

The great Christian dogmas and concepts were articulated in Africa and the major battles of heresy against Gnosticism, Arianism, Montanism, Marcionism, and Manichaeism were also fought in Africa before they were argued in Europe (47). Fourth, the early African councils provided the model for ecumenical debate and resolution. This conciliar movement, which began in Jerusalem in 45 C.E. was formalized in the African debates in Carthage, Alexandria, Hippo, and Milevis. Fifth, Monasticism was born in the desert of African, years before it migrated to Europe. Monastic communal life was firmly built upon the exegesis and liturgical traditions in African before Benedict wrote his Monastic rules. African monks established communities in the Theban heart of the Nile and in Scetis and Mimidia (Nitria?). Sixth, Christian Neoplatonism, spear-headed by central players such as Philo, Ammonias, Saecas, and Plotinus were all Africans. Early Christian teachers such as Clement of Alexandria were among the earliest to “set forth the circumspect connections between logos philosophy and the Christian teachings of God. Seventh, the rhetorical and dialectical skills that have shaped Christian thinking were honed in Africa and later used in Europe. African rhetoricians frequently moved from Africa to Europe, bringing with them the “rich subtleties of African communication talents, literary passion and dialectical skills.” This evidence is yet to be demonstrated conclusively!

Questions such as, why was Lactantius found so useful to Diocletian? Why was Marius Victorinus considered the most skilled dialectician of his day? Why did the major European academic centers value the African rhetorical tradition so much?” (p 57) need to be explored further.

Oden’s book has the potential to span major scholarly research in a much neglected area of early Christianity and its connection to Africa. It is clear from his research that this is a neglected area that is crying out for bold, creative, and innovative scholarly enterprise. Because of the enormity of the task that he has undertaken, it should come as no surprise that this book comes nowhere near the successful completion of his mission. But he has succeeded in laying the scope and breadth of the mission, the contours of the scholarly landscape, the urgency of the task, and the importance and relevance of the subject matter,

Oden has condensed in a small but excellent starter book a great amount of information and, at times, he has provided convincing and compelling evidence for Christianity’s debt to its African roots. He has attempted to explain why Africa has been left out of the story, but there is much yet to be written on this matter. He has left me with a great hunger for exploring more deeply into this vitally important subject.

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TREVOR O’REGGIO

Perkins, PHEME. *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. 312 pp. Hardcover, \$28.00.

In her book, *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, PHEME PERKINS fills a gap among available literature. As Professor of New Testament at Boston College and a renowned writer and editor, she has contributed largely to the study of

the New Testament and Gnosticism. Her most recent book is written for the layperson or the pastor who are interested in a scientific study of the background of the canonical and extracanonical gospels. Populist media and publications, such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* are a welcome antagonist, which Perkins confronts with a judicious use of text, form, and source criticism.

Perkins first examines the genre of gospel in the Hellenistic setting of the first century. She then draws upon the historical backdrop to explain the development of writing, transmission, and canonicity in the NT period and beyond. The subsequent chapter takes a close look at the sources available to the canonical gospels, which includes a balanced discussion of Q and the question of priority. Mark, Matthew, and Luke are each treated in a separate chapter, before Perkins deals with the second- and third-century gospels.

The strength of this book is the balanced view of the author and the inclusion of the extracanonical gospels. Throughout the book, Perkins remains evenhanded. She critically weighs mainstream and eclectic viewpoints and illustrates the pros and cons of both. Where the available information is insufficient, she presents the evidence and allows the reader to take a position. Yet, she does not shy away from emphatically asserting her stance in opposition to erroneous assumptions, as presented in the media. Additionally, the final chapter dealing with extracanonical gospels is a unique and much-needed contribution to the area of biblical introductions. Especially the recent debates have fueled the need to find a scholarly approach. In lieu of the footnotes Perkins has added a list of suggested readings at the beginning of each chapter allowing the reader to continue to pursue a deeper understanding of the material.

It is questionable whether or not the book is able to reach its intended audience. While it is easy to read and therefore appeals to laypersons, the arguments are often overly long and technical (i.e. the question of genre). On the other hand, the lack of footnotes and interaction with wider scholarly circles may not be satisfactory for the academic community. It also does not replace, but rather supplements a commentary introduction on the four gospels, for issues like authorship, setting, community, structure, and time of writing are treated on the side, if at all. Except for the final chapter, a good commentary on the canonical gospels will highlight the same issues as this introduction, albeit not as in-depth nor as balanced. It is therefore a helpful supplement.

Overall, Perkins has masterfully crafted an introduction to the synoptic gospels that objectively analyzes the synoptic issues, while interspersing it from time to time with her refreshing subjective spiritual experience.

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EIKE MUELLER

Perry, T. Anthony. *The Honeymoon Is Over: Jonah's Argument with God*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006. xxxvii + 250 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

The book of Jonah has been called one of the "strange" books of the Bible, and its proverbial "strangeness" challenges simple solutions. T. Anthony