BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE INVERTED JESTER

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A serious book which meets the needs of today.
Category: Avril Poisson

Over the years, I have read a number of books which used the picture of the medieval jester as an illustration of the Christian or even of Jesus himself. The jester, it is said, was someone who sacrificed their dignity, but in return was the only one who could say uncomfortable things to the all-powerful lord.

In her book, The Inverted Jester: Speaking Power to Truth, the celebrated French missiologist Avril Poisson of the University of Paris I/IV takes issue with this illustration and develops a more appropriate approach for the needs of today.

The book is a medium sized paperback and written at a level that will appeal to the average reader; though academics might struggle with the simplicity of the phrasing. As of today, I am unable to say how much the book costs, nor can I find an online source where it can be bought. You may need to approach Dr. Poisson directly.

The book breaks down into three broad sections.

- The dignity of the messenger
- The dignity of the message
- Jester or King?

The first section argues that the missionary should be a person who is respected for their dignity and authenticity. The notion of accepting a humble position in order to gain a hearing is rejected entirely. Missionaries should be listened to because of their own intrinsic value and there is no need for them to adapt their identity in any way, shape or form.

> *The notion that a missionary should adapt to local customs, dress or music is one that must be rejected out of hand. Missionaries represent the best of the world and they should not adapt or change in order to "be all things to all men".*
>
> *p. 14*

> *The tendency for missionaries to be photographed wearing casual clothes or - worse still - national dress, is to be rejected at all costs. A sober suit and tie or neat dress should be worn at all times.*

> *p. 666*

Section two looks at the issue of contextualisation and argues persuasively that the Christian message must never be contextualised. The missionary must be careful to communicate the authentic Christian message as expressed by the Reformers, rather than a form of Christianity that emerged out of a particular geographical and historic context.

> *Calvin, Wesley and Spurgeon have spoken in a way which addresses the needs and aspirations of all people in all times. There is no need to develop so called African or Asian theologies when everything that needs saying has already been said.*
>
> *p. 42*

> *It is impossible to imagine that any modern song writer, much less someone who is not composing in the English language, could surpass the works of Isaac Watts, therefore we should discourage any one from investing their time in a futile endeavour. There is no place or need for so-called ethno-doxologies.*
>
> *p. 23*

The final section takes the two earlier themes and uses them to develop a new model of mission and missionary involvement. In an age of indigneity, contextualisation, and hyphenated-theologies, there is a need for missionaries to re-assert their role as arbiters of orthodoxy and appropriateness in the church.

Who should read this book? Well, I would argue that we are in a day when it is sorely needed and that anyone who does not read it would be foolish.