Chapter 2

California, Localized Theology, and Theological Localism

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Wallace Stegner once said, "Like the rest of America, California is unformed, innovative, ahistorical, hedonistic, acquisitive, and energetic—only more so."[1] As California becomes increasingly self-conscious as a social and political entity, an academic conversation is beginning to take place among historians, political scientists, literary scholars, and others interested in describing this vast place. "California Studies" is now, as they say, a thing. It has classes, courses of study, academic conferences, a journal,[2] and in the inevitable logic of academia, it will no doubt have majors and graduate degrees before long. In this interdisciplinary conversation, theologians have not been prominent so far. As a result, the conversation has lacked a depth and seriousness which theological categories could provide. If theology is a real intellectual discipline, in touch with reality, it ought (at the very least) to be able to find true, interesting, and enlightening things to say in this public dialogue.

But before theologians can contribute to the dialogue, they need to: first, know the Californian dialect: second, clarify their own properly theological reasons for involvement: and third, consider helpful methods from more established disciplines. This chapter will attempt to enact the first (showing mastery of the Californian dialect by working with recognizably Californian sources), pursue

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[1] Quoted from the editorial of a special California issue from Wallace Stegner, "California: The Experimental Society," *Saturday Review* (September 23, 1967) in Philip L. Fradkin, *Wallace Stegner and the American West*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 154.

[2] See the acclaimed, *BOOM: A Journal of California*, published by University of California Press and edited by veteran journalist Jon Christensen; and note the significance of California literature recently highlighted in Larry Gordon, "Students sample the large shelf of California literature," *Los Angeles Times,* January 1, 2012, http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/01/local/la-me-california-literature-20120102 (accessed June 13, 2013), and Marisa Silver, "Oh, California," *New York Times*, March 18, 2013, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/oh-california/ (accessed June 13, 2013).

the second (explaining theological reasons for theological engagement in the first main section of the paper), and give one extended example of the third, scouting the accomplishments of the critical quest to define California's literary regionalism.

Theological Localism

In the first main section of the chapter, I distinguish between the theological method of correlation on the one hand, which would take culture as either a norm or source for theology, and programmatic apologetics on the other hand, which investigates the culture in order to communicate its message most effectively. The present movement toward developing theological localism is a third thing, an attempt to be aware and self-critical about place, location, and situation. While rejecting correlationism, theological localism attempts to take into account the fact that theological thinking is embedded in the very cultural forms it addresses. It also recognizes that, within the bounds of orthodoxy, a laudable diversity of equally legitimate local theologies have developed elsewhere throughout Christian history, and envisions such possibilities for California.

Correlationism is an approach to theology that gives equal weight to human, cultural questions and to biblical, theological answers. One of its great practitioners was Paul Tillich, who developed it as a method of explaining the contents of the Christian faith through aligning existential questions and theological answers in mutual correspondence.[3] "Philosophy," said Tillich, "formulates the questions implied in human existence, and theology formulates the answers implied in human existence." Tillich was not the first practitioner of correlationism; it is at least as old as classical liberalism, and if Tillich is to be believed, "it is as old as theology. We have not invented a new method, but have rather tried to make explicit the implications of old ones, namely, that of apologetic theology."[4] Tillich said of his own work, "since the split between a faith unacceptable to culture and a culture unacceptable to faith was not possible for me, the only alternative was to attempt to interpret the symbols of faith through expressions of our own culture. The result of this attempt is the three volumes of Systematic Theology."[5]

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[3] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 60.

[4] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 16.

[5] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 5.

The method of correlation is perennially attractive for theologians of culture because it marks out a clear arena in which culture can make itself heard in theology. It raised theological reflection on culture to a higher level by making it an explicit topic of discussion and by sanctioning it. But already in Tillich's own work, the method showed itself to be unstable. Tillich claimed that culture was neither a source nor a norm for theology, but it proved difficult for him to keep it out of that space. When Tillich was writing, the word "experience" had more cache, and Tillich drew a line there, arguing that experience cannot be a source or a norm for theology. But those who learned the most from Tillich, and carried out his task of reading their cultures theologically and learning their theology culturally, usually drew the opposite conclusion. In the next generation after Tillich, it became standard for theologians of culture to admit categories like experience and culture into their canons of doctrine, both as norms and as sources.

Two other weaknesses of correlationist theology are that, first, only with great difficulty can a correlationist break through the grid of presuppositions built into the questions raised by a culture. And unless they do so, they are stuck with questions no better than that grid permits. But often theology's task is to announce that a culture is not just missing the answers, but asking the wrong questions. Framing a question is often more important than answering it, or at least more determinative of the bounds of discourse. Second, correlationists tend to hurry past the task of describing and elaborating Christian truth, assuming that the proper business of theology is cultural theology. Their sense of excitement and project tend to come from combining theology with the next thing, as if the descriptive and elaborative task of Christian doctrine could be presupposed as already accomplished.[6] The result is that correlationists generally approach their task with an unnecessarily minimized, or thin, theology.

Tillich contrasted correlationism with the "theology of proclamation," especially the approach to theology advocated by Karl Barth. According to Tillich, the theology of proclamation wants to hurl the Christian message like a brick at the head of its audience. This was not, of course, really fair to the theology of proclamation. Even if proclaimers were interested in doing so, they might after all want to know more about the brick they are throwing, and the head at which they are throwing it. One could imagine a theology of California

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[6] For a critique of this mindset and an alternative to it, see John Webster, "Theology After Liberalism," in, *Theology After Liberalism: A Reader*, John Webster and George P. Schner (eds), (Blackwell, 2000), 52–61. And note also the recently established (regional) enterprise designed to focus on systematic theology itself and its own internal questions in the annual Los Angeles Theology conference, co-sponsored by Biola University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Zondervan Academic (www.latheology.com).

culture that sought better and better information about that Californian head at which it is hurling its gospel brick.

Which brings us to programmatic apologetics. Tillich called his own method not only correlationism, but also "apologetic theology," by which he meant a theology that helped modern people to answer questions (from the Greek *apo* + *logia*, a word in response, an answer). But in our time, apologetics also names a discipline of recommending and defending the truth claims of Christianity in a public forum. In its advocacy for Christian truth claims, programmatic apologetics is highly interested in the plausibility structures of the target culture. "What will today's culture find believable?" is the operative question. Apologists want to know what presuppositions are held by modern people. Those engaged in apologetics investigate culture in order to communicate their own message to it with maximal effectiveness. Programmatic apologetics has some of the same weaknesses as correlationism—a tendency to let the world set the terms of the debate. But programmatic apologetics is also threatened by the opposite danger, that of failing to notice that the apologist is part of the world they are attempting to persuade; that they can never simply speak to the culture, but always already speak from it, or as one formed by it, as well.

Theological localism is something different from either correlationism or systematic apologetics. Here is a short statement of it by art historian Matthew Milliner, presented in the form of "theses on theolocalism:"

1. When Biblical and Nicene theological norms have been sufficiently internalized, theology can encourage unique regional developments.
2. Localist efforts to combat modern transience should therefore infect theological method.
3. If a given place hasn't yet made a distinct theological contribution, it should consider doing so.
4. Theological localism means thinking with those closest to you—a sort of 100 mile intellectual diet.
5. What theologians thought matters, of course, but so does where they are buried.
6. This is not to be nativist, but to exploit native resources for the sake of the universal church.[7]

[7] http://www.millinerd.com/2011/03/thirteen-theses-on-theological-locality.html (accessed June 13, 2013).

Theological localism is a commitment to regional intellectual resources, both in terms of drawing on them and contributing to them.

Applied to California, the overall intellectual task is somewhere between "A Theology of California" and "Theology from California." Those would be the two bumper stickers. The former, Theology of California, indicates bringing theological reflection to bear on this entity which is California, to offer a theological account of its existence and character. The latter, Theology from California, indicates that we're doing theological reflection about the usual subjects (revelation, God, creation, providence, humanity, sin, redemption, eschatology) in this particular location, intentionally cultivating resources that are Californian.

Theology is going to have to run to catch up here, because several other disciplines are well established in California studies. Or to say it collaboratively instead of competitively, theology has a lot of partner disciplines that it can call on as it begins the investigation. The best case study is literature, which is significant on two levels: first, that distinctively Californian literary art has been produced; and second, that a body of criticism and commentary has been devoted to that art. There are important spiritual elements embedded in the literature (first level) which need to be explored by critics (second level) using doctrinal categories and paradigms which theologians can help provide. A parallel situation exists in the visual arts, where there are important schools and movements of, for instance, California painting. I don't know the field of musicology well enough to comment on the resources there, unless you look at pop and hip hop music where of course a characteristic Californianism is easily discerned. Another discipline that has a lot of synergy with theology is history: there was once a dominant narrative of American history that said we started on the East Coast (pilgrims!) and spread westward (pioneers!). But California-centered historians have long since demonstrated how much that narrative needs to be juxtaposed with our Mexican past, our Russian connections, our Pacific Rim realities: factors which understandably have played a lesser role in an East Coast version of American self-understanding. Theology, partly through church history, has much to learn and much to teach here. Not to leave any disciplines out, sociology is also a field that is doing a good job staying alert to surprising realities that are available for study here in California.

Even philosophy has promise here. There is value in attending to the social-cultural environment in which Christian philosophers work. Localized philosophy pushes against the notion that philosophers are portable brains-in-vats, creatures of pure comprehension who generate concepts that show no traces of local origin. But that's a flawed public image of philosophers, not

the way most philosophers actually view themselves. Without taking a hard historicist turn, intellectuals all tend to admit that we're located in multiple ways that influence our intellectual work. My favorite example of a thinker who has reflected well on that is Charles Taylor, and one can easily imagine a really enlightening Californian gloss on *Sources of the Self*: Sources of the Californian Self. To my knowledge, only Josiah Royce has attempted anything self-consciously Californian in the field of metaphysics and epistemology, and few philosophers have followed his lead.[8] But Royce's call for a non-parochial regionalism or a "higher regionalism," visionary though it might have been, seems more like a road not taken in American intellectual history.

Literary Regionalism

The most helpful cognate discipline for initial forays into this project is the field of literature, and this chapter concludes with a few lessons learned in the ongoing quest to identify a California literary regionalism. What counts as California literature?

There is a classic discussion on the subject that is not exactly up to date, but it's a 1955 article full of wise counsel. The article, "California's Literary Regionalism" by Frederick Bracher of Pomona College says "regionalism" is more of a "hypothesis to be tested" than an "unquestionable fact." So it's best to approach California literature by asking of each book or author, "does this represent the authentic voice of California?"[9]

"Voice," of course, is a metaphor, and Bracher laments the "morass of metaphor" that awaits anybody looking into literary regionalism: there are "roots that go down deep into, layers of cultural humus and substrata which lie below, mirrors that catch at a slightly different angle the sunlight of, long immersions in, natural blossoms as opposed to hot-house growths," and so on. That kind of metaphorical description is serviceable when you're talking about the kind of pronounced regionalism that is widely agreed on, like a certain kind of literature from the American South. But when you're trying to name something as ambiguous as "California literature," the morass of metaphor obscures more than it illumines.

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[8] See Chapter 10 of this volume for further discussion of Royce.

[9] Frederick Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," *American Quarterly* 7/3 (Autumn 1955), 275–84.

Never mind the question of what geographic region should count as "California" for literary purposes—the spirit of a place doesn't stop at a state line, or even necessarily extend that far, especially if you're sampling literature from before the clear definition of states. Just consider the even thornier question of who counts as Californian. Bracher points out that native birth is not a good criterion, since that would make Robert Frost a Californian (born in San Francisco) and Robinson Jeffers not one (born in Pittsburgh). Living and writing in California doesn't suffice either, since that would transform Thomas Mann, Aldous Huxley, and Henry Miller into California authors (maybe they are). Even writing about California isn't sufficient, since it lets in Evelyn Waugh and John Dos Passos. "Nearly everyone comes to California sooner or later, and many of these temporary settlers dislike the area enough to write about it. But this does not make them regional writers."[10]

What it takes to be a California author, according to Bracher, is a view of the area from the inside "not curiously and from a safe distance, as one might look at animals in a zoo, but with some sense of concern for, or identification with, the region."[11] In other words, California literature is not so much *about* the region as it is *of* the region. And Bracher adds one more requirement: California literature shouldn't be too aware of its regional character. Bracher summarizes Thomas Hardy's rule of thumb for how to know when you're observing a real folk tradition: "the test of an authentic folk custom is the grumpy unawareness of the participants that they are doing anything out of the ordinary."[12]

The sense of identification with the region is hardly demonstrable or analyzable: it must be felt, he says, and goes on to name eight authors in whose work this identification can be felt: John Steinbeck, Robinson Jeffers, William Saroyan, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, George R. Stewart, Hans Otto Storm, Nathanael West, and Budd Schulberg. From among this list, he singles out Steinbeck, Clark, and Saroyan as "the most important of the regional writers."[13]

Even making allowances for the half-century that has elapsed since the publication of Bracher's article, there is a palpable sense of deflation once he has offered this list. Only the most dedicated readers of California literature would have read widely from these eight authors, and some are now minor names indeed.

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10 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 277.
11 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 277.
12 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 277.
13 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 278.

But Bracher has the wisdom not to be dogmatic about his admittedly somewhat arbitrary choices, and spends the rest of the essay illustrating a few characteristics that he thinks mark California literature at its most regionally distinctive.

First, California authors are not urban; they do not write city novels. "There are no important novels about San Francisco or Los Angeles."[14] California authors have a feeling for the larger landscapes outside the cities, whether it is the long valley of the Salinas River or the whole coastline surrounding Point Sur. No cityscapes or cozy townships for these West Coast authors. Consequently, the characters are people who fit these settings: "The virtues implicit in California heroes are essentially frontier virtues: independence, adaptability, humor, an engaging naivete, and confidence in one's ability to take care of himself."[15] All good novelists make use of local climate, and California authors make the most of California's distinctive weather: the dryness above all, but also the "seasonal alternation of short, cool winters and long dry summers which sets up the rhythm of life in the area."[16]

Second, California literature is non-political. "Despite a distinguished tradition of radical political literature, from Henry George through Frank Norris and Jack London to Upton Sinclair, the best of the present writers seem to be more interested in moral problems than in political problems; in the large general questions of human life rather than in the immediate problems of society, in Evil rather than in particular evils."[17] Here, perhaps, the circular nature of Bracher's procedure is most evident. He picks the least political writers and then declares California authors non-political. But even at that, he has to squint at a great deal of rabble-rousing and social analysis in Steinbeck and Clark to decide that the spirit of California is non-political. For my part, I am struck by the exact opposite trait: California literature is inveterately political, too much so for my taste. Many of the best books have been too invested in too-current events, rendering them period pieces after a couple of decades.

Third, California literature is broadly allegorical rather than tensely aesthetic. The preoccupation with large moral problems brings forth "a kind of naive symbolism—naive in the sense that the authors tend to give their characters symbolic meaning, instead of finding significance in particular characters and

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[14] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 279. With efforts from writers such as Mike Davis, and Edan Lepucki's *California* (Little, Brown and Company, 2014), this is no longer the case, of course.

[15] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 279.

[16] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 280.

[17] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 280.

events."[18] Bracher cites Saroyan's claim that "everything I write, everything I have written, is allegorical,"[19] and notes Steinbeck's "arbitrary assignment of symbolic meaning to characters" in *East of Eden*.[20] Here I think Bracher has put his finger on something very interesting and surprisingly widespread in California literature: lack of subtlety. I am less sure that it has been a happy trait of the region.

Finally, California literature has "a good-natured ignorance of critical disciplines." The state's best authors "appear to be genially oblivious to the rules of criticism and to critical censure for violations of taste and propriety."[21] Bracher has in mind Saroyan's declared intention to found "a tradition of carelessness" to ensure a plentiful supply of irreverence and creativity.[22] But he also has in mind the besetting bathos that makes itself felt in otherwise fine works: "What other novelist of comparable stature [to Steinbeck] could stomach the over-poetic, pseudo-Irish speech of Samuel Hamilton in *East of Eden*? And what Eastern writer would have been so regardless of possible ridicule as to conclude *The Grapes of Wrath* with its final melodramatic scene?"[23] California writers are naked and apparently unashamed. Bracher warms to his subject:

> The Californians' willingness to let themselves go, their cheerful ignoring of the restraints a writer is expected to impose upon himself, comes fairly close to the traditional stereotype of the Westerner as the child of nature, free from the trammels of tradition and the paralyzing self-consciousness of the hypercritical. There may be a germ of truth in the myth.[24]

Whatever the merits of Bracher's 1955 account of California literary regionalism, he concludes with an interesting note. Many East Coast critics have complained about the "unbuttoned romanticism" of California literature. Edmund Wilson said that the state has a "golden air of death" for the literary mind, owing to "the boundless sunlight which never becomes charged with

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18 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 282.

19 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 282, citing William Saroyan, Preface to "Sam Ego's House," *Don't Go Away Mad and Two Other Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 101.

20 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 282.

21 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 282.

22 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 283.

23 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 283.

24 Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 283.

human energies."[25] Eastern critics from traditioned schools of commentary just can't imagine painting anything human on a canvas as vast as the big Western sky. But perhaps that is because East Coast critics have made the error of thinking that all serious literature has to be urban, political, tensely aesthetic, and critically self-conscious. California literature may just have a chance to be true to itself in a way that could expand the horizons of New York critics.

> The California writers are not hampered by rules or schools; illustrious examples do not intimidate and engross them. They are willing to tackle large and old-fashioned subjects, and they do not worry unduly about partial or occasional failure. At their best, they achieve an easy and unaffected lyricism of style.[26]

Bracher is certainly not the latest word on California literary regionalism. The critical conversation has gone on since 1955, especially with the explosion of diversity in California writing since 1955. It won't do to call California literature non-urban anymore, and it probably never was right to call it non-political. It's also necessary to include assessments of California from outsiders: shrewd observers like Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson and Polish-Lithuanian Czeslaw Milosz. And I would certainly include some notes about California from the rest of America, because there's no disentangling the state of California from what it has meant to the entire nation. California literary regionalism is certainly, in Bracher's terms, more of a "hypothesis to be tested" than an "unquestionable fact."

Territorial Spirits

To zoom in one level further, I would like to explore at greater length the musings of one writer about California: Czeslaw Milosz. Polish writer Milosz lived in Berkeley from about 1958 until his death in 2004. He looks at California from a long way off, from the Old World, and it is helpful to read him to learn to see the state from that angle. Milosz wants to name the territorial spirits of California, and suspects many of them are demons. Much of his poetry is about things that can't be spoken, or at least things that can't be said quite right, because his view

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[25] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 284, citing Edmund Wilson, *The Boys in the Back Room* (San Francisco: The Colt Press, 1941), 58.

[26] Bracher, "California's Literary Regionalism," 284.

of the poetic vocation ran along the lines described by T.S. Eliot as "raids on the inarticulate."

Milosz wrote a lot of books. *The Captive Mind*[27] made him famous, but the lectures entitled *The Witness of Poetry*[28] are probably the best place to get an idea of what he's up to artistically. I recommend jumping into the large volume of his *Collected Poems*[29] and finding something that grabs you.

Milosz was no one-trick pony, but he did have a handful of themes and approaches that he kept coming back to in all his work. One of those themes is his own artistic quest to testify accurately about himself. He is always holding up his hand and saying "Here I am," in ways that continually astonish the reader. For our purposes the best book is *Visions from San Francisco Bay*,[30] because though it is a fragmented and flawed book, it is a coherent essay on the spiritual significance of California which only Milosz could write. When he holds up his hand and says "Here I am" from Berkeley, California, he tries to speak for his Lithuanian ancestors, for the continent of North America, for the territorial spirits of California, and for himself after midlife.

His elliptical autobiography *Native Realm*[31] is full of good stuff, too, and mixes some light humor with the heavy brooding and bewilderment that are his signature style. He begins the book by pledging allegiance to his Eastern heritage: "No, I will never imitate those who rub out their traces, disown the past and are dead, although they pretend they are alive with the help of mental acrobatics."[32] He goes on to conjure up all that he has seen during a life in which "new images canceled out none of the old"[33] and he had to speak in spite of "the pressure from this reality I have swallowed."[34] Milosz praises a meticulous biographical essay he once read because it gave such attention to small physical details of the subject's surroundings: "one can get at man only obliquely, only through the constant masquerade that is the extension of himself at a given moment, through his historical existence."[35] He calls his autobiographical work

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[27] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Penguin Popular Classics, 1953).

[28] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[29] Czeslaw Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems*, 1931–2001 (New York: Ecco, 2003).

[30] Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982).

[31] Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968).

[32] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 2.

[33] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 3.

[34] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 3.

[35] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 4.

"a token of respect for those undergrounds that exist in all of us and that are better left in peace."[36]

In speaking from California, Milosz was interested in imagining a world history that jumped straight from prehistory to the industrial revolution in a single year: 1849. That is telescoped a bit, but compared to a Europe that ripened through the middle ages, then made the long voyage to New England, California does seem to have happened overnight, with machines.

Milosz often set for himself a task that he knew in advance was impossible. His poetic vocation was to declare something that couldn't be said straightforwardly, and he advanced toward that goal with a panoply of strange techniques. In the California book, Milosz said "I am always aware that what I want is impossible to achieve. I would need the ability to communicate my full amazement at 'being here' in one unattainable sentence which would simultaneously transmit the smell and texture of my skin, everything stored in my memory, and all I now assent to, dissent from." Why bother trying to say the unspeakable? "Each of us is so ashamed of his own helplessness and ignorance that he considers it appropriate to communicate only what he thinks others will understand."[37]

His goal was to speak his own existence fully, without suppressing the incommunicable mystery of being. He was always looking for "that single phrase which, were it truly weighed, would suffice as a life's work."[38] It wasn't because he thought he was so special, but simply because he was himself, and he as a poet was responsible for bearing witness to that bit of reality about which he had inside knowledge. But he wanted to find a voice or a phrase which would articulate even the parts and layers of himself about which he didn't have knowledge.

> There is nothing degrading in our fundamental incapacity to lay bare all the particulars of our fate. If it were any different, if that chaotic richness, in the presence of which our faculties are like a circle of lantern light in the darkness, did not exist, we would not constantly be aspiring to form, achieved by a process of elimination, and probably the art of writing would disappear. It is enough that we realize to what extent thought and word are incommensurable with reality. Then it is possible to set one's limits consciously.[39]

What Milosz excelled at was speaking in such a way that he and his reader could become aware of what was speaking through him. Was it an epoch, a

[36] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 5–6.
[37] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 3.
[38] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 5.
[39] Milosz, *Native Realm*, 5.

century, speaking through him? A culture, or a clash of cultures, using his voice? Was he identical with his family heritage, his religion, the soil and weather? Were Lithuania and California taking turns talking in his voice? Above all, what spiritual forces were having their say when he freely chose the words and lines of a sentence?

Because he relentlessly sought this goal, Milosz can be a hard poet to read. But he is worth grappling with, because everybody should become more aware of what forces are speaking through them. Milosz is a writer whose whole life's work was to identify those forces.

As I've already said, Milosz thought of some of these forces as demonic. He said of America in general: "this continent possesses something like a spirit which malevolently undoes any attempts to subdue it. The enormity of the violated but always victorious expanse, the undulant skin of the earth diminishes our errors and merits."[40] Later in the book he reports what a European friend said to him about America: "Who knows, maybe this continent was not destined for the white man, and it might have been better to leave it alone." Milosz responds:

> I would have agreed with his divining in those mountains and deserts the powerful presence of vengeful demons with whom only the Indians knew how to maintain alliances. But in California those demons seemed to evince no good will even to the Indians, allowing themselves to be placated only because the Indians remained on the lowest level of civilization, without agriculture or the use of metal. I am also always puzzled why the white man steered clear of California for so long, though word of it had reached him through the accounts of sailors. ... In California, prehistory, millennia of generations passing without chronicle, leaving no other traces than the flint arrowheads found in the clay, collided with the nineteenth century—not the nineteenth century of revolutionaries and poets, but that other, rougher nineteenth century, the century where every many had an equal right to lust for gold.[41]

Sounding nearly Pentecostal, Milosz goes on:

> Call it delusion, but a demonic presence can be felt on this continent whose apparent concern is that Christian man see his own nature revealed and that he unleash all his brutality. Something nameless is concerned with destroying

[40] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 9–10.
[41] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 45–6.

> ideology in him and, thus far, has rewarded him not for possessing ideology but for not possessing any.[42]

As he develops the Californian portion of his personal mythology, Milosz enters into dialogue with the poems of Robinson Jeffers, themselves haunted by the territorial spirits of the Carmel coast. And before long he has identified the demons of California, with their struggle between primal nature and technological second nature, with the Moloch of Alan Ginsberg's "Howl": "Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money!"[43] Indeed, the Moloch of Howl (a poem first published by Bay Area poet and San Francisco bookstore owner Lawrence Ferlinghetti) is curiously in line with "this continent's demons," as Milosz describes them. Their greatest trick, "their leisurely vengeance, consists in surrendering nature, recognizing that it could not be defended; but in place of nature there arose that civilization which to its members appears to be Nature itself, endowed with nearly all the features of that other nature. It is just as alien and hostile to me...."[44]

Conclusion: Toward Theological Categories

With the introduction of the category of demonology, we have made a full transition from literary regionalism to theological concerns. In the early stages of a project like TECC, we can conclude by gesturing beyond demonology to the other traditional doctrinal topics of systematic theology. How do each of the doctrines sound when developed with Californian categories, West Coast intellectual tools, and a local accent? We do not need to embrace Milosz's demonology in order to develop a distinctly Californian doctrine of sin. Outsiders viewing California could easily fill in the elements of our hamartiology. Joan Didion, without calling it sin, has explored this territory at some length, and has linked it to an equally anonymous notion of salvation. Taken together, the ideas of sin and salvation presuppose something about theological anthropology, the doctrine of humanity. What is California man, that God is mindful of him?

Founded as it was by the dream of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny, California's self-understanding has always been involved with a secularized doctrine of providence, and the conviction that God or the gods wanted this very

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[42] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 51.
[43] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 66.
[44] Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, 68.

development to happen. That secularized providence is indistinguishable from a cultural eschatology, whether developed in terms of "Continent's End" (the title of a Jeffers poem) or an acceleration toward the end of history. Probably every time the word "paradise" is invoked to describe the place, something eschatological is being conjured. California is usually called a paradise because of its great natural beauty, and its literature and culture are marked by an ecological awareness that runs from John Muir's early conservationism (which he developed with constant use of religious metaphor, in gorgeous latter day King James English) to the host of recent Buddhist and New Age spiritualities. A theological account of creation developed in Californian terms is an obvious desideratum.

But it is the doctrine of God that is the true test for any theology, and this is the doctrinal area which will ultimately determine whether a Californian localist theology will be worth pursuing. Liberal theological method is already fully employed in speaking of a God of California culture, or in "naming toward the transcendent mystery" from this particular place. Such theologies will find the god they seek, as they always have. For Christian theologians who affirm that God can only be known where he has revealed himself authoritatively in Christ through the Scriptures, the whole project of theological localism is admittedly less urgent. But as California continues to develop as a self-conscious regional entity, theologians working here will increasingly ask, "what language shall I borrow?" to speak about the Christian God. Shall we borrow Californian language? Perhaps so.