Joseph Brodsky once declared that "Czeslaw Milosz is one of the greatest poets of our time, perhaps the greatest." After his death on August 14, many of the obituaries and published tributes said the same thing. Milosz's greatness was displayed not only in his poetry but also in his prose. In both he showed himself to be one of the bravest and sharpest thinkers of his time, as most critics have agreed. Yet there is an element of his greatness that has been generally avoided or underestimated even by his admirers. One rarely sees Milosz discussed as a Christian writer or his work as an expression of a profoundly religious imagination. How is it possible to praise Milosz as poet and thinker without coming to grips with his Christian vision? To do so is not just to ignore an essential dimension of his work; it is to miss the heart of his message.

Czeslaw Milosz was born in Szetejnie in 1911 and raised in Wilno, both of which are in present-day Lithuania. His family was part of the large Polish-speaking population of that city. For this reason he identified himself as a Polish writer. Living there through his university education, he was present in 1939 when the Soviets invaded Lithuania, while Hitler simultaneously invaded Poland. At great personal risk, he escaped through the Soviet borders and worked for the Polish resistance in Warsaw throughout the war. Once the war had ended, he tried to make a life for himself in his own nation and was part of the diplomatic corps of Communist Poland's postwar government. He was posted to the consulate in New York and the embassy in Washington. In 1951, while he was serving as the cultural attaché at the Polish embassy in Paris, he defected. He remained in France until 1960, when he took a position at the University of California, Berkeley, as a professor of Slavic literature. In 1980, at the age of seventy, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Having lived in exile for fifty years, he moved from the United States to Krakow in 2001 and died there this summer at the age of ninety-three.

This bare-bones summary of his life shows that Milosz's personal history included almost the whole of the twentieth century. He participated in some of its most dramatic episodes and lived within several of its colliding cultures, carving out homes in Lithuania, Poland, France, and the United States. These are the contexts in which his Christian vision was shaped and delivered. Although he often expressed this vision obliquely, he was relentless in his criticism of those who despised faith as an anachronism: "I am not afraid to say that a devout and God-fearing man is superior as a human specimen to a restless mocker who is glad to style himself an 'intellectual,' proud of his cleverness in using ideas..."
Czeslaw Milosz’s 1951 The Captive Mind explores, through the author’s personal experience, what motivates seemingly morally strong, thoughtful men to instead cooperate with, and often embrace, evil. Sadly, this question is as relevant today as seventy years ago, which makes this book very much worth reading for its insights into the future, as well as into the past. Print (PDF). Milosz, a world-famous poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1980, revolves most of his core analysis around the motivations of artists, usually artists of the world, presumably because that was his own m In 1931, he visited Paris, where he first met his distant cousin, Oscar Milosz, a French-language poet of Lithuanian descent who had become a Swedenborgian. Oscar became a mentor and inspiration.[26] Returning to Wilno, Milosz’s early awareness of class difference and sympathy for those less fortunate than himself inspired his defense of Jewish students at the university who were being harassed by an anti-Semitic mob. The lectures were published as The Witness of Poetry (1983). Milosz continued to publish work in Polish through his longtime publisher in Paris, including the poetry collections Hymn of the Pearl (1981), Bells in Winter (1984) and Unattainable Earth (1986), and the essay collection Beginning with My Streets (1986). Milosz also witnessed the Second World War during which time he was in Warsaw. He attended lectures of Polish philosopher and historian Władysław Tatarkiewicz. After the war ended he worked in Pairs as a cultural representative of Poland. He had to obtain political asylum in France in 1951 as he broke off with the government. Milosz was awarded with the ‘Prix Littéraire Européen’ which is the European Literary Prize. He became a US citizen in 1970. Best Poem of Czeslaw Milosz. Ars Poetica? I have always aspired to a more spacious form that would be free from the claims of poetry or prose and would let us understand each other without exposing the author or reader to sublime agonies.