

TWO POEMS

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In January 2017 the Scottish Church Theology Society, which TF helped to found, will have as its theme "Theology and Poetry." The relationship between the arts and the church in Scotland has not always been an easy one, even though the Church of Scotland set up the Gateway Theatre after the Second World War, and has continued to own the Scottish Story Telling Centre (now an integral part of John Knox House in Edinburgh's High St.).

I began writing serious poetry when I reached the age of 70, and my aim is not so much to write "Christian poetry" — though there is a place for that — as poetry written by a Christian, and poetry which reflects good rather than bad theology.

Apart from writing what naturally I hope is good poetry, I would be happy if Christians became less suspicious of the arts, and people in the arts less suspicious of Christianity, though perhaps this is more of an issue in Europe than America.

JB encouraged people to understand their humanity as a gift from God, wonderfully redeemed in Christ. If our Lord Jesus came to give people back their humanity, let us embrace the arts, as Calvin taught and Knox practised in earlier times.¹

1 Cf Institutes, 1.11.12.



Touching Point

They decided it for me;
I became a 'touching point',
with my own arrow sign,
my location minuted
in Alhambra documents.
The few who noticed me
presented fingers, thumbs:
clean, stained, smelly,
delicate, hoary, cracked,
bored, pushy, hesitant . . .
I was really moved by
all this touchy-feely stuff.

What a pity I am stone.
If I were human flesh, I would
not keep my feelings to myself;
and if I were divine, I should
discover what it's like when people
put the finger on me, and conclude
their accusations with my death . . .
I would become a touching point for good.

Granada, Spain, June 2014

Because of fear of deterioration through people touching the ancient stones, in Spain the Granada Authorities have designated certain places in the Alhambra as "touching points."

At New College, JB lectured on how different theologians approached Christology. Both he (and of course TF) emphasised that in the incarnation, the divine and the human really intersected, met ("touched" in the poem) so that God was not pretending to be human; and for God the incarnation was a real voyage of discovery, as in the person of Christ he was "fingered" and eventually crucified.

JB would explain how a Jesus who really made atonement in his own person had been watered down by liberal theology to a Jesus who makes us "feel good" by the story of his life and death as merely an example of love. But while that "touchy-feely stuff" is moving, something deeper is required if human hearts of stone are to be really touched and transformed.

The Director's Cut

She knew its hidden presence,
 reached for it in her mind,
 put her hands and heart there,
 got down to it, to find
 our image, as yet uncut
 from that great lump of stone.
 How could she learn to hammer
 with a skill home grown
 and, come to that, a chisel?
 It came to this: the sculptress
 had to occupy that rocky
 place herself, and learn to dress
 the stone as she herself
 now dressed — in mineral wear,
 plain as only God could be,
 love in hardened clay laid bare.

Beech Hill, Haddington, Scotland, June 2014

The ambiguity of the title reflects the double aspect of incarnation, *enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*, as well as the link between incarnation and atonement. The feminine is used, not because God is feminine (or masculine) — as JB would often point out in the context of the “reimagining God” controversy — but because the subject of the poem is “wisdom,” which in the Old Testament is a feminine word. English (of course) has only “he” or “she” for personal pronouns; and whereas today in many circles it is appropriate simply to use the word “God” instead of a pronoun, here we are referring to a “personalised idea” from the book of Proverbs who is only later identified with the *logos* who became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God.