Models," 88; emphasis original). Kroger further notes that "the phenomenon of 'modelling' … relates to the attempts of the human mind and imagination to *grasp* and *express* our realities" (*Ibid*.). These definitions parallel what Robert P. Scharlemann distinguishes as (theological) models intended as a

via the quest for flourishing.[110] Expressed differently, this chapter utilizes the model of

human flourishing (Chapter 4), to inform a model of doing theology for engaging secular

society—a society that is predicated on human flourishing as the normative final end for

humans. On the other hand, the simpler, more intuitive model, also incorporates cognitive

and intellectual dimensions via the integrative Scripture framework and its rereading of

key concepts. Accordingly, the model acknowledges potential challenges posed by the

demands of the modern 'scientific' ethos.[111]

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simplified schema—"some handy construct"—in contradistinction to models "in the stricter sense of a distinct cognitive device and method" ("Theological Models and Their Construction," *Journal of Religion* 53, no. 1 [1973]: 65). For Scharlemann, "a model arises out of the free play of a subject's *imagination*" (*Ibid.*, 70; emphasis supplied). Dulles concurs that models are produced with the use of "creative imagination" (Dulles, *Models*, 31). It is uncertain whether Dulles intended this phrase in the constructive sense of Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The utility of models is that they can be changed with relative ease by small iterations, though the differences in the results may only be a question of degree (*Ibid.*, 33).

[110] Notably, the notion of divinely ordained economic flourishing that Taylor identifies in secularity 3 is historically complex. Richard A. Horsley agrees, as indicated earlier, that in the ancient (Greco-Roman) world, religion, politics and economics are closely interlinked and it would be "impossible to separate" them ("Jesus and the Politics of Palestine under Roman Rule," in Charlesworth and Pokorny *Jesus Research*, 338). It is also worth bearing in mind the economic nuances in the OT tabernacle which were highlighted in Chapter 2. Due to the efforts of Horsley and others, assertions of the broad linkages between economics and religious developments are now commonplace. In comparison, understanding how these linkages may be leveraged in theological method appears somewhat deficient. For a discussion of the broad linkages, see, for example, Ballor, "Theology and Economics"; Kevin J. Wanner, "Prophets and Profits: On Economies of Economic Goods in Economics of Salvation," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 41, no. 1 (2012): 20-25; Andrew Bradstock, "Profits Without Honor? Economics, Theology and the Current Global," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, no. 2 (2010): 135-57; Rowan Williams, "Theology and Economics: Two Different Worlds?," *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 4 (2010): 607-15; Devin Singh, "Secularity and the Money Economy"; Grant, *Economic Background*; and Nock, *Conversion*. The latter two were discussed in Chapter 2.

[111] On the question of 'cognitive' theological models, see, for example, Klemm and Klink, "Dialogue on Theological Models." In the early twenty-first century, Klemm and Klink diagnosed what they considered a marginalization of theology in contemporary intellectual life parallel with the persistent dominance of science and scientific knowledge—a condition they believed to be the inevitable consequence of theology's inability "to contribute to human knowledge by making cognitive claims that are possible to test" (*Ibid.*, 495-7). As a solution, Klemm and Klink prescribed an alternative that involves the constructing and testing of theological models, and that illuminates "the cognitive dimension" (*Ibid.*, 502). They explain that scientists create models to investigate and explain why some aspect of nature (the domain) behaves the way it does. For them, the critical value of models is that it is known from internally by the modeler who can change and control the composition or arrangement of the elements iteratively. On their view, "models enable one to 'see' why something behaves the way it does…and requires [*sic*]

Thus, a multidimensional model is sketched from all the data, comprising the secular, canonical, and stewardship dimensions. Arguably, all the data are now properly canonical because they have been reread from Scripture. However, it must be stressed that the model is inherently 'incomplete' because of the need to remain sensitive to impulses from the secular dimension, and because of the ongoing hermeneutical spiral: within the canonical dimension, and between the canonical and stewardship dimensions.

A Multidimensional Theological Model
Toward Engaging the Secular

The multidimensional model proposed in this chapter is an attempt at a broad framework of essential elements. Aside from being "created as tentative exploratory means for understanding,"[112] the intended role of the model developed in this chapter toward secular engagement is ultimately to "foster a genuine encounter with the living God."[113] In this section a number of proposals progressively hone the model into a more compact concept, moving from a generalized articulation as to how the model remains anchored in human flourishing *and* theology, to theses proposing the essence of the three dimensions, and then to three parts as a way of naming and incarnating the model.

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scientific imagination" (*Ibid*., 503). Klemm and Klink assert that "[m]odels participate in the metaphorical capacity of provoking the mind to think something new by seeing a resemblance previously unnoticed and unthought" (*Ibid*.).

[112] *Ibid*., 507.

[113] Kroeger, "Theological Models," 86.

Engaging the Secular: Systematizing the Model

To summarize the mode of theological method in this study, then, is to imagine an approach that recognizes that the questions framed by the secular audience direct the method more toward secular rather than theological or ecclesiastical concerns, and that the response, moving from a focus on man to a necessary focus on God, will involve as much praxis as doctrine. As Robert McAfee Brown says, the theologian "cannot be mainly a thinker; he must also be an actor and a participant" because "the only way the theologian will be able to speak authentically in the world today will be as he, in the contemporary expression, puts his body where his words are."[114]

Theology's role, then, is as Grant Osborne says, to function "so that the Bible might speak as validly now as it has in the past"[115]—with the "inviolable" content remaining unchanged but the form of presentation adapting to new situations—so that "'the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious, and historical setting.'"[116] In the model developed in this study, minimal theo-ontological implications via the concept of divine providence and the transcendent-immanent dichotomy also impact the question of systematization.[117] The understanding

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[114] Robert McAfee Brown, "Theology and The Gospel: Reflections on Theological Method," in *Theology and Church in Times of Change: Essays in Honor of John Coleman Bennett*, ed. Edward LeRoy Long Jr. and Robert T. Handy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 25.

[115] Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 397.

[116] Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 13-14, quoted in Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, 411. Notably, delivery strategies suitable to the audience—precisely how the method will be applied—need not be a part of the model, per se, and, in this study, are left to be developed on a needs basis, specific to particular engagements.

[117] Consideration of divine providence necessarily involves links to, and questions about, God's will, determinism, divine and human freedom, theodicy, and divine foreknowledge, among other things.

of these theo-ontological elements ought also to be modeled in the stewardship dimension.

At the same time, an important *caveat* is warranted by this emphasis on stewardship as Christian praxis. The inclusion of Christian stewardship transforms the model from being purely cognitive to being wholistic (a way of life). Faithfulness to the kind of stewardship implied in this model demands a life lived in coherence to the biblical PAST: experiencing true human flourishing and continually engendering it in others. It is not, initially, what one does but, rather, who one is—as Jesus tried to teach the rich young man in Matthew. Of course, there is place and need to do, but the steward's doing is secondary to the steward's being. This transformative dynamic of being before doing aligns well with the inversion of the Scripture principle to reflect spiritual discernment with *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura* (Chapter 1 and above).

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Toward a Multidimensional 4-S Model
for Engaging the Secular
</div>

The analyses in this dissertation offer an answer to the question as to how the multidimensional approach compares with conventional 'unidimensional' approaches.[118] This section summarizes how the "answering theology"[119] approach guiding this study in its atypical multidimensional expression that utilizes human flourishing as the key to secular engagement invites a reoriented view of human flourishing, several ontic

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These linkages are not developed here but are deferred to be investigated as part of future research.

[118] Unidimensional describes the singular explicit focus on theological (canonical) issues and questions, even where these are, of necessity, with respect to the God-world relationship.

[119] See Chapter 2, 83n.196.

variables, and Christian stewardship for efficacious theological method. Consequent on the foregoing, the threads of this discussion are organized into ten propositions for efficacious multidimensional theological method for secular engagement.

First, humans are, indeed, created for flourishing. Second, to those who follow Jesus, "eternal life" is promised in the flourishing for which humans are created; life lived in the present historical context is best couched in the principle of reversal implicit in Jesus's teaching (above). Third, maximal human flourishing is guaranteed. Fourth, economic flourishing limited to this life is only a small fraction of the breadth of flourishing for which humans were created; to focus only on economic flourishing is to desire far less than what God plans for humans created in his image. Fifth, humans are limited in the extent of flourishing achievable independently. In fact, relative to what is potentially achievable, any unilateral achievement is not properly defined as flourishing. Sixth, maximal, wholistic flourishing demands a biblically-oriented understanding of human flourishing, life, God (and divine providence), human beings (and human telos), and οἰκονόμος. Seventh, maximal, wholistic flourishing demands that οἰκονομία (stewardship) is realized as more than 'practical theology' limited to intermittent activity but must be understood as a multifaceted dynamic—an ongoing way of life that is being continually transformed and that evokes a transforming effect on its context as it executes, engenders, and enhances true human flourishing in the manifold areas of life. Eighth, maximal, wholistic flourishing is coextensive from now until eternity. Ninth, maximal, wholistic flourishing requires desiring, embracing, and living flourishing now, and recognizing its irreducibility despite suffering or hardship. Tenth, maximal wholistic

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flourishing requires recognizing that flourishing now poses no tensions with 'eternal' goals.

Importantly, no part of this model is optional or incidental. This is the 4-S Theological Model: Secular-*sola Scriptura*-Stewardship.

Following this, as it gathers and further summarizes the threads of the arguments made throughout the dissertation, the chapter proposes two broad articulations of the model, an abbreviated and an expanded version, and commends the latter.

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Abbreviated Multidimensional 4-S Model
Toward Engaging the Secular

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The 'abbreviated' model is the first of at least two possible approaches to represent the broad spectrum of the dimensions captured in the model sketched above. This abbreviated model is a simplification of the 'unidimensional' canonical integrative Scripture framework employed by some traditions of Christian theology. There is a presumption that this present formulation *assumes* that the integrative Scripture framework *implicitly* captures other dimensions—in this instance those relating to the broader economic, PAST, and practical considerations—and that these will be addressed in the model implementation as part of any subsequent process of contextualization.

This specification posits that efficacious secular engagement rests primarily on articulating (and communicating) canonical principles of theology using the comprehensive integrative Scripture framework while remaining opening to spiritual discernment. Secular concerns with human flourishing, for example, are not *necessarily* excluded but neither are they specifically considered, or treated, as primary. In practical terms, the three major dimensions discussed above seem to appear most naturally as: first, engage with secularists (focused on the canonical dimension). That is, to invite

secularists to investigate Scripture to understand the essentials of theology and the

gospel. This *may*, ideally, include consideration of the secular quest and posit human

flourishing and PAST biblically. Second, seek to inspire secularists (focused on the

secular dimension). This is *likely* to include secular interests and secularists are guided to

expect and experience flourishing greater than economic. Third, seek to ignite secularists

(focused on the stewardship dimension). Christians *may* begin to model the canonical

understandings of themes of interest to secularists. In general, the results of the

implementation of this 'front-loaded' Scripture model among secularists have not been

encouraging, pose challenges to contemporary theology, and highlight the need for

articulated multidimensionality.[120]

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Expanded Multidimensional 4-S Model
Toward Engaging the Secular

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The 'expanded' model is the second possible approach to represent the broad

spectrum of the dimensions captured in the model sketched above. This alternative,

explicitly multidimensional, specification of the model is the preferred option for this

study. This articulated model includes explicit and expanded dimensions to the

abbreviated model so as to remain purposefully sensitive to, and emphatic on, issues of

paradigmatic import to secular 3 social imaginaries. For these reasons, it is convenient to

augment the first configuration by specifically including a dimension to encompass

human telos in general (due to its singular importance to social imaginaries in general)

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[120] Arguably, it is the attempts at canonical engagement as primary that stymies efforts at
theological engagement with a secular audience, for whom Scripture is '*adiaphora*' at best. Hence, on these
grounds, it appears that the 'conventional' models might be theologically 'thin.'

and human flourishing in particular (due to its defining import in social imaginaries and in secularity 3), and, thus, the significant reformulated PAST variables from modern social imaginaries discussed above, in addition to an explicit stewardship dimension.

In practical terms, the three major dimensions discussed above may be expressed as: first, connect with secularists (the secular dimension). Christians/theologians will linger with secularists in their space or, secondarily, listen to or about secularists with authentic interest (Rom 10:14), and learn about the world through secular eyes. Second, model a life of true flourishing to secularists (the stewardship dimension). As good οἰκονόμοι, Christians live true canonical human flourishing that is greater than economic in the secular imaginaries, model the canonical meaning of PAST, strategically use human flourishing language to connect with secularists, and build genuine social relationships of Christian love and friendship. The first and second points here are interchangeable or may be concurrent.[121] Third, engage with secularists (the canonical dimension). Christians engage secularists to directly investigate Scripture to further examine their quest and to understand PAST biblically, and continue to ignite secularists with Christian example as they seek to inspire secularists to expect and experience flourishing greater than economic.

This expanded formulation states that efficacious secular engagement is a function of openness to spiritual discernment, explicit attention to, and focus on, secularity 3 fundamentals—human flourishing and, thus, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and theology—and, purposeful, strategic, and faithful Christian stewardship

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[121] Ideally, Christians should live a life of canonical human flourishing continuously: prior to, during, and after strategic contact with secularists.

that is true to the biblical ethos of human flourishing. These themes should be construed within the context of a biblical understanding of the manifold areas of life in a way that is faithful to the spiritually-directed comprehensive integrative Scripture framework. Importantly, the essence of the biblical message remains intact and is exemplified by Christian stewardship, while the form is rearranged to give primacy to secularity 3 interests. Notably, the source(s) for identifying issues of centrality to the cultural imaginary may be social-scientific (as Charles Taylor) but must, necessarily, engage with the secular self-identity rather than being assumed or imposed.

Summary

Irrespective of whether the model articulation is abbreviated or expanded, the theological project is organized and aligned to a singular center in a canonical perspective of human flourishing. However, the multidimensional model reinforces this objective from various angles through which the Holy Spirit may respond to, and mitigate, diffuse philosophical presuppositions that are incongruent with a canonical philosophy and that may be at work in dominant cultural pockets in society. Hence, the very nature of οἰκονόμος—as (Christian) steward—as diffuse and dynamic, emerges as a significant key to this end in this era when οἰκονόμος—as economics—also plays a central and defining role.

The proposed model represents work in progress toward engaging the secular. With its inherent reformulations of human telos, paradigmatic shifts in PAST variables and the concomitant effects (Chapter 3), Taylor's story of secularity undoubtedly suggests far-reaching implications for contemporary Christian theology and method. Are secularists likely to respond more favorably to this model than they have to other models

in the past? Does multidimensionality automatically guarantee or enhance the efficacy of theological method? The testing of the model has been deferred to future research and the precise results will depend on a range of factors.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented details of the development of a theological model for engaging modern social imaginaries. The approach, and the results, show themes that are atypical to theological models. While this may initially appear surprising, the explanation lies in the fact that these specific indicators utilized were selected by a process of qualitative investigation of the secular self-identity via Charles Taylor's social imaginary model (Chapter 3). In this respect, the model developed is intended as a multifaceted tool to complement current mechanisms toward secular engagement. The preferred articulation for this chapter (and this dissertation) is the expanded 4-S Theological Model— Secular-*sola Scriptura*-Stewardship. Theoretically, each dimension, and each variable in each dimension appears to be significant and potentially important instruments for contemporary theology and method.[122]

Notably, the emphasis on Christian praxis—stewardship—although atypical in theological method, is singularly important. Because of the symbiosis between background and practice,[123] Christians must seek, individually and collectively, to

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[122] The three dimensions and the associated variables should be recalled as: first, secular dimension (with variables human telos, human flourishing, PAST); second, canonical dimension (with variables canonical data, analytic themes from canonical data, and reoriented human flourishing and PAST); third, stewardship dimension (with variable Christian stewardship with regard to reoriented human flourishing and PAST).

[123] Taylor, *Modern*, 25.

provoke re-imagination of the imaginaries it wishes to dominate via Spirit-guided and canonically-guided praxis—essentially, living a canonical understanding of human flourishing and PAST—in creative and attractive ways. Christians are charged to witness about the One who is their Head (Matt 21:42; 28:19-20), and to proclaim God's love as depicted through Jesus Christ (John 3:16). It is therefore critical that human flourishing be clearly articulated by, and evidenced in, the life and doctrine of the church. To the extent that it is true that social imaginary reflects how "ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings,"[124] and that this complex concept is more frequently expressed in images, stories, and legends, the twenty-first century church must seek to penetrate social imaginaries by retelling the story—a biblical edition of flourishing, reality, God, and humanity—clearly, simply, and repeatedly. Utilizing a variety of strategies, Christians must seek to repaint the imaginaries of contemporary society using broad strokes or painstaking detail—whatever is necessary to re-present the biblical images and the stories of the past.

As the church contemplates these critical issues in these times, the love of Jesus, and obedience to the Great Commission, must overflow into every motive and action so that the church may be empowered to share beyond philosophical, cultural, socio-economic and even religious boundaries about the good news of the immanent-transcendent and everlastingly loving God's plan for human flourishing.

This chapter has not focused on determining relative efficacy of different dimensions of the multidimensional model. Neither has the statistical or practical efficacy

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[124] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.

of the model been tested. Such investigation is deliberately deferred to be examined as part of future research.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

How to do theology in contemporary secular society is a vexed question. Finding an intelligible means of communicating the gospel in this epoch is one of the greatest challenges facing the Christian church in the West. Chapter 1 pointed to the increase in 'nones' (those who consider themselves 'religiously unaffiliated') and posed some indicative suggestions for utilizing concepts from the secular culture itself for redeployment in theological method. Thus, this dissertation reports the results of a study that has sought to sketch a multidimensional model in response to the need for improved theological engagement with the secular as expressed in Chapter 1.

Launching from the hypothesis to redeploy modern social imaginaries in theological method toward secular engagement, Chapter 2 presents a selected, and predominantly historical, survey of imagination and its constitutive social imagination (social imaginary). Relying on Charles Taylor's articulation of secularity 3 and modern social imaginaries in Chapter 3, the study moved to a biblical exploration and rereading of some fundamentals of secularity 3 in Chapter 4. Informed by the data and findings from the foregoing chapters, Chapter 5 reports the development and the crafting of a multidimensional model specifically intended for engagement in secularity 3. Although

preliminary, these results have far-reaching implications—particularly in the issues they

expose as yet to be addressed—and offer some important options for responding to the

challenges that have accompanied increasing secularity.

In the remaining sections, this chapter summarizes the findings of the study,

offers some concluding remarks, and proposes some important areas for future research.

Summary and Conclusions

This section presents a summary of the findings and conclusions of each chapter

of the study.

Theology and Social Imaginary

Chapter 1 summarized several analytical themes that were subsequently

developed in the various chapters of this dissertation.

The problem addressed in this study centers around the character of modern social

imaginaries—as articulated by Charles Taylor—and the associated challenges (and

potential opportunities) to doing theology and fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt

28:19-20. Cf. Acts 1:8) within this cultural and social context. The chapter opened with a

discussion of the background to the study and the attendant challenges which the secular

context poses to Christian theology and to share the gospel. These challenges are evident

in the gap between church and society. Undoubtedly, challenges to the theological project

have increased significantly due a wide range of modern impulses. Among other things,

the contemporary situation reflects plurality, indifference toward the religious, and a

preoccupation with 'immanent' goals. Apart from the implications of the peculiar

historical construction of modern social imaginaries, per se, the exclusively humanist

character of modern social imaginaries is an epistemological relocation of authority,

meaning, and purpose from the supernatural and transcendent realm to the natural and human, and immanent human flourishing. Thus, the question arises as to what shape Christian theological method should take so that it not only functions persuasively in the secular context but that it also bears efficacy with full academic and theological responsibility as an efficacious channel for the message of the gospel.

Accordingly, the chapter called for a response positing that the problem arises, firstly, from insufficient understanding of the peculiar character of contemporary secular society and, secondly, from lack of multidimensionality in theological method to account for different aspects of reality. Based on the premise that economic human flourishing is a central axis of modern social imaginaries, and on the hypothesis that social imaginary is potentially instrumental to theological method, the chapter moved to articulate the focus and the outline of the study via explication of the problem, purpose, justification, conceptual framework and methodology, and scope and delimitations. As part of the process, the chapter briefly introduces the concept of οἰκονόμος, the Greek root from which the modern concept of economy (and economics) is derived, given the 'economic' import to Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries. The chapter outlines a tripartite methodology comprising philosophical phenomenological exegesis (from Charles Taylor's articulation of secularity 3), biblical hermeneutics (focused on analyses from the Gospel of Matthew), and a Scripture framework that integrates the former two parts. In this study the Scripture framework inverts the conventional order, so that it appears as spiritual discernment with *sola-prima-tota-analogia Scriptura*, in order to emphasize the primacy given to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the entire process of doing theology.

Genealogical Dynamics of Social Imaginaries

Chapter 2 presents a selected survey of the literature on imagination and social imagination and concludes, among other things, on the potentially positive role of imagination and social imaginary in Christian theology. The chapter is presented in two parts.

The first part of the chapter delineates changing perspectives on imagination across pre-modern, modern, and post-modern epochs. Relying on Richard Kearney's argument, the chapter describes changing perspectives of imagination as mimetic, productive, and parodic, respectively. These shifts in imagery were mirrored in social imagination as social construct, and as instrument to understand the world (C. Wright Mills) and create community and social identity (Jennifer Elisa Veninga).

The imagination-social imaginary link is explored via the work of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" and Cornelius Castoriadis's "imaginary institutions" of society. With slight peculiarities, both thinkers posit the imaginary as an invisible reality of social identification. Thus, the chapter moves to phenomenological analyses of pre-modern Hebraic and Greco-Roman social imaginaries before considering some broad theoretical considerations relating to the modern and post-modern contexts. The relevance of these views is reflected in the inferences about the potential utility of social imaginary as a didactic tool in contemporary society.

Varied conceptions of human flourishing emerge as a central pole and recurring theme across social imaginaries. The cultural and philosophical context of Greco-Roman social imaginaries evidence interesting influences of economics on religion, evident in the varied emphases on human flourishing but also through the dynamics of οἰκονόμος.

This word connotes economy, economics, manager, or steward of some kind, was used in reference to to an individual of high status in a position of responsibility in the *civitas*, and later in the church. As spiritual substitute for the bishop in addition to financial and 'economic' manager, the historical roles of οἰκονόμος offer a possible explanation as to how current conceptions and nuances about money in the church might have arisen. Hence, οἰκονόμος appears extemely significant, although sometimes unobtrusively, to shifts in social imaginaries.

In the second part of Chapter 2, and weighing the potential usefulness of social imaginary for theological method, the chapter moves to highlight and address the apparently overwhelming negative perspective that pervades in some religious quarters with respect to its constitutive element—imagination. By implicitly assuming that imagination and its output are suspect, some religious perspectives have ignored the question of its inevitable presence (and usefulness) in the interpretation of Scripture. From the vast literature and breadth of viewpoints, Chapter 2 explored four selected themes via representative thinkers. First, an overview of negative imaginative views— which attribute a presupposed negative character to imagination and, thus, its relationship with theology. Second, constructive imaginative views—which suggest that imagination *constructs* the concept of God—were explored via Gordon Kaufman's "theological imagination" and David Ray Griffin's "postmodern theology." Third, reflective imaginative views—which suggest that imagination *reflects* an existing concept of God— were explored via George MacDonald's "baptized imagination" and C. S. Lewis's use of imagination in theology. Finally, a positive imaginative view—which suggests a positive hermeneutical role for imagination—was explored utilizing Garrett Green's

"paradigmatic imagination." This exploration informs a more balanced conclusion of the potential utility of positive imagination (and, also, possibly, reflective views) in Christian theology, with the recognition that imagination must always be constrained by an overarching principle and/or standard and therefore should not be viewed as entirely autonomous or omnicompetent.

Theology and Social Imaginary in Charles Taylor

Chapter 3's deconstruction of Charles Taylor's story of contemporary secularity, supports the thesis of Chapter 2 in signifying the potential methodological utility of social imaginary and, also, in flagging human flourishing as a key consideration.

Central to this study is that the formulation and execution of sound methodological principles to address the problem of engagement with secular society mandates cognizance of the secular self-identity. Additionally, the chapter places emphasis on factors of primacy to the secular mindset that may be redeployed for engagement with secularists. For this, the chapter relies on Charles Taylor's articulation of secularity, taxonomically outlined as secularity 1 (an era of sacred-secular duality), secularity 2 (an era of *a*religiosity and intense rationality), and secularity 3 (the contemporary era of 'authenticity,' the co-existence of belief and unbelief, and exclusive humanism in the context of plurality). The chapter is presented in two parts.

In part one, the analytical description of Charles Taylor's articulation of secularity suggests modern social imaginaries—characterized by exclusive humanism—as the undoing of classical and medieval structures as evident in shifts in PAST variables: philosophically (the nature of reality more broadly), anthropologically (human nature and telos more generally), sociologically (social structures and the God-world relationship),

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and theologically (considerations of divine ontology and divine providence). Hence, the secular reformulation of these ontic concepts have proved pivotal to the secular self-identity and, thus, to appropriate theological methodology for contemporary society. These reformulations, which characterize secularity 3 suggest an enclosed and immanent universe, buffered human with telos confined to economic human flourishing, predominant individuality with only instrumental mutuality, and an utterly transcendent and impersonal god (where one exists) that somehow providentially orders life to relinquish all authority and capability to humans to realize economic human flourishing.

Part two of the chapter evaluates this secular understanding within modern social imaginaries and concludes on the potential for its application in theological method. However, on account of internal incoherencies and inconsistencies, a rereading of some fundamental concepts—human flourishing and PAST—prior to any application and utilization to augment theological method was recommended. While this study makes no assertion that these variables appear unambiguously as a unique model, they are central to, and also discernible, demonstrable, and defensible from, Taylor's story, and their utility to augment 'conventional' theological method supports the multidimensionality that this study considers pivotal to efficacious contemporary theology and method.

Theology and Social Imaginary in Matthew's Gospel

Chapter 4 presents the results of a biblical exploration of the concepts marked for rereading in Chapter 3 and, with secularity 3, concludes on human flourishing as human telos, but otherwise, more broadly, defined. The chapter is presented in two parts.

The awareness of the need to engage with issues of primacy to secularists *and* to articulate a faithful and reliable biblical reading of these issues, is an essential

consideration for secular engagement. Thus, in the first part, Chapter 4 explores three potential avenues for this nexus. First, the chapter explores the concept of social imaginary in the context of the first Gospel and emphasizes both its Hebraic and Greco-Roman aspects and influences. Second, the chapter explores, and illustrates, positive imaginative potentiality via the Sermon on the Mount. Third, and most substantively, following the indicative clues about human flourishing (Chapters 2 & 3) and following the leads of economic imagery in the Gospel (see Chapter 1), the chapter analyses the human flourishing trope from different perspectives in the Gospel's Hebraic and Greco-Roman social imaginaries via the narrative of the rich young man (Matt 19:16-29). From these analyses, the narrative of the rich young man emerges as a narrative of human flourishing, with no antagonisms with soteriological and other 'divine' goals. Thus, the analyses of the narrative of the rich young man and its intertwinings with the Sermon on the Mount suggest that a faithful biblical articulation might be palatable to the existential preoccupation and quest of secularity 3 because of the link to the central pole of human flourishing and, thus, sensitivity to a range of interests from secularity 3.

The chapter moves, in the second part, to extract indicative lessons from the analyses of the narrative of the rich young man and the Sermon for theological method using human flourishing as the anchor and diffused via PAST. Human flourishing in this instance is subject to a particular, biblical, conception that exceeds the economic and extends to all facets of life. Hence, the realization of maximal flourishing is presumed to be contingent on a reoriented conception, and ethical expression, of the PAST variables. Implicitly, then, to understand, and live, maximal human flourishing, points to a need for Scripture to inform that understanding.

With the foregoing in view, the chapter closes by pointing toward the sketching of a multidimensional model for contemporary secular imaginaries that utilizes lessons from Matthean social imaginaries.

Toward a Multidimensional Model for Engaging the Secular

Chapter 5 demonstrates multidimensionality in theological method by combining sub-models from varying dimensions to give attention to secular thought patterns in a way that aims to be useful for recontextualization, and channeling, of biblical theology. This chapter asserts that *sola Scriptura* is not irreconcilably incompatible with social imaginary and, thus, gathers the threads from the various chapters and sketches a three-dimensional model toward secular engagement: secular, canonical, and stewardship. The chapter describes the development and crafting the multidimensional theological model in four main sections.

First, the chapter preempts and responds to potential concerns about transposing lessons across time and space, and about the application of social imagination in theological method. It pulls together themes and identifies affinities between Greco-Roman and modern social imaginaries, and illustrates positive imagination in the interpretation of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). Against this background, the chapter also illustrates the method to apply the integrated Spirit-guided Scripture framework to secular fundamentals in this study. This relates to the secular dimension.

Second, applying the integrative Scripture framework to give a canonical reading of human flourishing and PAST variables, the chapter transforms the Matthean lessons and readings into canonical lessons and readings. Because Taylor's story suggests economics as important via its role in human flourishing, and because of the centrality of

economic human flourishing to the Taylorian model and to social imaginaries more generally, a biblical reading of οἰκονόμος was considered prudent as well. This reading of these secular fundamentals provides an alternative, and fresh, perspective from Scripture. The canonical readings suggest that human flourishing is wholistic and independent of human economic achievement (Matt 19:28-29. Cf. 20:16), and that it is realizable in a historical context wherein humans live and act and where God is able to act and relate with humans. Furthermore, there is an indelible link between human nature and telos and a divine element that the *imago Dei* establishes, and, as such, full flourishing is realizable only within the context of a relationship with God and with others. As the foregoing suggests, to consider God as utterly transcendent or as having a providential plan for purely economic goals for humans appears incoherent. This latter point on immanence-transcendence carries potentially broad implications for divine ontology, more generally. Furthermore, this systematic understanding of these readings of PAST and human flourishing is further illuminated within the context of humans as stewards/managers (οἰκονόμοι). The foregoing describes the canonical dimension.

Thus, the biblical reading expands and systematizes the lessons extracted from Chapter 4 by explicitly extending their canonical presence outward from the Gospel of Matthew in both directions (into the Hebrew Bible as well as the NT). In doing so, all the variables—including human flourishing, the consideration of which was initially motivated by secularity 3—are 'transformed' into canonical variables for the theological model. The transformation of οἰκονόμος—as the way a person chooses to live in the world—is particularly noteworthy: human preoccupation with accumulating and managing economic goods as 'owner'/economist (οἰκονόμος) is transformed into a

preoccupation with managing life as 'steward' (οἰκονόμος) and this appreciation and

normative integrative praxis of stewardship (οἰκονόμια) is reflected in particular

understandings, attitudes, and expectations toward human flourishing. As integrative

praxis, stewardship (οἰκονόμια) carries important implications for secular engagement

because it is the avenue through which Christians mimic the way of life that is

conditional to the full and true human flourishing that secularists seek and that Scripture

suggests. This represents the stewardship dimension.

This study takes the view that the level of import that is accorded to the Christian

way of being in the world is a fundamental question. The engagement with οἰκονόμος

and οἰκονόμία suggests at least two very important directions for Christian praxis. On the

one hand, faithfulness to biblical social imaginaries provokes obedience to follow Jesus

as the goal of Scripture. On the other hand, faithfulness to biblical social imaginaries

provokes obedience to model Scripture as example for secularists, not to be imposed

from a unilateral 'objective' stance but, rather, to be exemplified in Christian praxis as

the (un)natural way of being in the world, prior to any invitation to Scriptural

engagement. This is considered an efficacious response to secularists's expressed need

for a God who is present in "everyday contexts." That is to say, within the context of

engagement with secularity 3, it is only when the question about making a Christian

connection with secular social imaginaries has been answered can subsidiary questions

concerning secularists 3 engagement with the Scriptures be satisfactorily addressed.

Οἰκονόμος as steward is a central element of the model that relies on social imaginary as

complementary methodology: it is by the instrumentality of social imaginary that the

οἰκονόμος actualizes the canonical impact on the secular philosophy. By living in the

world according to a canonical understanding, Christian οἰκονόμοι are effectively utilizing social imaginary for generating adaptations and self-transformations.

Fourth, the multidimensional model is summarized, all the while recognizing the importance of remaining tentative to further illumination and potential modifications. The model is thus summarized according to the three major dimensions—secular, canonical, and stewardship—and named for incarnation as the 4-S Theological model: Secular-*sola Scriptura*-Stewardship.

Conclusions

The church is undoubtedly challenged in its efforts to engage contemporary society although, on Taylor's view, the secular perceptions may have been theologically influenced and/or incubated. The prime issue in this study has been the development of methodological strategies to narrow the gap between church and society, seeking, ultimately, to answer the question: What shape might theological method take such that it enhances the possibility of greater secular reception of the gospel? Recognizing that the mechanisms may, possibly, come in a variety of forms, this study has sought to sketch the development of, and to report on, multidimensional modelling for theological method directed toward engagement with secularity 3.

Taylor's story seems to capture the complexities of contemporary society. The interdisciplinary composition of Taylor's social imaginary model appear as potentially efficacious instruments and critical components for methodology aimed at contemporary secularity 3 engagement. The utility in Taylor's model accords well with the major themes of this study: in particular, that efforts must be focused on identifying and addressing the areas of disconnect between church and contemporary society and, in that

regard, addressing the lack of sufficient multidimensionality in theological engagements with the secular audience. Thus, sensitivity to the philosophical underpinnings in the historical construction of contemporary secularity assumes primacy in this study.

Multidimensionality in theological modelling in this study has redeployed human flourishing as a central cultural variable extracted from Charles Taylor's articulation of modern social imaginaries, along with other culturally conditioned PAST variables (the secular dimension), in addition to some fresh exegetical evidence regarding these variables from the narrative of the rich young man in the Gospel of Matthew (the canonical dimension). In these respects, the study has attempted to fill the gap with respect to understanding and engaging the cultural dynamics of secularity, and also the gap that exists in the literature with respect to the economic dimension of the first Gospel and its contemporary application. A third complementary dimension in the form of Christian praxis completes the model (the stewardship dimension). Although this dimension appears thirdly in the model construct and is dependent on the second, canonical, dimension for its constitution, it is functionally prior to the canonical dimension in the actual execution of the model. Presumably, practical application prior to cognitive engagement is likely to be more effective with secularists. Ostensibly, a major part of the complexity that besets theology today can be removed by a return to including God in theology—according to the nature and actions of God evident in God's self-revelation in Scripture—and, ultimately, reflecting the canonical image of God in the lives of individuals and in the doctrines of the church.

In this dissertation, the model encapsulates both philosophy and broad strategy in the form of a reasoned and relevant assertion of faith. Enhancing theological method is

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deemed to require explicit sensitivity to the secular self-identification and issues of import to the contemporary secular context. In general, the multidimensional and contextual nature of the model appear consistent with the method inferred from Scripture as Jesus often engaged with people using language and context from the cultural experience. Generally, the model implies some relevance and potential benefits of the multidimensional approach to doing theology.

This study suggest that complex inter-relationships exist between individuals, the social system, as well as the broader existential socio-religio-cultural setting. The study also highlights the importance of considering the dynamics at work among the different dimensions. These themes suggest that any theological model aimed at engaging secularity 3 should be designed to include these various dimensions. The implications of these results for theological method are potentially far-reaching: Efficacious theological engagement requires a combination of spiritual direction, cultural indicators, biblical data, and informed judgement (imagination) to inform the life and strategy of believers, since cultural influences may not be sufficiently addressed through the use of only broad-based biblical-hermeneutically-influenced data and strategies, however well-intentioned and executed. At the same time, the questions of proportionality and measurement are obvious challenges: should emphasis be placed on cultural factors or biblical data? How exactly are such non-quantifiable indicators measured and indeed, can they be measured?

This dissertation has also intimated that the Great Commission takes on added significance especially in this epoch when discipleship seems irrelevant and redundant. Attempts to change the current impasse between church and society begin with the courage to re-imagine society in the way Jesus implies. The Holy Spirit who empowered

twelve Galilean peasants such that they, and others they influenced, "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) in the first century, is still available to empower willing twenty-first century disciples to turn the secular tide. If the church is to mimic Jesus's methodology in any attempt to obey the Great Commission, then it must respond to the issues of primacy to the secular mind, and theological method should be purposefully sensitive to the compelling force that fuels the secular quest. If, indeed, there is "no new thing under the sun" (Ecc 1:9), and if the story of Scripture is the story of the gospel, then the church must stand ready to face this task armed with Scripture.

The results from the analyses should prompt theologians as well as all Christians to imagine new ways of doing theology. Theology not only plays a critical role in creating and fostering the appropriate linkages with secular society by way of its influence on the life, ministry, and mission of the church through doctrine, but it also stands at the nexus of the broader church-society social connection influencing, to a large extent, the degree of secular engagement achievable by way of its method. Theological method comprising a model such as that developed in this study—particularly the expanded version of the 4-S model—suggests potentiality for greater and, possibly, more effective secular engagement. More generally, the model proposed in this dissertation— by its novel explicit multidimensionality encompassing explicit cultural, canonical, and stewardship dimensions—provides strong *prima facie* evidence for, and point toward, the possibility of developing multidimensional models of varying composition and levels of complexity for doing theology in order to enhance secular engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

This dissertation has sought to incorporate some of the major findings from a relatively simple examination of Charles Taylor's articulation of the secular self-identity in the construction of a multidimensional theological model. In many respects, this study remains research in the early stages of development. Several other issues may profitably be investigated as part of future research in order to enhance multidimensionality, as well as the reliability and utility of the model proposed in this study and also the quality, extent, and influence of the various dimensions. The potential augmentations noted here are not comprehensive, derive directly and obliquely from the model developed, and are likely to enhance the design and efficacy of appropriate strategies for dynamic secular engagement within the flux of the cultural imaginary. Two sets of recommendations are broadly summarized from the analysis.

The first set of recommendations concerns the priority that should be given to theological research in conjunction with cultural issues. To give this matter due consideration, it would be important for theologians to review the range of possibilities open to them to effectively do theology and to give explicit and significant consideration to cultural issues as well as 'conventional' theological issues. Within the context of conservative Christian theology, it may certainly require major changes in the way theological method is conceptualized and articulated. Three potential avenues are noted here.

Firstly, a logical extension of this work could involve further contextualization of the multidimensional model (and thus the message) using localized social imaginaries. This means focusing on the specific issues of concern to target groups—defined, for

example, by race, gender, ethnicity, or profession, and/or groups within a specific locale, and could include, but not be limited to, research in the use of cultural concerns. Such contextualization should remain, as this study has attempted, independent of the cultural flux while utilizing it productively.

Secondly, a possible extension of this work relates to the inclusion of some other factors significant to secularity. The model developed in this study is based on factors that have been deemed significant in the past in terms of the historical construction of secular imaginaries. A possible modification might include trending issues that are likely to become significant to the secular mind-set or self-identity. Additionally, this augmentation might be complemented by the inclusion of factors garnered from alternative social scientific sources, such as multiple (but coherent) articulations of the secular. Such complementarity will augur well for comprehensiveness, robustness, and multidimensionality. These modifications were not used here since model parsimony was critical, bearing in mind the space constraints.

Thirdly, the model developed in this study could potentially benefit from specific considerations of risk and reward from an economic perspective and a comparison with the necessary element of 'faith' in economic models vis-à-vis the faith element in theology. In this regard, consideration of potential protests from secularists in terms of an economic versus biblical understanding of flourishing would likely improve the relevance and robustness of the model. Linked to this are concerns already implied above regarding the issue of theodicy. Does the claim to maximal human flourishing for those in relationship with God hold in the face of egregious, inequitable, and inconsistent suffering in the world? It would be useful to extend the model to the inclusion of this

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consideration, if possible. Further research could apply such considerations—and the attendant issues of divine providence and divine and human freewill—to the framework already developed in this study.

The second set of recommendations concerns theological issues that were highlighted from the present study's consideration of the cultural situation. Three potential augmentations are offered.

First, this research suggests that the use and acknowledgement of Scripture as norming norm is essential to a reformulated conception of human flourishing as well as philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and theological variables. However, from the perspective of both theological method and social transformation, this presumption about Scripture raises questions about the defense of its truth and the trustworthiness. This is of particular relevance due to the epistemological turn of the contemporary cultural context more generally, but also, specifically, due to the contemporary relationship between 'reality,' imagination, and social imaginary. The question of truth is of singular importance for Christian gospel and doctrine, and future research could extend the multidimensionality of modelling for secular engagement further to explicitly reflect this in some way.

Second, on Taylor's account of divine providence as fundamental to secularity 3, it appears that the concept of divine providence might profitably be utilized in secular society toward enhancing theological engagement. This consideration opens up as a significant avenue for further research because concerns with divine providence are inextricably linked with issues about divine ontology: for example, divine power, foreknowledge, and freedom. These have not been examined in relation to the secular

model in this study. If, indeed, the world can be conceived as having been transformed from one in which belief in God was inevitable to one in which it is absurd, and if indeed God has been redefined to guarantee a favorable response to every human desire for economic flourishing, then, as noted above, it appears that the real issue at stake is the understanding of God and of his relationship with the world. Undoubtedly, comprehension of God's cosmic activities in history is secondary to, even contingent on, understanding his nature, character, and how he works in individual lives. Apparently, the conflation of incompatible macro presuppositions with some Scriptural and philosophical data have contributed to secularity 3. Misinterpretation of historical events purportedly in the name of God (for example, religious wars) might have conspired against a responsible canonical understanding of God such that rationality and economic prosperity substitute for spirituality. Furthermore, because Taylor's account of secularity also cites Adam Smith as being particularly influential in issues critical to the shift to secularism via its relationship with divine providence, exploration and analysis of relevant and mutual themes with Smith's 'invisible hand' appear as ideal candidates for future research. Considering the central role of the 'invisible hand' to free market economics and the latter's role to the secular conception of human flourishing, it is evident that there is much room for extensive work to be done in regard to divine providence and its attendant issues in the economic realm.

Third, performance measures to evaluate effectiveness should be developed. The results reported in this study do not bear on the issue of the relative efficacy of the various factors in determining the extent of theological engagement possible, or to the effectiveness or the usefulness of the model as a whole in achieving those results. The

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multidimensional model presented in this study for addressing the need for greater

engagement with the secular is based on theoretical presuppositions and an attempt to

address the complex concept of social imaginary but by a relatively unsophisticated

approach. Consequently, there are a number of facets to social imaginary that have been

superficially addressed and, possibly, some that have not been addressed at all.

The dynamic nature of the secular cultural environment is likely to pose far-

reaching and significant challenges to Christian theology and method. Accordingly,

effective theological method should, ideally, exercise prudence in being proactive to keep

abreast with the social and cultural flux. Reactive responses may result in ineffectiveness

because of attempts to connect with secularists via outdated modes that are of little or no

import to contemporary society. Proactive responses should foster efficacious

enhancement in both theological method and secular engagement.

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SELECT PUBLICATIONS, PAPERS/POSTERS PRESENTED

2018.   (a) "When Unity is Not Enough. Reflections from ῾Ομοθυμαδόν in the Acts of the Apostles." Poster presented at annual professional meetings, CO, Nov.
(b) "'Keep the Commandments … Sell Your Possessions': Soteriology and Human Flourishing in the Narrative of the Rich Young Man (Matt 19:16-29)." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Denver, CO, November 19.

2017.   "How will they hear if we do not listen? Theological Method and Engaging the Secular." Poster presented at annual professional meetings, MA, Nov

2016.   "God, Power, and Gospel in a Postmodern World—A Critique of Griffin's Postmodern God." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 27, 1 & 2.

2013.   "Post-crisis cost efficiency of Jamaican banks," *Applied Financial Economics*, 23, 20: 1599-1607 (with Kent Matthews and Tiantian Zhang).

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2004.   IFRS: Blessing or curse for developing markets? *Financial Regulator*, 8, 2.

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