

central) and the creation of a new people to include Jews and Gentiles. Even the new community failed, but they were restored by their response to the passion. Hence the question of atonement: Jesus is not presented chiefly as martyr or the righteous sufferer, and there is little to link him with the Servant. He is not chiefly an example to be imitated; his death is not chiefly an eschatological event; and his kingship does not govern the account. The main interpretation must depend on 10:45 (with *lytron* meaning liberation from spiritual failure—firm proof is lacking that the Akedah was influential), on 14:24 (the blood of the covenant shed for many), and the surprising cry of dereliction, 15:34—when Jesus bears God's judgement for fearing death as breaking relationship with God. Hence restoration after failure in discipleship and creation of the new community are central themes of Mark's passion.

Dr Best has enviable ability to disclose the essentials of an argument, to assess its measure of plausibility, and to expose its inadequacy. Present Markan scholarship needs this severe combing out. But to my mind, he is less persuasive when he proposes his own solution. I think he misreads the three important sayings, and misunderstands Gethsemane. His discussion does not help me to locate 'freedom from sin' (*lvi*) in the spectrum 'freedom from the consequences of having sinned—freedom from the practice of sinning'. But I have no hesitation in saying that his latest thoughts on Mark are necessary reading for all exegetes, and cannot lightly be dismissed.

KENNETH GRAYSTON

ATHANASIUS AND THE HUMAN BODY by Alvyn Pettersen. *The Bristol Press*, 1990. Pp. viii + 117.

Most recent discussions of the anthropology of St Athanasius have had more than half an eye on what is really another issue, viz. whether the great patriarch of Alexandria and champion of Nicene orthodoxy can be accused of Apollinarianism. It is alleged that his understanding of Christ's humanity allows no real room for a human soul. One of the great merits of Dr Pettersen's book is that it puts such questions to one side and concentrates on Athanasius' understanding of the human body for its own sake. In the light of this study, it may well appear that the question of Athanasius' Christology needs to be approached more circumspectly, but Dr Pettersen does not pursue this question here.

Dr Pettersen's discussion advances by close analysis of various Athanasian texts, but also by critical assessment of pieces of widely-held conventional wisdom about Athanasius, especially those found in textbooks accessible to students where such conventional wisdom rapidly gains wide currency as the truth. He has three large points to make about Athanasius' understanding of the human body. The first is the profound importance for Athanasius of the doctrine of *creatio ex*

nihilo, understood in a radical way so that distinctions within the created order (especially between soul and body) pale into insignificance when set against the fundamental divide between the uncreated being of God the Trinity and the created being of all else. His second point flows from this, and it is that, while Athanasius recognises a distinction between soul and body, this distinction does not upset the fundamental holism of his understanding of the human person. His third point is a little different from these two and amounts to a denial that Athanasius conceived Christ's humanity as some kind of Platonic Form, with its twin implications: first, that the Word of God became man, rather than a man, and secondly, that the atonement achieved by the Incarnate One is extended to all human beings in a more or less automatic way because of their participation in the humanity of Christ, understood as the Ideal Form of humanity. Dr. Pettersen's wholly convincing attack on conventional wisdom on this last point will entail a good deal of rewriting of the textbooks.

Reflection on the notion of the body in Late Antiquity is currently a widespread concern of which Peter Brown's *The Body and Society* (1988) constitutes only the (fairly massive) tip of the iceberg. Fuelling much of this concern is an awareness that the notion of the body is by no means an unproblematic physiological *datum*, independent of cultural context, but something that can focus the hopes and anxieties of a society in a way quite specific to it. Not very much of this concern is reflected in Dr Pettersen's book, though much that he discusses—e.g., the relationship of the bodies of Christians to the Body of Christ—is highly relevant to such reflections. A good deal of the time Dr Pettersen seems to be working with an idea of the body as defining individuality and expressing the soul, something that strikes me as being rather a modern construct. There are two other points where it seemed to me that further reflection might be profitable. The first has to do with the 'placing' of Athanasius' thought. Is Athanasius' 'holism' a notion that Athanasius holds conscious of the way in which it calls in question much contemporary philosophical wisdom, or an unsophisticated notion influenced largely by biblical language, or an only dimly perceived consequence of a polemically wielded doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*? Similarly with his understanding of evil as non-being: it is easy to show, as Dr Pettersen does, that Athanasius does not draw from this the conclusions of a Plotinus, but is that because his grasp of the notion is distinctly different, or just unsophisticated? It also struck me that Dr Pettersen's discussion of Athanasius' treatment of asceticism left many problems unexplored, notably the contrast between its handling in the *Vita S. Antonii* and the Festal Letters.

This is, nonetheless, a valuable contribution to Athanasian studies, which clarifies much in the teaching of the Alexandrian Patriarch and certainly leads one along the grain of his thought, which is more than can be said for much that is written about Athanasius. No-one should let the slender proportions of this volume deceive them as to its importance.

ANDREW LOUTH