

# Chapter 3

## Can Theology Engage with California's Culture?

Jason S. Sexton

### Introduction to California and Theology

In her earlier attempts to capture the euphoric essence of the Golden State, Joan Didion famously described California as “a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension; in which the mind is troubled by some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent.”<sup>1</sup> Displayed repeatedly in the Sacramento-born Didion’s writings, this endeavor to describe a mood, a dream, or perhaps a desperate cry, poured forth from her pen as the theme not only of hope but especially of tragedy recurrently marked her work.

Already pointed out in this volume, California’s very existence is paradoxical and enigmatic,<sup>2</sup> as ingenious as disastrous, and as heartbreaking as hopeful. It is the dream turned nightmare for some, still giving enough reason to keep dreaming while uncertain about an exact state of consciousness; hoping that things may soon turn. It is simultaneously imaginative and blinding, as intoxicating as sobering, and often the latter only when options are all but exhausted. California is a puzzle that academics, politicians, writers, poets and paupers, sinners, saints, and even theologians have sought to make sense of and will continue to do so for a while yet.

One recent study exploring California’s current civic situation, marking crises facing all Californians, suggested that at the heart of these concerns is “the fear that California lacks even a language, and an understanding, equal to

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (reprint, New York: Penguin, 1974), 144.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 of the present volume.

its calamity.”<sup>3</sup> Facing scarcity of resources for addressing California’s problems, ready and willing to enter the fray to address matters of responsibility and democracy by virtue of sharing a common humanity, perhaps theologians can offer some hope. Fred Sanders has suggested that theologians might even borrow language from the lines of Californian literature for their reflections on matters most critical to theology’s remit—even for their ongoing God-talk.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is most appropriate because California itself is as much as anything a theological reality—itself an object of deep faith. This suggests in some sense that the question of theology’s ability to engage with California is already settled, or may be assumed. Yet the question remains because theology itself is not confined to California and would exist whether or not California ever did (though the modern world as known and experienced would hardly be the same without California). In a sense, theology has already engaged the Golden State in profound ways through the work of countless groups seeking to test their claims of ultimate reality on Californian soil.

At one level, the very question of theology’s ability to engage California has been sweepingly dismissed by unbelievers, by which I do not mean naturalists, secular theorists, or atheists. But perhaps because it resists his own version of “Christian America,” leading theologian Stanley Hauerwas testifies, “I do not believe in California.”<sup>5</sup> Yet whether one chooses to believe or not, the problem is that such a place as California does exist, and people of all kinds don’t stop believing.<sup>6</sup> This poses problems of immense significance for its citizens, for others around the world who believe in it, and for the church. The present chapter asks, then, whether theology can begin to helpfully and properly reinterpret and re-engage California’s culture in ways that bring the immense resources of the gospel’s promises to bear on its reality, thereby laboring for the good of its citizens.

Methods that direct attention to questions of cultural engagement with theology as part of the discourse usually develop what might be called either a top-down or a bottom-up approach, with often very little methodological

<sup>3</sup> Joe Matthews and Mark Paul, *California Crackup: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2 of the present volume, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 248. What precisely he meant by this is not developed.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly the popular song “Don’t Stop Believin’,” written by Bay Area band Journey and sung by Hanford-born Steve Perry, has been referred to as “a cultural touchstone” having an “eternal quality” (“Journey song cements status as cultural touchstone,” *CBC News*, July 20, 2009, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/music/story/2009/07/20/steve-perry.html> [accessed June 16, 2013]) and has been sung the world around.

consensus between either proponents, largely conditioned by pre-commitments to particular disciplinary perspectives (consensus even among theologians of the TECC Project will likely be strained). This strain has been a challenge for theology itself, one example of which might be illustrated by the approaches of twentieth-century theologians Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as commonly understood.

It is acknowledged that Barth viewed theology as having no direct responsibility for changing society in any ordinary sense, while Bonhoeffer saw it having robust ethical and social dimensions. The latter's perspective was one that Barth saw as not transcendent enough, and thus he found Bonhoeffer "turning grace into a principle" and "thereby beating everything else to death."<sup>7</sup> During a press conference in May 1962, after lecturing at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, Barth unequivocally displayed his opposition to natural theology. Highlighting society's inability to receive divine revelation, he stressed, "Disaster doesn't bring mankind closer to truth. It has never made any one listen to God's word." With a smile he is said to have then asked reporters, "Do you think the [1906] earthquake here changed the behavior of the residents?"<sup>8</sup> Now, the earthquake was not what brought the greatest destruction of San Francisco, caused more so by negligent political impasse and the inept dynamiting of the city's buildings, as humanly engendered as naturally,<sup>9</sup> which one might suppose Barth was aware of. But his locating of revelation as utterly distinct from these worldly matters is a principle that Barth insisted provides a theology capable of

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion about the disagreement between Bonhoeffer and Barth in Charles Marsh, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Under the Constraint of Grace," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen (eds), (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 133–5. Marsh recounts that Barth viewed theology as bearing no responsibility for changing society, making nothing happen in any "ordinary sense." Responding to post WWI Germany with how theology might be co-opted for certain political propaganda, the early Barth believed that theology ought to be practiced "now as before and as if nothing had happened." Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, especially from his time in America with social-gospel reformers and what he saw from the African-American church leaders, affirmed that "theologians must be willing to speak clearly and pay up personally," and therein he was aggravated by Barth's reluctance to make necessary ethical and social connections for doctrine (see the last quotes in Bonhoeffer, as cited in Ilse Todt et al., "Editors' Afterword to the German Edition," in *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 6 [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005], 411).

<sup>8</sup> "Pressekonferenz in San Francisco [Englisch]," in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe, Gespräche 1959–1962 (GA IV/25)*, Eberhard Busch (trans.) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1995), 525–7, from *The San Francisco Examiner*, May 1962.

<sup>9</sup> See some of the confusion surrounding this event and its immediate aftermath in

Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Random House, 2005), 162–3.

yielding “an anthropology that is ontologically determined by the fellow-human and is ontologically oriented to their well-being.” This ontologically-determined anthropology is said to then have decisive political, economic, and social consequences that, rather than engendering the prepolitical atomistic approach of the late-modernist project, cares for the weak and lowly.<sup>10</sup>

Additional approaches to the question of theology’s relationship to culture may offer deeper integration of the transcendent with the earthly.<sup>11</sup> Some have suggested, however, that theology is able to engage culture only to the degree that theology resists being shaped in any way by culture, which would thus render theology something less than what any part of the great tradition or ancient creeds would render or recognize it to be. And yet any failure to affirm theology’s discursive relationship to all things risks a denial of Jesus’ lordship over all that Holy Scripture affirms was “in the beginning” divinely created, *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) which insists that everything is care-fully sustained, providentially-ordered and therefore all matter and events are of immense significance.

But this nevertheless leaves the question remaining about how theology does touch the ground, shaping things in any ordinary sense. Tagged to this is also whether or not a bottom-up theology can indeed be done. This problem is highlighted when theological themes are seen to be ubiquitous in California life and existence (as later chapters in this volume attempt to show), or when transcendent ontologies or philosophies are developed here and disseminated in unique ways across the globe. This is not merely because of the presence of religious people in California, although there have been (and are) many. Many of our cities and towns were named after religious figures, and countless experiences of religious phenomena have flourished here. Indeed California’s life can be as much identified by various theological movements and moods as it can with economic, social, and moral booms and crises. Theological impulses and signals have been long present throughout the state’s life, in all the California dream holds forth with its forms of eschatological realism, or its protological reflections on individual origins amidst the amnesia, marijuana, psychedelia,

<sup>10</sup> See Brian A. Williams, “Karl Barth’s Theology and Politics of Christological Co-Humanity,” unpublished paper presented February 22, 2013 at the Winter 2013 meeting of The Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Cambridge, UK.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the efforts recently set forth in the following projects: Robin Gill’s 3 vol. *Sociological Theology* series (Surrey, UK; Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2012–13); the work of “Ordinary Theology” seen in Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (eds), *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church* (Surrey, UK; Burlington, US: Ashgate, 2013); and the work of The Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network which has produced a number of vols. with Eerdmans and T&T Clark/Bloomsbury and whose new

journal *Ecclesial Practices* (Brill) began Autumn 2013

conflicted laws, consumerism, and other cultural forces.<sup>12</sup> California art and architecture, sports, technology, politics, and its other cultural innovations invoke theological themes in strong ways, as extremely as any other cultural place. Religious movements likewise were given fertility on California soil and perhaps conscious and subconscious cache as being *from* California that they'd have never garnered in most places. In all these ways and more, California has changed the world. But how does this relate to theology?

Before moving to address this essay's main question, and because I have already claimed that theology exists both apart from inasmuch as within California's existence, a preliminary question begs attention.

### *What is Theology?*

At one fundamental level, theology is the expression of consistent belief and living. It implies "revelation," *theologia vera* (true theology) or divine communication; not the mere reflections of the human mind or Bahktinian projections toward that highest ceiling. It asserts that amidst all the challenges of communicant expressions in our world, language about God may be taken to truly make reference to things as they really are. This is because it contends that God has spoken in Holy Scripture, which speaks truth about whatever it speaks of; and it speaks with unique reference to a self-giving God who has graciously disclosed himself there. Accordingly, theology does not merely affirm this notion but labors to make the matter of revelation plain, ensuring that the truth can be heard, striving to develop sound plausibility structures for this hearing while maintaining a moderate foundationalism reinforced by a hearty realism.

It further maintains the archetypal/ectypal distinction of revelation that correlates to the *homoousios* (same substance) humanity and deity found in Jesus Christ, maintaining a posture that beautifully and capably purports to have the ability to give coherent explanations of all realities. But "all realities" means that theology has been both locally and institutionally nurtured in its variegated expressions, where these realities could be meaningfully situated and interpreted.

In describing "theology" one cannot fail to acknowledge various twentieth-century theologies or descriptive theological systems—feminist, black, Latin American, dispensational, covenant, queer, and others. Because theology flows

<sup>12</sup> See the account of one fortune built on selling this "Dream" in Eric John Abrahamson, *Building Home: Howard F. Ahmanson and the Politics of the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

from a living confession, shaped by the inexhaustible riches found in the gospel with its comprehensive truth claims, various heavily schematizing or corrective theologies can be expected. But rather than the way these emphases tended to compartmentalize and totalize, theology is much better conceived as the expansive rendering of theologies of the whole. To be fair, interdisciplinary theological work being attempted by academics and practitioners in California may very well be ultimately rendered by historians as regional theology, or a theology of more meager proportions. But theology itself does not claim to be satisfied by this relegation or ghettoization inasmuch as its range is not limited to either empirical or the temporal.

Theology's claims regard matters temporal and atemporal, "created" and "uncreated," as the Athanasian Creed states. This shows theology as concerned not just with God, but with all created things, both in their particular relations to God and between one another. Theology deals not with the created order in itself, but the created order in its status as *creaturely*, and thus radically contingent.<sup>13</sup> Therefore theology takes as subject matter all things in relation to God, while simultaneously serving as a witness as it "mirrors, or ... partakes of, the character of its divine subject." In some sense, then, theology is very much both a human creation and a divine one.<sup>14</sup> Admittedly some so-called developments on the human side are simply malformed, perhaps owing to being removed from ecclesial and contextual rootedness, or to having been oppressive to certain groups, or to having proceeded in imbalance by failing to speak out against injustice or things that God's word is concerned with. Committing these errors by failing to pay sufficient attention to God's word marks a negative web of inter-relations characteristic of, quite simply, bad theology. This is one reason why the university's significance for theology remains critical.

### *Theology as an Academic Discipline*

We know that the historical development of higher education in the West had a significant place for theology in its faculties, and the integration of faith and learning.<sup>15</sup> This was the case with the medieval Parisian university which saw intellectual practice as reasonable or rational "*because, and in so far as, it is*

<sup>13</sup> A.N. Williams, "What is Systematic Theology?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11/1 (Jan 2009), 47.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, "What is Systematic Theology?," 48–9.

<sup>15</sup> In one sense, higher education has always been about moral formation. See Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 46.

devoutly Christian.”<sup>16</sup> The ordering of human life before God and social life were meant to be developed through the deepening of virtues like humility, piety, and peace through learning. Through the halls of Berlin, Oxford, and Dublin with John Henry Newman, theological reflection on the role of the university has come a long way, but has never lost the notion that the content of confessed faith may yield sound learning able to contribute to the common good. California was no different.

Henry Durant, the Congregationalist clergyman and Yale philosophy professor, moved to San Francisco “with college on the brain,” and founded Contra Costa Academy the very same year of his arrival in 1853, which in 1855 became the College of California. Following the 1852-chartered University of the Pacific by Wesleyans in San Jose (formerly known as California Wesleyan College) and the Jesuit Catholic College of Santa Clara established in 1853, Durant’s vision, though nondenominational, was to “furnish the means of a thorough and comprehensive education under the pervading spirit and influence of the Christian religion,” which was meant to serve the “common interest in the promotion of the highest welfare of the State, as fostered and secured by the diffusion of sound and liberal learning.”<sup>17</sup> See also the other academic institutions of great academic significance in California and the nation, including University of Southern California (founded in 1880) and Whittier College (founded in 1887), both private institutions today which began as schools with deep ecclesial sponsorship and support.

Not long after this, however, in the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century, American universities sought reform and ultimately discontinued natural theology courses (University of California’s last was in 1871), with moral philosophy being retired shortly thereafter (University of California’s last was in 1879), largely because, it was argued, ethical reflection derived reasoning from theological considerations. This reconstitution of departments was meant to give way to the academic study of the science of religion, but nevertheless had a profound influence on the separation between faith and reason.<sup>18</sup> In

<sup>16</sup> Mike Higon, *A Theology of Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>17</sup> William Warren Ferrier, *Origin and Development of the University of California, Ninety Years of Education in California, 1846–1936: A Presentation of Educational Movements and Their Outcome in Education Today* (Berkeley: Sather Gate Book Shop, 1937), 181, cited in John Aubrey Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 38–9 nn. 60–1.

<sup>18</sup> Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 88–90.

California, theology went out a long time ago, its departure cemented with the emergence of Edmund G. “Pat” Brown and the promises held out in “The Master Plan” for Higher Education of 1960, which even into the present day has marked theology’s ongoing exile from the state’s major universities.<sup>19</sup> In one sense, however, this is consistent with the nature of theology, which is no mere compartment of any university faculty.

### *Theology as the Dynamic Expression of Faith*

Theology is something far more audacious than what can be contained in the university, and something much more than merely academic. By “theology” we are referring to the dynamic expression of the body of material and content of Christian faith. Well aware that religious studies and even the social-scientific study of religion have dominated the academic scene, these disciplines do not fully comprehend this dynamic expression. On the other hand, theology is the discipline that holds promise of the integrative work. Pulitzer Prize winning novelist and Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Marilynne Robinson states that, “Theology, of all modes of thought, integrates all the elements of human experience more exhaustively than any of them. Its purpose is to integrate at every level. That in itself means that meaning becomes pervasive rather than being isolated in narrow interests and purposes.”<sup>20</sup> In various ways faith matters have continued to play a role in California’s public square. But thick theological description has often not been part of the discourse either.

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Compare also Higton’s critique of John Henry Newman and Hauerwas in *A Theology of Higher Education*, 79–106, 123–8.

<sup>19</sup> See some of the consequences of secularized knowledge and its relationship to theology and the university in Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 355–9. And while there are some major universities in the US which still have theology courses in their curriculum (for example, University of Virginia), it seems that California’s institutions of higher learning have completely done away with theology as a source of knowledge. And while some like John Aubrey Douglass (“Can We Save the College Dream?” *Boom: A Journal of California* 1/2 [Summer 2011], 41) are calling for a “rebirth” in California higher education, this is largely driven by conversations over economic costs and contain no proposal for a future role of theology. In the opening remarks of his address at the Spring 2013 TECC Project workshop at the Berkeley City Club, March 11, 2013, the eminent California historian Kevin Starr commented that the TECC Project is “doing a favor for the university by trying to reconnect theology back to it.”

<sup>20</sup> See William Storrar’s interview with Marilynne Robinson, Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, July 10, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWkOkfN3VAg> (accessed November 13, 2013).



It does, however, seem that even some of California's leading sociologists are acknowledging that the more responsible presence of reinvigorated theological reflection is needed in public life, as well as the sound and explicit structural bases for religious expression.<sup>21</sup>

If we can then talk about what this expression might be with the language of a center, it is going to be from this center that the dynamic exposition begins centrifugally moving out and thus regarding both the particular and the expansive. For Christian theology, this center seems to be echoed in the amazingly simple yet profound statement made by the Apostle Paul who wrote, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1 NRSV; see also Phil. 3:8–12). This message of "Christ crucified" is said to contain both God's wisdom and power in its very fabric (1 Cor. 1:22), yet by some is deemed a stumbling block and foolishness for various reasons. If there is something of a recovery of theology to happen—in California or anywhere—complete with its central and wider messages and implications, it is going to need to play a much more relevant role in society and the academy. And if theology indeed is the queen of the sciences, as some today may still want to argue, she must be a queen who, above all, labors to serve the inhabitants of the land, and who deploys her abilities, whatever they may be, in service of others. Theology must be a queen who serves.

Theology is still, however, often perceived to be empirically unsatisfying to the scientific disciplines, unless any particular investigation is genuinely ongoing.<sup>22</sup> In the latter case, investigations follow the world *as it really is* and not as rendered in exclusion by science or any other academic field in isolation, governed inflexibly by certain fashionable rules of any present moment and shut off to new possibilities and the pursuit of deeper questions. But this seems to be exactly the way the universe works, with various longings and impulses met by surprises and wondrously unbeknown satisfactions and discoveries which remain increasingly forthcoming. This is the message and disposition theologians bring to the table as the sobering, hopeful balm that confronts the world with

<sup>21</sup> Sociologists of religion seem increasingly aware that theological reflection is a significantly absent part of their work which some are beginning to address. See Wade Clark Roof, "Engaged Faith: My Own and That of Others," in *Studying Religion and Society: Sociological Self-Portraits*, Titus Hjelm and Phil Zuckerman (eds), (New York: Routledge, 2013), 173–4.

<sup>22</sup> See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1–3 (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–98) as one who in the postwar German universities labored to set forth theology as a hard science and thus challenging the other disciplines to meet with theology on the common ground of historical reality.

a savior who carries a promise of one day healing all that is broken, renewing all that is decayed, and satisfying all longing hearts. In this manner theology is no isolatable academic category or remote body of knowledge easily cordoned off as it has been in some faculties that have viewed “theology” as theoretical and abstract whilst “practical theology” deals with practice and real world affairs. If theology is an exposition of the gospel, it addresses the real broken world we live in with a healing hope that God has chosen to reconcile an alienated world, promising healing of all that is torn in the present.

### *Theology as Contextual*

Theology is shaped by everything else insofar as it—as a confession or internal description of matters of faith—exists as an expression of the Creed which denotes the triune God in action and in relation to all things. To varying degrees and from time to time this comes about as benevolent ectypal expression of the archetypal reality in the life of God, which then leads to the imperfect ongoing construction of models after the reality.<sup>23</sup>

In this way it is right to speak of the medieval distinction made between *theologia viatorum* (theology on the way, or pilgrim theology) and *theologia beatorum* (theology as it really exists, or will be understood eschatologically).<sup>24</sup> In Californian terms, the desire for and attempt to find ultimate fulfillment that has marked so many Californian events and endeavors, and which is true to theology, finds the true paradise remaining ultimately elusive and beyond us.

Of course, theology has had two thousand years of refinement, careful nuance, internal self-critical engagement, and limitless manners of contextual flourishing, aside from its own moral merits and robust claims about the universe. Beyond this it manifests the ability to meaningfully interpret the world, developing wisdom and careful approaches with reference to all matters in every sphere of life. This asserts a distinctly “Christian” theology, which itself displays capable theological descriptions of religions which, in California especially, display unique forms of reality which are subversively fulfilled in the

<sup>23</sup> See John Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11/1 (Jan 2009), 58–64; and John Webster, “Introduction: Systematic Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12–14.

<sup>24</sup> For a treatment of these categories see the excellent discussion in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725; Vol. 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003),

gospel of Jesus Christ. And theology implies, again, divine revelation, and the astonishment and wonder that comes with faith in a message as radical as good news from heaven can be, with the full force of its message to wayward children of a father who still loves them and the implications of this message for life now and in the world to come.

No theology is uncontextual, then. It is all shaped by particular cultural needs, conditions, and language. Any pure kind of theology only exists in the being and action of God, and therefore whatever theology is done by any living theologian is entirely second-order, part of a fallen enterprise, and subject to err. Yet it nevertheless participates in the reality of God's saving action in Christ to reconcile the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). It aims to shake off various trappings that under scrutiny may be expressions of earlier forms of Christianity which are not essential to the gospel and may indeed prove as unnecessary hindrances to ongoing expressions of Jesus' lordship over all realities. And it remains committed to particular localized expressions of faith in Christ, forged in the reality of the Spirit's constitution of church *qua* church with its intrinsic love for Jesus Christ daily lived out in various community situations and while remaining captive to the word of God. As such, California will have particular expressions of Christianity in its particular contexts. Whether these are in any meaningful sense *unique* in the world remains an area of ongoing exploration.<sup>25</sup>

### *Theology as Confessional*

Theology is dynamic and ecclesial, at home in the church and aiming for the flourishing of all human beings while treating all knowledge as relational, contextual, communal, eschatological,<sup>26</sup> and transformational (understood via soteriology and sanctification). And thus it sees everything as fundamentally theological—containing authoritative sources, traditions, and contexts for furtherance and development—aiming to be explicit and self-conscious about this, deploying rich millennia-tested resources from theology and theological

<sup>25</sup> See chapters 10–12 in this volume for a brief conversation on whether there is a “theology of California.”

<sup>26</sup> For examples of employing eschatology and anthropology to interpret cultural phenomena, see Luke Bretherton, “Consuming the Body: Contemporary Patterns of Drug Use and Theological Anthropology,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, Stephen R. Holmes (ed.), (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 94–130; and Luke Bretherton, “The Real Battle of St Paul Cathedral: The Occupy Movement and Millennial Politics,” *HuffPost*, October 19, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/luke-bretherton/the-real-battle-of-st-paul\\_b\\_1065214.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/luke-bretherton/the-real-battle-of-st-paul_b_1065214.html) (accessed November 14, 2013).

discourse (most of which have shaped the world in the twentieth century for good or ill, but rarely acknowledged to have done so) in order to come into closer contact with various topographies.<sup>27</sup>

Because “California,” identifiable as such and as a socio-political entity of the United States, is a relatively recent human invention, seeming to endlessly reinvent itself,<sup>28</sup> generated from the most imaginative resources of the human situation, theology offers a unique grasp of these various phenomenological features and innovations with protological, purposive and ultimately eschatological meanings involved.

In these ways, theology as a *confession* affirms all humans as equally significant public actors, with the church as a primary actor in the public square,<sup>29</sup> indicating theology as something uniquely done by the church *qua* church, or as the body of Christ—the concrete substance of what God has spoken to the world. Of course, we are now no longer referring to the academic discipline of theology (although this confession will inform the academy and vice versa), but to the faithful confession of the promise found in the gospel. It expresses amazement at being a direct recipient of the work of divine economic action in salvation history, and having experienced personal ontological change, or a paradigm shift that has awakened this confession. It is not neutral. By the truths inherent in this confession we admit to now seeing things completely different, exclaiming not just “Jesus as Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3; and 2 Cor. 4:5) but also doxologically that “with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light” (Ps. 36:9, NIV). Setting forth the integrity of the church’s faithful confession indicates its exclusive and capable manner of reckoning with all things. It includes responsible stewardship of this confession that has been explicated/enacted for the past 2,000 years and throughout the entirety of redemptive history. The gospel properly confessed,

<sup>27</sup> See the observation of Stanley Grenz’s theological work seeking to correlate with sensibilities from an assumed turn to a large-scale postmodern epistemology in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel,” in *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects*, Craig Bartholomew, Robin Parry, and Andrew West (eds), (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 67–8. See also a form of correlationism in Tillich that Sanders responds to in Chapter 2 of this volume (see pp. 20–22) which is quite different from what Vanhoozer observes in Grenz.

<sup>28</sup> See some of this historically chronicled in Starr, *California: A History* and also in the remarkable work, Josef Chytry, *Mountain of Paradise: Reflections on the Emergence of Greater California as a World Civilization* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of various actors in the public square and ways of doing public theology in light of other approaches, see Sebastian C.H. Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere:*

*Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (London: SCM, 2011), 3–26.

then, truthfully addresses the major social, political, and ethical questions of the day.

Because California sits at a crossroads of contradictions<sup>30</sup>—political, moral, ethical, economic, religious, ethnographic, social, and historical—there is nothing better to make sense of its features when the other disciplines exhaust the widest range and farthest reach of their best conceptual tools. Revelation, protological as much as present-apocalyptic and eschatological, is what theology presupposes, labors along with, and lives in light of.<sup>31</sup>

It takes cues often and repeatedly from a transcendent base, affirming things as spiritual and Spirit-wrought, and therefore good; or otherwise some things as displeasing to God from what may be known of this God's character in Holy Scripture (for example, the golden calf of Ex. 32). So theology as a confessional reality may struggle at times to reckon with tools of anthropologists, ethnographers, historians and sociologists. Theology can and will always say more than what these fields can unfold; but must say nothing less than what these say, and will sometime contradict and even confront them, facing whatever consequences may come.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes the conclusions of other disciplines need to be reassessed, or reinterpreted, or reframed in light of a bigger picture—theology most often comes with a different starting point and carries different aims. This ought to settle the question about whether theologians are more akin to academic social-scientists or historians; or else whether they are more like pastors or activists, or something else entirely. In describing claims that “concern the extraordinary in the ordinary,” the eternal quickening of human history, Kevin Vanhoozer offers this:

<sup>30</sup> See the brief reflections in Richard Flory, “Making Sense of Religion in Southern California,” Center for Religion and Civic Culture Blog, December 21 2012, <http://crcc.usc.edu/blog/news/making-sense-of-religion-in-southern-california/> (accessed November 14, 2013); Edward J. Blum, “Gods of the Golden Coast,” *Boom: A Journal of California* 2/2 (Summer 2012), 82–5; Dowell Myers, “California Futures,” *Boom: A Journal of California* 2/2 (Summer 2012), 37–54; with the moral contradictions highlighted in Starr “Intro” to *California: A History*, ix–xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Apocalyptic, however, may be too ambitious [although may be redeemed with realist eschatology] since it displaces church and the very possibility of regional theology, evaporating ecclesial confessional echoes along with various redemptive legacies and good cultural plausibility structures that cohere with the missional shape of this divinely-made and ordered universe.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the Barmen Declaration (1934) of the German Confession Church which opposed the practices of the Nazi-regime, an obvious case where the church's action led them to face exile, persecution, and martyrdom. And it is here that theology especially shows its strength, as the voice that remains—speaking for the poor and societally marginalized—

when all other discourse is sequestered and stymied.

The vocation of the Christian theologian is to be an interpreter-martyr: a truth-teller, a truth-doer, a truth-sufferer. Truth requires evangelical passion, not postmodern passivity; personal appropriation, not calculation. The theologian is to embody in his or her own person the core of Christian culture, in order to provide a focus for Christian wisdom. Making Christian truth claims ultimately is not a crusade, nor a pilgrimage, nor even a missionary journey, but rather a *martyrological* act. Genuine theology is not only about the art of reasoning well (rationality), but about living well (wisdom) and dying well (martyrdom).<sup>33</sup>

While perhaps being slightly more hesitant than previous eras to speak of theology as queen of the sciences, its apologetic task finds it happily employed as *servant* to the sciences and humanities, although transcending and running through each in complementing and subversively fulfilling ways. While morality remains a significant feature and aim for all disciplines, it is best and most comprehensively built on the basis of theological structures and considerations, which further stress the importance of biblical-theological engagement as high on the priority list (see Gen. 3:4–5), yielding epistemologies of theology which are self-aware and themselves witness to the gospel insofar as they are expositions reflective of the archetypal love of God.

### **What *in the World* is Theology?**

The question must be asked about what theology is for, or what does it aim to do within a culture. It advances the question of particularity, of theology in and for (and from) a particular culture. It picks up the matter of a theology even of California culture. To investigate these matters requires a preliminary consideration of the nature of culture itself.

#### *Defining Culture*

Culture often eludes definition, and is notoriously difficult to describe. Cultural critic Raymond Williams noted that the term is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”<sup>34</sup> T.S. Eliot observed that when

<sup>33</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Trials of Truth: Mission, Martyrdom, and the Epistemology of the Cross,” in *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge*, J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (eds), (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 156.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (rev. and exp., New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 87; emphasis in original.

contemplating remains of a distinct civilization and its influence, culture is what was “*worth while*” for that civilization to have existed; thus he opined that culture is simply “that which makes life worth living.”<sup>35</sup> Offering his propositions on culture and how it changes against prevailing views, James Davison Hunter recently suggested that culture is “a normative order by which we comprehend others, the larger world, and ourselves and through which we individually and collectively order our experience.”<sup>36</sup>

Emphasizing attentiveness to both inherent systems and practices, Kevin Vanhoozer defines culture as being “*made up of ‘works’ and ‘worlds’ of meaning.*”<sup>37</sup> Each of these descriptions highlights that culture is a very particular matter wherein humans exist and cultivate life together. Beyond just the nature of humanity is something that signifies and denotes the significance of various beliefs, values and traditions. Once again, much more than the items or things that are created and consumed in a particular context, culture denotes the impulses and rhythms of making and enjoying meaningful life.

### *Californian Culture and the Theological Place of “California”*

If culture is about making and enjoying meaningful life, few places can claim to have held out as robust a promise for a better life in the last 200 years than California. The end of the “out West” phenomena for Europeans and Americans, and “the beginning of the new world” for those in the Far East,<sup>38</sup> California has been perhaps more dreamed about, imagined, and longed for than any other place in recent history, both from a socio-political and economic standpoint as well as from within popular culture. It has also been a place prone to the begetting of dreams and innovation, and the strengthening of the imagination. There is something about this particular region of North America on the Pacific Rim, situated on the San Andreas Fault, that academics have sought to make sense of.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (2d ed., London: Faber and Faber 1961), 27.

<sup>36</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture,” in *Everyday Theology: How to Read and Interpret Cultural Trends*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (eds), (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 26.

<sup>38</sup> This insight is owed to Russell Jeung.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see the Los Angeles School of geographers which has sought to capture the significance of Los Angeles, chief among them is Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990).

It is not as though California's soil has not provided contested religious space for the pluralist and special equity promised to all religious groups under the First Amendment,<sup>40</sup> but a regional "theology of place" is something that theology especially can begin to locate, even while seeking to address questions about why some things happen here in remarkable ways that do not—could not—happen elsewhere. In considering such a question theology begins with the first question God asks of humans: "where are you?"<sup>41</sup>

Any kind of deeper engagement with cultural "place" naturally tempts one toward boosterism or an amalgamated tribalism. It does not have to be this way, especially as there have been copious studies of California from the traditional disciplines that have resisted this. Many of these have sought to understand the inner logic of California. While others have decried, largely due to the intense dynamic of the place, "Anyone who knows enough to define California through culture knows better than to try."<sup>42</sup> But theology offers more, not just in making sense of contingent realities in ways that theology uniquely can, but also offering its language, resources, and conceptual tools to other disciplines for the sake of further insight that true interdisciplinary work may yield.

Any theological investigation into cultural place will affirm *creatio ex nihilo*, and that all other worlds that may be created are contingent upon the omnipotent and *a se* (self-sufficient) reality of the divine being who sustains everything that exists. Every world created by humans carries a *ratio* or logic divinely gifted to the world in such a way that every other world created is derivative of God's ultimate world.<sup>43</sup> In this way, creation is meant to reflect the glories of its Creator—to image God—while humans themselves are meant *to be* that very *imago Dei*. Stephen Holmes says that Christian theology, by its very nature, is both capable of providing and indeed *is* "a coherent account of all created realities in relation

<sup>40</sup> See Bret E. Carroll, "Worlds in Space: American Religious Pluralism in Geographic Perspective," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80/2 (June 2012), 304–64.

<sup>41</sup> For an excellent study that theologically examines matters of social and geographical location and matters of natural and built environments, see Eric O. Jacobsen, *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> James Quay, "Beyond Dreams and Disappointments: Defining California Through Culture," in *A Companion to California History*, William Deverell and David Iglar (eds), (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 3.

<sup>43</sup> This idea is etched in stone atop the main entrance to the Fisher Museum of Art, University of Southern California: "The True Work of Art is but a Shadow of the Divine Perfection."



to God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and of the God to whom we are thus related.”<sup>44</sup>

A significant problem, though, is that theology has not been part of the conversations about the particular features of California life. This state's cultural significance reaches the far corners of the earth, in both high and low forms of culture. If various other disciplines can engage California—history, sociology, geography, nuclear astro-physics, aviation, botany, ethnography, environmental science, seismology, law, economics, urban planning, public policy, engineering, public health, conservation biology, transportation and communication studies, and the rest—in order to address the fringes of California's extreme situations, allowances and provisions, then why not theology, which can integrate all these and aims to complement, engage, and enhance them? And all this, especially when religious experience has flourished here and the church as a public actor has been enduringly present and active on the scene at the local congregational level, not merely in the form of institutionally-based organizations enabling religious experiences or religious sentiments tantamount to euphoric or identity-shaping nostalgia, but as a theologically life-giving organism.

Theology is not only the ever-present (tacit) feature in California's culture that should be recognized for its conspicuous nature, as well as for being the discipline that gives the closest categorical language to “make sense of” things (which other disciplines struggle to do), but theology makes claims about things and has potential to change games if its claims are true. And it carries the promise of not only striking chords by rendering what is true, but also what is beautiful and good. Jane Williams has reasoned, “As Christians who believe in God the Creator, anything ‘true’ is nothing for us to worry about. God is the source of all. So the discovery of anything that is true is simply the revelation of the character of God.”<sup>45</sup> Theology further has the capacity to suggest that something may not *really* be what it has been thought to be, possessing potential paradigm-shifting power similar to what was yielded in the Copernican or scientific revolutions. Theology may shed light on things, considering insights from other disciplines that allow theology's categories to further illumine the subject matter under investigation, profoundly shaping the understanding of things. In this, while maintaining confidence in its ability to describe objects, action, and meaning, theology is not dependent on other disciplines for its ability to move forward in its cultural appraisals, but must be tempered in humility when approaching

<sup>44</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, “Introduction,” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, Stephen R. Holmes (ed.), (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), xi.

<sup>45</sup> Jane Williams, “Creation, Christology and the Human Vocation,” college lecture, March 7 2013, Ridley Hall, Cambridge, UK.

subjects that theologians have neither been known for engaging nor have engaged in meaningful ways (this does not suggest that the church has not been engaging California but only that academic theology has not been!).

Back to Joan Didion. If things, as she sees it, *had better work here*, and they fall apart, then what? It seems the only answer is to keep searching for a higher order. The truth is, however, that things do *work* here. But the looming question is this: At what (or whose) expense? From technology to church to industry to innovation to sports to entertainment—things certainly do work here. But things also fail here. As much is seen with the world's leading prison state, largely and conveniently relegating these facilities to far out of the way locations. While critics have often suggested California may be a “failed state” with its massive financial problems, Governor Jerry Brown has incessantly looked to creative funding strategies for the state's woes. This materialized in the Spring 2013 trip to China in search of “plenty of billions” of foreign investment dollars whilst local unions also seemed willing to help—for an additional price, of course.<sup>46</sup> Religious groups, especially those with aberrant theologies, have also experienced scandals and bankruptcy, most notably the recent demise of Robert Schuler's Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove. Hopes of grandeur meet true defeat. Parasitic groups also surface. On the religious level these include advocates of the so-called “prosperity gospel,” an especially hubristic form seen on the television series “Preachers of L.A.”; and atheist mega-churches like LA's Sunday Assembly have also emerged. But amidst the tragedy and artificiality present on multiple levels, personal and corporate—these religious examples being just one category that has co-opted theology and which a coherent theology might critically and constructively engage—Joan Didion still remained hopeful for a society of a “higher order.”

True theology is meant to guide human flourishing. It accounts for the big questions that scientists and leading politicians work to address, which affect ordinary people in profound ways. The John Templeton Foundation has proceeded with the desire to see science and faith work together in fruitful ways, where modern scientific research (especially neuroscience) is meant to yield incredible discoveries for religion and theology.<sup>47</sup> One might suppose,

<sup>46</sup> See Juliet Williams, “Jerry Brown in China: California Governor Heads to Asia Seeking Investments,” *Huff Post*, April 6, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/07/jerry-brown-in-china\\_n\\_3033523.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/07/jerry-brown-in-china_n_3033523.html); and Saki Knafo, “California Prison Guards Union Pushes for Prison Expansion,” *Huff Post*, September 9, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/09/california-prison-guards\\_n\\_3894490.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/09/california-prison-guards_n_3894490.html) (accessed November 15, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> For example, see Justin L. Barrett, *Born Believers: The Science of Children's Religious Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

additionally, that this street runs both ways, especially as divinely revealed theology, accommodated to the human capacity and contained in the body of Scripture, comprehends many holy sciences, according to William Perkins. Perkins understood the principal science as theology itself, which yields “a doctrine sufficient to live well.”<sup>48</sup> But this, of course poses a challenge for those who would seek to engage theologically with California, or any society. What are the nature and consequences of this higher order of society that Didion was referring to? Californians display a kind of determination boasting the extraordinary capacity for ingenious forms of creativity yet with often less attention to social and moral flourishing.<sup>49</sup> But when can we adequately determine that we have gone too far?

Theology can help with this. It is needed for a coherent grasp of what makes California what it is—diverse and uniform, plural and singular, defined locally in fluid interchange of many realities, and theoretically through media, representative legislation (as anonymous as this can be after Progressive reforms), and the academy. Theology is needed because it stands present on the scene declaring that things are not now the way they're supposed to be. And an essential component of the mission of the church is to reckon with this reality in light of the healing that God will effect for the world through Christ. Theology aims to make all these matters plain, acknowledging that mission doesn't take place apart from the unlimited ranging exposition of the inexhaustible core of our confession and those matters that the core of this message is related to.

While boasting these capabilities, however, it is worth considering how theology resists dominating other disciplines when its claims are so sweeping and its reach so vast, spanning from the transcendent unto the transcendent with audacious promises for this in-between state. It can do so, however, because its discourse is not limited there inasmuch as the transcendent intersects with the contingent, even to the point of becoming one with it, and thereby offering hope amidst the realities of human existence often beset with tragedy.

Theology refers to the relationship of things to one another, which necessarily means prioritizing and regulating things in relation to others that may be more or less significant. For example, a homeless person on Skid Row or in the Tenderloin

<sup>48</sup> William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Uniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, Vol. 1 (London: John Legatt, 1623–26), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Kevin Starr observes Josiah Royce as among the first to evaluate the Gold Rush as a social and moral event (*California*, 89). See the additional pressing environment and societal issues (immigration, energy, economics, to name a few) that have plagued Californians in

Starr, *California*, 333ff.

District is more important than a famous Hollywood record store. This is not to suggest that music is unimportant, nor the vinyl on which music has been placed, and certainly not those individuals who wrote, performed, recorded, mixed, produced, packaged, marketed and aimed to sell it. Music is an essential part of being human insofar as its production is a *human* action relating material reconfiguration into mathematical sequences that are rendered both fitting and, in some instances, exquisite, for whoever might be the listener or judge.<sup>50</sup>

What theology does is frame things in light of the divine economic action. It shows that the worth of any particular human being, however perceived by society, is given significance as part of the material universe endowed with order and wonderful beauty from the Creator's handiwork, as theologians claim. But further, the significance of such a designation comes not from an investigation into the nature of the subject, as if in isolation. It derives from the truthfulness of the Creator becoming one with creation: *as a human*. A very particular human. A poor one, societally marginalized, treated as a criminal and despised. It is in light of these considerations that the gospel proclamation endemic to the church's mission takes shape, in the language and thought forms that a culture inhabits. But as it does so, it too has something to say about particular cultures.

## Theology of California Culture

Before any attempt can be made at drawing theological features from California's culture in a larger effort at rendering a theology of California culture, it must be noted that there seems to be something about California that elucidates theological themes and plays with them in dynamic ways, perhaps even more intensely than any other place. In vibrant ways California's culture co-opts these themes, using them for incredible and often for less than noble aims. In this way there seems to be something quite unique about California's creative culture. But what might a Christian reading of this culture look like?

### *California's Effects on its Occupants (and Visitors)*

From all over the world people have some idea about California, even if they've never been here. If they have been here, the ideas often become more concrete and

<sup>50</sup> For a recent theological accounting of music and temporality, see Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and also Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

even more imaginative, especially since it is near impossible to take in California's vast geographic terrain and kaleidoscopic culture even in one lifetime. But what then does this do to people, both the modern inhabitants of the land as well as its visitors? While we could consider this question by reflecting on the character of its residents, which would be a fascinating study in theological anthropology (especially since hardly anyone has been here more than five or six generations; most are second or third generation), to explore this question momentarily I will briefly consider a few high profile visitors to the state.

T.S. Eliot's visit to Southern California makes something of an interesting picture into the hope and tragedy of a love that never happened. He visited Claremont on one occasion, arriving December 27, 1932 and leaving January 6, 1933 after one lecture at Scripps's Balch Hall on January 5 and a talk at UCLA. But the main reason for the visit was Emily Hale, to spend time together with her, and alone. Hale and Eliot met in Boston in 1913 and some biographers have suggested a romantic relationship that ended when Eliot departed for Oxford in 1915 and married Vivienne Haigh-Wood the same year—a difficult marriage from early on. Hale and Eliot began corresponding in 1927. Hale joined the Scripps faculty in 1932 and invited Eliot out whilst he was lecturing in Harvard. Summer 1933 Eliot legally separated from his wife (who later died in a mental institution in 1947) and was later visited by Hale in England that summer. The relationship altogether is mysterious and will only be elucidated in 2020 when Eliot's staggering 1,000 letters to Hale (written between 1927 and 1957) become available. (Eliot burned all letters from Hale upon marrying his secretary Valerie Fletcher in 1957.) Whatever the relationship, whether platonic or romantic, Judy Harvey Sahak from Denison Library at Scripps College said she was Eliot's "muse" whom he placed on a pedestal as a feminine ideal. In a *New York Times* book review of Lyndall Gordon's 1988 biography of the poet, *Eliot's New Life*, Denis Donoghue wrote this:

If Eliot was ever in love with Emily Hale, it was in some ethereal and spectral sense, a love beyond desire. It is hard to resist the suspicion that he was morally obtuse: he kept Emily Hale hanging about, full of expectation, as if she had nothing better to do than to maintain his symbolism; he certainly went far toward destroying her life.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Much of the material above draws from David Allen's interesting essay, "DAVID ALLEN: T.S. Eliot may have found Claremont the chaste land," *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, December 24, 2012, <http://www.dailybulletin.com/general-news/20121225/david-allen-ts-eliot-may-have-found-claremont-the-chaste-land> (accessed November 15, 2013).

What seems curious about this all was the pivotal moment in California, perhaps where Eliot felt free—free to separate from his wife, free and inspired to imaginatively cultivate the muse—and yet he could never again be as free as he was with Hale for that week and a half in California.<sup>52</sup>

It seems that a similar form of free expression was also experienced when the French philosopher Michel Foucault was invited in 1975 by Leo Bersani to become visiting professor in French at UC Berkeley, marking his first visit to California. According to David Macey, Foucault had taken “a great liking to the West Coast, which was always to have an almost utopian appeal for him.” This was the year he took acid for the first time in Death Valley, “an unforgettable evening on LSD” which some have said proffered a paradigm shifting experience. Macey described this occasion as “almost ceremonial, and had as its setting the desert, and as its background accompaniment a tape of Stockhausen.” The “pleasures of California,” however, would move beyond this. Foucault became involved with the gay community to a degree that “was unimaginable in France” and exhibited “a sexual openness which enchanted and enthralled him,” and into which he immersed himself deeply on subsequent trips to the Bay Area. Macey noted that here seems to be where “Foucault began to develop his flirtation with the world of leather and sado-masochism, which were only some of the pleasures available.”<sup>53</sup> The other pleasures were also those of the academic freedom he experienced here, and at the time of his death he planned to spend multiple months of the year at UC Berkeley.<sup>54</sup>

Another significant figure who found a temporary home in California was the poststructuralist philosopher, Jacques Derrida. Derrida followed J. Hillis Miller in 1986 from Yale to Irvine to become tenured part-time distinguished professor in Murray Kreiger’s Institute of Critical Theory each Spring, a move which he thought would “recharge [his] batteries” and fit with his desire to “win the West,” however sub/consciously.<sup>55</sup> Out here people think differently, are perceived differently, and structures work differently. This move that brought him to the West Coast continued to see moods ease away from the earlier hostility toward his deconstructionism, marked especially with a formal lecture

<sup>52</sup> For an account of the relationship, save what may be known from January 1, 2020 when Eliot’s letters to Hale become available from Princeton University, see Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (London: Vintage, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Vintage, 1995), 338–40.

<sup>54</sup> James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 327.

<sup>55</sup> See these details from an interview with J. Hillis Miller in *Derrida: A Biography*,

Benoît Peeters, Andrew Brown (trans.) (Malden: Polity, 2013), 371.

at Stanford in April 1999 where he was warmly introduced by Richard Rorty.<sup>56</sup> In 1990 Derrida agreed to entrust his personal archives to Langston Library at UC Irvine, a matter that became deeply complicated when the University fired Derrida's friend and colleague Dragan Kujundzic for having an intimate relationship with a graduate student. Derrida thought Kujundzic was both a victim of injustice and a mistreated employee. Feeling a betrayal of the trust he had given the University, especially with his archives, he issued an ultimatum in a long letter to the UCI Chancellor, July 25, 2004, that included the cessation of any further materials being gifted. The matter was complicated and Derrida died less than three months later, but it shows at least some evidence of his expectation of a way of doing things differently in California, which in the end simply could not be.<sup>57</sup>

Earlier on, of course, San Francisco had the Bohemian Club which existed as a rendezvous spot for creative personalities from the late nineteenth century, including journalists and artists as well as businessmen, military officers, and others. At its best it celebrated the city as a place where lightheartedness was possible and where, like the later-formed Sierra Club, "the ideality of relationship" was upheld. Oscar Wilde paid a visit to the Club during his journey to "the Occidental uttermost of American civilization." In March 1882 he stepped off the train in Oakland wearing a Spanish sombrero, velvet suit, puce cravat, yellow gloves and buckled shoes. From here he is said to have wend his way to the Bohemian Club where he ably drank his hosts under the table, which was surprising in light of his dramatic self-portrayal as an "enervated aesthetic."<sup>58</sup>

It is often thought that people feel as if they can really be themselves here. People tend to dream differently here, of new possibilities;<sup>59</sup> and here they find new problems, and new ways to discuss the problems, which has led to innovations previously unimagined in leisure, recreation, entertainment, the arts, education, punishment, religion, and countless other categories of culture,

<sup>56</sup> Peeters, *Derrida*, 459 n., which notes Stanford University Press as one US publisher that has published most works by Derrida.

<sup>57</sup> Peeters, *Derrida*, 534–6.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 246–8.

<sup>59</sup> California was where racially-integrated couples would often end up in the postwar era, and was also the place of the first racially-integrated, intercultural church in the United States: the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, co-pastored by Howard Thurman and

Alfred Fisk.

including the ecclesial. The church seems to have also experienced a unique freedom here, as chapters 4–6 of the present volume attempt to highlight.<sup>60</sup>

*Affected by Sin/Visitors*

By its nature being a discipline that refers to things, and if the Bible has anything to do with informing its content, theology is going to effectively identify some things as sinful. For Augustine, culture is said to be “an end in itself for the earthly city, but merely an aid for the heavenly.” It is in this sense “a temporary, this-worldy remedy to cope with the effects of sin until Christ shall come, and sin and death and human culture shall be no more.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, in the meantime, rampant forms of sin will exist, about which the Old Testament provides examples of radical eradication, leaving not even a trace of these idolatrous cultures if Israel was to dwell in security.<sup>62</sup> In this way, we might say that there are some forms of culture which are irredeemably and irreducibly sinful.

The pornography industry which has thrived in the San Fernando Valley may be one of these forms. Various cultural pressures weigh in on it that shape it (diseases and health or medical advances, artistic and recreational developments, physiological innovations and abnormalities, music and filming technology, legislative and economic factors, among other things), and other amoral factors may be contained in it such as sound business ethics, health concerns, mutual regard for the “other” when present, athletic fitness and an otherwise healthy view of the human body, and so on. Yet nevertheless, at the root-level is the sexual exploitation of human beings, leaving the pornographic actors and the consumers of this form of entertainment media as those whose own lives are often both underfulfilled (and thus seeking fulfillment in wrong places) and left destroyed in the process.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> On recent treatments of innovations in Protestant Evangelicalism, for the first half of the twentieth century see Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), and for the latter half of the twentieth century see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, “Can Theology Engage with Culture?” in *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement*, Stephen R. Holmes (ed.), (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 9–10.

<sup>62</sup> Holmes, “Can Theology Engage with Culture?,” 6–11.

<sup>63</sup> Even after passing the 2012 “Measure B” ballot requiring Los Angeles County porn actors to wear condoms on film sets, summer 2013 saw multiple instances of actors testing positive with HIV. See Kathleen Miles, “Porn Moratorium After HIV-Positive Test From Performer, Cameron Bay,” *Huff Post*, August 21, 2013.



Another irreducibly sinful phenomenon, to keep the matter in the sphere of sexuality, would be an adulterous relationship, which is the vacuous exchange and utter misunderstanding of the nature of marriage. At a basic level, the engagement of other-oriented genital sexual intercourse is intended as an exclusive action and expression of mutual covenantal love that is not open to others in the same way that non-exclusive friendships are, which exist in open kinds of bonding that are not sealed by genital sexual union. In this way, to invite other friends from the non-exclusive friendship category to participate in intimate expressions reserved for the exclusive bonded relationship is the essence of adultery, which is condemned by Holy Scripture. Indeed, marriage honors the other as *sexed other* in manifold non-exclusive ways as with any friendship and affirmation of another's equal human dignity. But only in genital expression within the mutual confines of an exclusive, monogamous covenantal marital union is sexual intimacy supported by the context that yields the fullness of meaning for sexual embrace and the consequent and contingent fulfilment that such an exclusive bonded union brings, which ultimately images something far greater.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, there are some cultural phenomena that may seem sinful and often are, but are not so necessarily. For example, street or prison gangs have often been established as means by which to secure flourishing and justice for oppressed groups, the avoidance of victimization, and often show forth allegiances of deep, ongoing solidarity. But with this also comes the flip

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[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/21/porn-moratorium-hiv\\_n\\_3792761.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/21/porn-moratorium-hiv_n_3792761.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular); and "Porn star's positive HIV test prompts calls for industry shutdown," *The Guardian*, September 7, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/sep/07/porn-actor-tests-positive-hiv> (accessed November 16, 2013). For how pornography rewires the brain and depersonalizes sexually active, see Nisha Lilia Diu, "Don Jon: how porn is rewiring men's brains," *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/10441027/Don-Jon-how-porn-is-rewiring-mens-brains.html> (accessed November 16, 2013); and also Adam Withnall, "Pornography addiction leads to same brain activity as alcoholism or drug abuse, study shows," *The Independent*, September 22, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/pornography-addiction-leads-to-same-brain-activity-as-alcoholism-or-drug-abuse-study-shows-8832708.html> (accessed December 14, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> While a robust biblical-theological account of human sexuality is well beyond the scope of this chapter and the present volume, yet sorely needed (highlighted especially when reaching for source material during the Proposition 8 campaign), such proposals have been few and far between, especially from evangelicals. For one responsible treatment, see Stephen R. Holmes, "Should we 'Welcome' and 'Affirm'? Reflecting on Evangelical Responses to Human Sexuality," in *Revisioning, Renewing, and Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz*, Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris, and Jason S. Sexton (eds), (Eugene, Cascade, 2014), 121-34.

of a coin that could yield increased victimization from pre-emptive measures, or else the further removal from the protection of formal societal governance structures.<sup>65</sup> The Wild, Wild West remains such, of course. People escape to here, arriving looking for myth and fantasy, feeding into the economy that provides support for myth-making worlds, and the organization and distribution of such production.

This is the context in which Californian gave birth to Disney. As a storytelling world of wish-fulfilling family entertainment fuelled by postwar American affluence, Walt Disney's great project Disneyland would be a place of knowledge and happiness for its "guests." Producing a sense of overall unity with interweaving pathways and America's first monorail in 1959, Disneyland highlighted "the preponderance of human ambulation" so characteristic of the US and Southern California. Technology aided the creation of Fantasyland and Tomorrowland "designed to awaken emotional or archetypal responses common to everyone," inducing an almost religious experience of happiness, or of feeling alive. And yet through the simulated exhilaration laced with frontier thrills, fantasy, and romance, "[t]he 'Present' was either non-existent or manifested as the emotional experiences of the 'guests'."<sup>66</sup> It is this powerful inducement that prompted the critical reflections of Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard in their understanding of "hyperreality," where simulation destroys the real and obliterates the distinction between the real and the representation, with everything coming down to a sales pitch. This product sounds strangely similar to the San Fernando Valley's other leading industry mentioned earlier, with its subtle song: Do not think about the present, nor of any memorable past or concrete future—only fantasize. While the questions of these industries raise important questions about the composition of California's own political economic makeup, ultimate fulfilment is not found here, in any amusement park, film, or any other fading structures.

<sup>65</sup> For how this work with prison gangs, see the work of political economist David Skarbek, *The Social Order of the Underworld: How Prison Gangs Govern the American Penal System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 2; for youth gangs, see the "code of the street" explained in Victor M. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 55–7, 72–3. See also the remarkable story of John M. Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Ventura: Regal, 1973), which itself is a story of fleeing west to California for hope, then seeing a deeper need with injustice in the South, and never again being satisfied in California.

<sup>66</sup> See the chapter on Disney's emotional environment to highlight California's political economy in Chyrry, *Mountain of Paradise*, Chapter 5, especially 147–9.

*Contingent and Eschatological*

The reality of this present world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31; 1 John 2:17); yet the gospel declares the reality of a world that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:26–8). That world serves as a critique of the present world since it signals the healing this world so desperately needs, as well as the just judgment of all things that would undermine human flourishing. Accordingly, while it seems that nearly every human community on the face of the earth has some expression somewhere in California, there is “one new humanity” (*kainon anthrōpon*, Eph. 2:15, NIV) that God has willed to create which does not fit with the earlier-erected cultural paradigms and in that sense is properly not of this present world. In a sense, of course, the entire history of California over the last 500 years has been increasingly shaped by something of a vision held out in Scripture, where a new community could exist with its unique form of flourishing, righteousness, and peace. This was been sought by Spaniards, English, Russians, Franciscans, Mennonites, Mormons, Pentecostals, hippies, homosexuals, poststructuralists, to name but a few.

The new human community that the Bible describes, however, is profoundly different than the picture of each culture coming to stake its own claim at an appointed place where it might really experience what it had every hope of becoming, in some culturally hegemonic sense. Alternatively, Scripture speaks of the new human community as cutting

across all cultures and temperaments. Put another way, it doesn't fit any culture but challenges them all at some point. Christians from more individualistic cultures love the Bible's emphasis on affirming one another and sharing hurts and problems—but hate the idea of accountability and discipline. Christians from more traditional communal cultures love the emphasis on accountability for morals and beliefs but often chafe at emphasis on racial reconciliation and being open about one's personal hurts and financial needs.<sup>67</sup>

About this new humanity Thomas Torrance says that its proclamation “is the most explosive force in the world not only because it is proleptic of the final judgment of holy love and proleptic of the new heaven and new earth, but because in it the last things actually confront man creatively here and now in

<sup>67</sup> Timothy Keller, “Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” *Redeemer City to City*, [http://theresurgence.com/files/2011/04/10/Keller-Forgiveness\\_and\\_Reconciliation.pdf](http://theresurgence.com/files/2011/04/10/Keller-Forgiveness_and_Reconciliation.pdf) (accessed November 18, 2013), 1.

time.”<sup>68</sup> In other words there is a power inherent to the gospel of God that in ultimate ways testifies to the bringing about of the things that ordinary Californians have been searching for. The desire to find fulfillment, to have a new and better life, to have a new start, to experience true freedom and human flourishing—these are all built into a shared humanity. California has uniquely displayed a “search for higher value” in higher education and religion, a hope for happiness in the world, or for a better life, and for finding a meaningful place in the world.<sup>69</sup> California has indeed succeeded in becoming one of the most diverse places in the world,<sup>70</sup> perhaps following Josiah Royce’s “higher provincialism” which Sanders refers to as “A Golden State of Mind.”<sup>71</sup> And perhaps there is enough Zen laced through the entire setting to secure a way of journeying through the California terrain believing that such a better situation is possible. But with the wisdom of the ages, Christian theology acknowledges that for whatever gains may be found in this world (which are sadly often at the expense of others), the better life ultimately is only found in the all-benevolent hand of the one who created, and will one-day re-create this particular culture with an innovation that will never disappoint, fulfilling every hopeful longing for all who will truly believe.

But such longings are not fulfilled by human ingenuity or by running as far as land extends before the beach hits the ocean and the sun goes down. These ultimate longings are only fulfilled by sheer grace for those who trust in the one who is the fulfilment of true human existence, who became incarnate, was crucified, buried, dead, rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead. None of this denies that there is not something innate about being human, and something about the Pacific region, and especially California, that engenders wonder, hope, dreams, imagination, and innovation—something that perhaps California uniquely captures or embodies, or images somehow. But because this vision experienced in the real state of California is a broken one where dreams are repeatedly shattered as much as they are birthed, the gospel in particular is able to show how these human impulses, very real and unable to be suppressed, are subversively fulfilled in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “The Modern Eschatological Debate, Pt. 3,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 25/3 (1953), 175.

<sup>69</sup> See Kevin Starr’s 2012 “Mission Day” address, January 26, 2012, <http://www.lmu.edu/Page82604.aspx> (accessed November 18, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Kevin Starr, *Coast of Dreams: California on the Edge, 1990–2003* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 141–77.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 10 of the present volume.

Without this kind of particular Christocentric theism, meaning, purpose, and end are features of this present life and human existence that will be completely lost and will continue to undo the particular kind of hope-filled restoration found in the gospel.

## Theology's Promise for Culture

If theology—as an exposition of the church's confession of divine salvation offered through Christ—doesn't engage California's culture, it will continue in neglect of its neighboring disciplines in the academy in the pursuit of truth, and will have left the state's politicians and society alone to negotiate the ills that our confession capably and comprehensively purports to be able to reckon with. Seen from this perspective, we cannot *not* engage our culture with theology's claims and promises. Further, it must engage because it has tools that have immensely helped ancient and modern civilizations; and California could use some help. Theology aims to cultivate responsible citizens who in turn model responsible citizenship when the entire population is unwont to. It hardly seems the case that Californians have shed the shallow and irresponsible characterization that Josiah Royce attributed to them in 1886 after the Gold Rush, declaring that they displayed “a novel degree of carelessness and overhastiness, an extravagant trust in luck, a previously unknown blindness to our social duties, and an indifference to the rights of foreigners, whereof we cannot be proud.”<sup>72</sup>

A theological reckoning with California identifies a culture that uniquely creates “myth” and re-creates this same vision for others. And what kind of theology can engage with this culture? The kind that doesn't let the siren calling myths have the final say, confronting them by the coherence of the indicative nature of Christian witness (Acts 1.8), and expressing good news in various evangelistic ways, especially in meaningful localized forms of service for the common good. The public work of the church, as Luke Bretherton argues, is to be “an agent of healing and repair within the political, economic, and social order, contradicting the prideful, violent, and exclusionary logics at work in the *saeculum* and opening it out to its fulfillment in Christ.”<sup>73</sup> By discriminating between right and wrong then, in society, as it proclaims the gospel, the church labors to establish contexts in which moral and just relations are possible in light of the coming of Jesus

<sup>72</sup> Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character* (reprint, Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), 3–4.

<sup>73</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 210.

Christ. And simply because Christianity is exclusive (maintaining that salvation is found in no one other than Jesus Christ) does not mean it is intolerant.<sup>74</sup> It creates space for various traditions, and even for various religious expressions that are at odds with and parasitic to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And theological description witnesses in its humility. Consider again Henry Durant's vision for education in the founding of the University of California with what that university became with the "Master Plan" of 1960. Theology, quite early on, left when it was asked to, and has still not been formally invited back to the university. Yet it nevertheless flourished on the streets and in the churches, and is ready to come back and serve wherever it may find willing listeners.

Theology, of course, has no grand vision for what might be accomplished in the present situation which, again, is passing away. It aims in the meantime to know nothing but Christ and him crucified, meaning that those who confess the hope of the gospel would abandon all to see one sinner repent. It views the vocation of theologian, or of social-scientist, or of historian as first of all under the rubric of a divine calling to surrender ourselves in the same way the Lord Jesus did, pouring ourselves into culture in its variable shapes for the good of the church, and for the good of our fellow Californians.

We seem to be living in a moment where the secularization thesis is being shown to be quite a misguided proposal. In 1989 Lesslie Newbigin argued that "the belief in a secular society is an unproven belief accepted uncritically to justify a social institution, and also that the belief is mistaken."<sup>75</sup> Added to the growing dis-ease with secularism are ways that theology is being done responsibly and beautifully in many major university divinity departments around the world, and in seminaries, and by faithful clergy who have begun to carefully articulate theological frameworks for their efforts, in conversation with other traditional categories which have served as theology's replacements, including the arts and sciences.

Coming out of the ghettos in revived fashion, theology is again being shown for what it really is, making sense of the deep matters of the human experience,<sup>76</sup> reengaging from the margins, and experiencing something of what has been

<sup>74</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, "In Defense of Constantine," *First Things*, April 2001, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/in-defense-of-constantine-47> (accessed November 18, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 211.

<sup>76</sup> See Peter J. Leithart, "Death to the Copulative and Long Live the Queen!" *First Things: On the Square*, September 28, 2012, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2012/09/death-to-the-copulative-and-long-live-the-queen> (accessed March 8, 2013).

referred to as a “Lazarus-style comeback.”<sup>77</sup> In so many ways then theology is experiencing a moment it hasn't had for quite some time, highlighting that “Christianity is a culture-forming religion, and the planting and growth of Christian communities led to the remaking of the cultures of the ancient world along with the creation of a new civilization, or more accurately several new civilizations.”<sup>78</sup> With its retrieved resources, however, theology has a lot of catching up to do with the various forms of academic and public discourse, especially in a place as vibrant as California, and especially in the hopes that scholars, politicians, poets, and ordinary Californians would wake up to find what they've been missing.

### Conclusion: Theological Engagement with California's Culture

What has theology to do with California? And how does theology make sense of California culture? How does it engage? There's much more to say, and the efforts in this volume are attempts to begin doing this from various theological angles. The interdisciplinary aspect of it is highlighted toward the end of the volume (chapters 10–12), with Sanders doing as good as anything I've seen, trying to generate a theology of California's culture with systematic theology's tools, which proposal is then responded to by a social scientist (Richard Flory) and an historian (Richard Pointer). If I'd change anything it might aim to supplement Sanders's work with how Stanley Grenz tested his own biblical-theological concepts through the traditional theological loci,<sup>79</sup> perhaps drawing a major theme from California (for example: hope) and bringing it into a full conversation with this idea in Scripture and as it relates to systematic theology. While I anticipate that it will take an extensive and ongoing effort to begin to do this adequately and in a thoroughly interdisciplinary manner, I shall attempt one brief concluding reflection that theology might lend for making sense of California's culture, albeit without the robust biblical exegesis and theological reflection that could also ensue.

<sup>77</sup> John Milbank, “Lazarus-style comeback,” *Times Higher Education*, April 16, 2009, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=406157> (accessed November 18, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>79</sup> For an account of his methodology for this, please see Jason S. Sexton, “The *Imago Dei* Once Again: Stanley Grenz's Journey Toward a Theological Interpretation of Genesis

1:26–27” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4/2 (Fall 2010) 187–206.

In doing this, I'd like to suggest that California uniquely generates "myth."<sup>80</sup> Myth about God, humans, sin, church, Holy Spirit, redemption and reconciliation, Jesus, and the eschaton. It forces a change in the way the big questions are asked, and generates myth to compensate these, providing myths that are perhaps more easily transferrable than other cultural myths because of the dominant forms of irresponsibility and anonymity prevalent among Californians.

People come here from elsewhere looking for a better life, having bought into the myth, whether from boosters or someone else. When they arrive, and are asked "where are you from?" they reply, "elsewhere," causing deep forms of loyalty and identity to emerge (however strong they might have otherwise been) giving shape to the myth of the (in some ways *better*) life that they had. These new arrivals remain loyal to their place of origin, and this is reinforced in various ways. They then aim to import and appropriate mythical features of erstwhile identity in California. When this import of the mythical prior place and its cultural features doesn't work, a dissatisfaction with the present place (California) sets in. Delusion transpires and disenchantment with the present place and the dreams attached with it become shattered. The individual is left with a choice: in what world will he or she live? Many Californians choose not to live in the present world, nor in a truthful appropriation of their memorable past, and choose to remain enchanted, or in the magical land, perhaps with season passes or the annual trip planned to Disneyland.

This is where the church has something very important to offer, even as it seeks to resist the at times overwhelmingly compelling pull of Californian idolatrous myths. Perhaps these are all forms of the American myth of individualism, just expressed in higher forms because of California's unique cultural makeup and pressure? Kevin Vanhoozer expressed one challenge for the church, however: "It is a truism in Christian mission that we must go and address people where they *live*. Quite so. My point is that 'they' (and we) frequently live in cleverly devised mythical world created by media and marketing moguls."<sup>81</sup>

Myths continue developing in the course of California's life, old ones evolving and new ones emerging—myths of educational perfection and state-governed forms of equality; myths of sexual freedom or fulfilling partnership; myths of health and liberalism, wealth and prosperity; the myth of a soundly

<sup>80</sup> See Dora Beale Polk, *The Island of California: A History of the Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) and the recent work on what Californians have done with trees, Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013). "Paradox" would also be a fascinating conceptual tool to use in examining California's culture.

<sup>81</sup> Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?" 27.



governed state and security, of a better life; the myth of social/economic boom and overwhelming despair; and endless others. This is not “myth” in the sense of something artificial or sub-real. It’s something discerned by inferences. It generates translatable impulses and images that somehow point to the reality without ever presenting its real, super-real substance. It even does this in coherent ways although not in ultimate ways as people are in various ways transported *into* California. Joan Didion has stated that it is indeed a “delusion” to think that California is a mere five hours from New York by air. Indeed, “California is somewhere else.” And yet it’s not the eschaton, nor tantamount to the promise held out in the gospel. California is rather quite normal, arbitrary, and mundane, even if extremely so. And yet wherever and whatever it is, God is not far from it.