

Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 18. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004. 213 pp. \$22.00, paper.

Exhausted by the spiritually dry results of source, form, and redaction criticism, a friend of mine once commented that academic writing on the Synoptic Gospels is a barren wasteland. But with the publication of books like Peter Bolt's *The Cross from a Distance*, the wilderness has begun to bloom. Anyone tempted to think that the Gospel of Mark is not as theologically rich as Romans must read this book.

Peter Bolt is a member of the prestigious Moore Theological College faculty in Sydney, Australia. These New Studies in Biblical Theology, edited by D. A. Carson, represent the best biblical theology to be found in the academic community. All pastors, students, and scholars have much to be grateful for in these excellent volumes, and I am particularly keen on Mark Seifrid's *Christ, Our Righteousness*, Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* and Greg Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission*.

*The Cross from a Distance* consists of an Introduction and five chapters, which originated as the 2003 Moore College Annual Lectures. The introduction sets out the reasons for the study, most prominent of which is the desire "to improve our dogmatic formulations. . . . penal substitutionary atonement is supported by Mark, and at the same time . . . this dogmatic formulation needs to be constantly enriched with the complexity of the biblical data" (14). The method Bolt pursues is one which looks at the cross in the context of Mark's Gospel and interprets what Mark says through what Mark says in light of the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman milieu. This is what Biblical Theology should be and do.

Chapter one, "The Cross and the Abolition of Religion," highlights the radical shift in the nature of salvation history brought about by the crucifixion. Chapter two, "The Necessity of the Cross," looks closely at the three passion predictions in Mark 8, 9, and 10, argues that when Jesus speaks of the cup (10:38) he is referring to the wrath of God, and shows that the ransom in 10:45 is a ransom from the consequences of sin, from the authority of the devil, from death, and from the wrath of God, closing with a revealing discussion of "how revolutionary Christian mercy was" (79) in the Greco-Roman world.

Chapter three, "The Cross as 'the End of the World,'" presents a stimulating proposal for how we read Mark 13. Bolt puts forward the case that "Mark 13, when read in the context of the story, is about Jesus' death and resurrection rather than about the second coming or the destruction of the temple in AD 70" (90–91). The essence of this argument is that "the flow of the story shows that the expectations of Mark 13 find their fulfilment in the details of the passion narrative" (98). If correct, this view provides a compelling explanation of Mark 13:30, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place," for "this generation" sees Jesus on the cross, raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven. The "abomination of desolation" (13:14) is taken to be the cross, which is also taken to be the moment of great tribulation (13:19) (99–103). Bolt suggests that the reference to "the coming of the Son of Man" in 13:26 is "fulfilled in the event of Christ's resurrection, ascension and exaltation" (96–97), with no reference to the second coming. He argues this position more fully in an article (*RTR* 54.1 [1995] 10–32). Mark 13 is a difficult passage that deserves this kind of creative exploration, and we can

be grateful for this interpretation that focuses on the flow of Mark's narrative. Let the evidence be sifted, and let the prevailing interpretation be measured against Bolt's proposal.

In chapter four, "The Cross: Where God Comes Close," Bolt provides a discussion of how Jesus could be forsaken by the Father that should be read by all who believe in the Trinity. There is nothing more profound about the Christian faith than the doctrine of the Trinity, and in this discussion we are plunged fully into the mystery. Here is thoroughly informed New Testament scholarship that is not afraid to be Christian, and every pastor and teacher can learn from the bold clarity of this presentation. Chapter five, "The Cross, Resurrection and the Hope of Humanity," concludes the study by situating Mark's presentation of the resurrection of Jesus against contemporary accounts of what happened at death.

I cannot speak highly enough of this book, which gives us a close reading of Mark's Gospel, richly informed by historical research, applying itself to the highest theological questions known to the faith. May this book give rise to what is described in its last sentences: "It is time for a new call to proclaim that the only hope for the world rests in the crucified Son of God. The whole world needs to hear the good news once again. In this cross at a distance, God has come close" (173).

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