MACEDONIA AND THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

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A short review of a book which is absolutely essential for today.
Category: Avril Poisson

It is not often that you come across a book which shakes your view of theology and the future of Christianity from the ground up. However, today, I can sincerely claim to have come across such a work. I am indebted to Fautpascroire publishers for sending me a review copy of *A brief commentary on Acts 16:6-10* by the celebrated theologian Professeur Avril Poisson. This is, I believe, destined to become one of the central texts in the study of Christianity across the globe.

To get the details out of the way first, the book is available as a large format paperback of 800 pages, with extensive footnotes, endnotes and a 100 page index. It is currently available on offer from major bookstores and will cost you just under Â£750 pounds; it is worth every penny and more. It is written at an easily accessible level and anyone with a PhD in theology and a fluent reading level in *Koine* Greek should have no trouble in reading it, as long as they keep a dictionary to hand.

As you will immediately recognise from the title, the central argument of the book revolves around Paul being prevented from preaching in Asia, and then receiving a vision of a man from Macedonia calling him to Europe. Prof. Poisson argues that this event is far more central to the nature of Europe than is recognised by much current scholarship.

Working from Greek, Latin, Syriac and Navajo manuscripts, Prof. Poisson examines the contemporary context, the surface meaning and Luke's deep theologising in this passage. Never before has such detailed scholarship been brought to bear on this crucial passage. Of course, it would be impossible to recreate Prof. Poisson's complex and nuanced arguments in one short review, however, I will try to capture the essential issues that she raises.

The first thing we should notice is that it is the Spirit who prevents Paul and his companions from preaching in the province of Asia and Bithynia in verses 6 and 7 of Acts 16. Posisson demonstrates very clearly (by referring to Anselm and the Blues Brothers) that the use of "Holy Spirit" (v6) and "Spirit of Jesus" (v7) is a literary device which emphasises the strength of the prohibition. By contrast, it is a vision of a *Man* of Macedonia which results in Paul's call to evangelise Europe. This counterpoint of a prohibition by the Spirit with a call by a man is a demonstration of the absolute importance of European men (or men of European descent) to the future of the Gospel.

At this point, Prof. Poisson takes us on an extended discursus through the work of Augustine, Origen and Tertullian to demonstrate that the Scriptural pattern is that Biblical exegesis and theology should be firmly based on the work of European men - Possion refers to this as the Macedonian principle. Poisson helpfully gives a short definition of the Macedonian principle on pages 421-436 of her book (with three pages of end-notes). However, I will attempt to condense her short summary as

follows.

The Macedonian Principle states that Biblical studies and the development of theology are properly the work of men of European descent. Believers from other parts of the world (and European women) are of course called to study the Bible and theology, however their role is to apply the principles developed by their forefathers in their own context. When European theology does not appear to address the cultural issues raised in other parts of the world, then it is incumbent on Christians in these contexts to change their culture in order to align with correct teaching.

Although I have only been able to give a very cursory overview of this magisterial tome, it should be clear to my readers that they would be foolish if they didn't take its message to heart. As Prof. Poisson indicates in her closing remarks, the findings of this book are of great relevance to the study of mission and World Christianity. However, as she rather sadly concludes, her work will be of less relevance in many Western Churches and seminaries who already act as though the Macedonian Principle were in fact established dogma, without any supporting reasons.

For my own part, I consider this to be a timely book and I would encourage everyone to buy it today (preferably this morning).