

Where Confusion Abounds

By Steve Ray (Author of [Upon this Rock](#) by Ignatius Press)
My Response to Selections from Keith Mathison's Book [The Shape of sola Scriptura](#)

It is always a bit flattering to see your own book referred to in the book of another, even if the author proves to be critical, incomplete, or uninformed. It is always hoped that the one quoting treats the text fairly, within its proper context, and with a bit of objectivity and fairness. There appears to be a problem with recent quotations and comments concerning my book which necessitates this response.

The unfortunate comments are contained in a recent book written by Keith A. Mathison entitled *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* and is published by Canon Press in Moscow, Idaho. I will not pretend to have read the whole book, for my free time is very limited these days, nor will I attempt to interact with or refute all his conclusions on *sola Scriptura*, for the book is not worthy in my eyes for the investment of time or effort it would take for a thorough response. Plus, I already dealt with many of the issues and utter impossibility of *sola Scriptura* in my conversion story *Crossing the Tiber* also published by Ignatius Press.

I am, however, going to address Mr. Mathison's comments. His index of authors has my name listed with eight page references to my book *Upon this Rock*. So, I will divide this response up into sections by topic. I should also make it clear that I have not had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Mathison, or for that matter of ever hearing of him prior to being told by a friend that my book was mentioned in Mr. Mathison's book. So I write with no personal knowledge of the man or opinion of him personally.

Though I am going to keep this as impersonal and objective as possible, dealing with the factual issues at hand, it is seldom possible for an author to be completely devoid of personal involvement. I know this is the case in my situation. I will try to keep this review relatively short.

My book *Upon this Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church* is published by Ignatius Press and can be seen by clicking the link above. In the book I delve into the earliest years of the Church and the biblical and historical development of the Chair of Peter. In his book Mr. Mathison tries to debunk the Catholic view of authority—especially papal authority. Therefore he takes aim at my book. We shall see if he took the time to interact honestly with my book, if he understands and deals with it fairly, and is correct in his assertions.

Who and What is the Rock and Foundation?

First, on pages 186–187, referring to Peter as the rock, Mr. Mathison states that even if he concedes the point that Peter is the rock, it says nothing about the issues of succession, infallibility, supreme jurisdiction, etc. If Peter's designation as the rock were all we had in this passage, I would tend to agree in a limited way that the issue of succession jurisdiction and such would not be strongly established, at least clearly, but that is NOT

all we have. We have the rest of this passage (especially the delegation of keys and the power to bind and loose) and the rest of the New Testament. We also have the organic development of the papacy in the early Church similar to the opening of a flower from bud to full blown beauty.

I never made the case for succession, infallibility or jurisdiction based on the rock imagery alone. It seems significant that the following verse dealing with keys and authority are not addressed in Mr. Mathison's critique at this point. Since the metaphor of the keys is a profoundly important element in the commission of Peter, it is intriguing to me that Mr. Mathison never mentions the Old Testament background for this passage, a passage which establishes the context and Jewish understanding of keys, the kingdom, and the commission and authority of Peter.

This office of steward—"over the house"—in the monarchy of Judah was dynastic, successive and quite clearly defined. The king has a steward. The office of king was successive—always to be filled. The office of steward with the keys was also successive, a governmental office—always to be filled. A survey of the Old Testament and the Jewish kings makes this obvious. King Jesus appoints his steward with the keys to oversee his kingdom on earth until he returns. We don't have just the rock imagery alone in Matthew 16, we also have the image of the keys and much much more which Mr. Mathison ignores. The keys are rich and pregnant with meaning, especially to the Jews who understood monarchies and kingdoms. Simple enough, but Mr. Mathison fails to address this issue though my book goes into some detail on this matter, especially in Appendix B: An Old Testament Basis for the Primacy and Succession of St. Peter. Too often Evangelicals don't like or even understand the concept of kingdom and prefer to see the church as the "democracy of God".

It is quite clear from the Jewish foundations of this passage (esp. Isaiah 22) that it is referring to a dynastic office—an office of succession and successors—, but if we fail to understand the root of this Matthean passage in its native culture, we fail to appreciate the full implications of what Jesus is teaching. It is not the "rock" alone that gives the foundation for the Catholic teaching, it is the passage as a whole and the various images Jesus uses in conjunction with all the Scriptures (such as the "chair of Moses" the imagery of shepherd, etc.) as well as the organic development of the early Church under the guidance of the ever-present Holy Spirit.

Mr. Mathison also makes the comment to the effect that Rome could not exercise authoritative jurisdiction during the lifetime of a living apostles. But, the fact that Rome (St. Clement, the third pope from Peter) assumes a specific authority even during the lifetime of a living apostle (St. John) is apparent in history and it would behoove Mr. Mathison to read my section of the earliest Christian writings where I show that Clement of Rome writes to correct the church in Corinth with an authority comparable to the authority exercised by the papal office today, even though it is assumed that St. John is still alive. Yes, the apostles were vested with a unique authority, and the fact that Clement can exercise such an authority seems to show that he assumes to have apostolic authority (delegated through succession) and that it was unquestioned by the Corinthians

or anyone else at the time. In his letter, Clement explains the authority of succession—as early as 96 AD. I have a whole section in my book documenting and commenting on this early history

Now to the point where he specifically mentions by book. Mr. Mathison says I try to get around the fact that others are referred to as rocks or foundations, namely Jesus and the other apostles. I certainly do *not* attempt to get around anything of the kind, nor do I “keep my readers in the dark” about a clear biblical passage (as Mr. Mathison keeps his readers in the dark here, implying I fail to mention Christ or the other apostles being referred to as foundations). I specifically mention these facts and comment on them a number of occasions (see page 34–35, 36, 106, 206, 215) in *Upon this Rock*. This makes me think that Mr. Mathison has not read or dealt fairly with *Upon this Rock* but was using the hunt and peck method to gain fodder for his mill.

In fact, Mr. Mathison falls into the very confusion I pointed out in my critique of William Webster. He mixes the metaphors and tries to obscure the Matthean passage by doing so. In 1 Corinthians 3 where Christ is referred to as the foundation, it is Paul who is the builder (and others) who are building on the foundation with works that will either endure the fire of testing or fail to endure it. In Ephesians 2:20, where the apostles and prophets are referred to as the foundation, we find Christ is not the foundation, but the cornerstone. These are different examples and illustrations used to teach differing aspects of the work of Christ and it is “wrongly dividing the word of truth” to obfuscate and confuse the reader by intermingling and mixing the metaphors. Such poor exegesis is done by saying “If Jesus is the only foundation in 1 Cor. 3, then Peter cannot be a foundation rock in Matthew 16”. Such reasoning shows a very poor understanding of the varied metaphors and richness of Scripture.

One should be careful not to mix the metaphors—something I learned in Grammar School as a kid. In Matthew 16, Jesus is telling a different story, using different images and metaphors which are obviously not in conflict with the words of Paul in his epistles. In Matthew, Jesus is the builder—not the foundation—Peter is the rock foundation, not the builder. I certainly don’t try to get around the other images; rather, I refer to them in their own contexts and don’t try to confuse the reader or skew the singular authority and office Jesus is bestowing on Peter in Matthew by throwing up red herrings and mixing the metaphors.

St. Cyprian of Carthage understood that all the apostles had been given a like authority as Peter but Peter and his office were unique. His words are instructive at this point for he understands what Mr. Mathison has apparently failed to grasp, and he understood it a hundred years before the final collection of the New Testament canon:

“The Lord says to Peter: ‘I say to you,’ He says, ‘that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven.’ And again He says to him after His resurrection:

‘Feed my sheep.’ On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the Apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?”

Taking one sentence out of its larger footnote, which gives the context of the relationship between Jesus and Peter as foundations, does the reader a great disservice. In fact, in that *very* paragraph from which Mr. Mathison excises one sentence, I notify the reader that the New Testament refers to the apostles and prophets as a foundation; yet, Mr. Mathison misrepresents the facts and tells his readers I do NOT inform my readers of this fact. He writes, “He fails to point out at this crucial point in his argument, however, that it also presents us with *all* of the prophets and Apostles as the foundation.” Really Mr. Mathison? I fail to mention that? Here is my full footnote from which Mr. Mathison extracts only one sentence (notice the bolded text, and this is only one of many places in my book I inform my readers of this point):

“In this metaphorical description, Jesus himself could not be the *foundation*, because in this illustration he presents himself as the *builder*. The following is very important. In Scripture Jesus is variously depicted as the foundation (1 Cor 3:11), the builder (Mt 16:18), the cornerstone (Acts 4:11), and the temple itself (Rev 21:22). **We also see the apostles and/or believers as the foundation (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14)**, the builders (1 Cor 3:10), the stones, *livqo*" not *pētra* (1 Pet 2:4), the building (1 Cor 3:9), and the temple (Eph 2:21). Many illustrative metaphors are used to explain various aspects of the Church. One cannot interchange descriptive figures of speech between illustrations willy-nilly—mixing metaphors. It does great violence to each textual illustration and is a good example of roughshod “proof-texting” and wrongly “dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). The Bible does not set up a dichotomy—*either Jesus or Peter*; rather it presents us with *both Jesus and Peter* as foundation stones. Jesus is establishing the man who would be the focal point of unity within the Church, the foundation. He who builds on sand has a structure that crumbles (Mt 7:24–27). Jesus built His Church upon the rock of his choice and, by his protection, the Church has stood the test of time and the powers of hell have failed to destroy or corrupt her” (*Upon this Rock*, 36).

Now, was this dishonesty on the part of Mr. Mathison, poor scholarship, or maybe just an inadvertent mistake? I don’t know. But I discuss the various foundations in more than one place—so why does Mr. Mathison deny that I informed my readers of this obvious biblical truth? If he “exegetes” my book so sloppily, why should anyone trust his biblical exegesis?

Was Simon's Name Changed to Peter?

I make the point in my book, based on good scholarship and exegesis, that Simon was given a new name in Matthew 16. He was given the name "Rock". He had just "defined" Jesus by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God", and in response Jesus defines Peter by saying, "You are Rock (Peter) and on this rock I will build my Church." Peter made a theological declaration about Jesus and Jesus responds with a theological declaration about Peter. Mr. Mathison disagrees and basing his argument in part at least on R. T. France he says that there is no indication in Matthew 16 that Jesus is changing Peter's name.

Actually, whether Jesus changes Simon's name at this precise moment, or had done it a bit earlier is somewhat irrelevant in light of the fact that his name *had* been changed and it is precisely here at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus explains *why* he had received the name change and the significance of the change. So, on this matter Mr. Mathison is majoring on the minors. However, that the name change was conferred at Caesarea Philippi seems clear to most scholars and commentators—but it is often denied by those with an axe to grind or a tradition to defend.

But, what are the reasons Mr. Mathison gives for refusing to concede the name change at Caesarea Philippi? There seem to be two. First, following R. T. France, he gives the uniformed explanation that since Matthew continually refers to Simon as Simon Peter throughout the Gospel and prior to Matthew 16, it must mean that the name Peter (Rock) was given very early in the career of Peter and not at Caesarea Philippi. Secondly, John mentions "Cephas" (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic "Kepha"—rock) as early as John 1:42. Well, I guess that proves it! If someone is called Peter at the beginning of the story, how could we possibly be so naïve as to believe that the name was given to him later?

The question arises—when were the gospels written and by what name was Peter known at the time of the writing? Think about it for a minute. It seems certain that the gospels were all written well into the last half of the 1st century, at least twenty to thirty years after the life of Christ and the commission of the apostles. For those reading the gospels for the first time, how do you think they knew Simon Peter? By what name? Peter? That Peter is the name used throughout the Gospel of Matthew does not prove in any way that he was called Peter prior to Matthew 16, it only means that the writer of the Gospel referred to Peter as "Peter" throughout because that is the name by which the readers knew Peter—now that he had been renamed. The only time Simon is referred to as Peter in the Gospel of Matthew is when he is named such by the narrator.

If I write a biography about my daughter for all her long-term friends and family, and I refer to her throughout as "Princess", a first-time reader might assume that her name had *always* been "Princess". But, what if I had not nicknamed her "Princess" until she was twenty years old? Does the fact that I as the narrator refer to her as Princess in the beginning of the story—for those who have always known her as Princess—mean that her name was Princess from the beginning? How would you explain this even if the story

explicitly states that I renamed her “Princess” on her 20th birthday and it had been Cindy prior to that? Does my referring to her as “Princess” even when describing her youth prove that I didn’t rename her at 20 years old? Of course not. I am surprised that anyone of the stature of R. T. France would even argue such a thing. (For more on this matter, see Davies and Allison’s *International Critical Commentary: Matthew* vol. 2.)

And lastly, on this first point, Mr. Mathison says that Jesus refers to Simon as “Cephas” at the time of his call to discipleship in John 1:42. He incorrectly states that John 1:42 “indicate[s] that it was given at an earlier stage”. So, does this prove that Simon had the name Cephas (Rock) from the beginning therefore making it impossible for Jesus to give him this new name at Caesarea Philippi? Of course not. Read the verse carefully. Jesus does not say Simon’s name *is* Cephas, but rather that he *will be known* as Cephas. The KJV renders this “*thou shalt be called Cephas*” The verb is *second person, singular, future, passive, indicative*. Notice it is a future tense verb. John 1:42 is a statement, a prophecy in a sense, that sometime in the future Simon will receive a new name—Cephas, Peter, Rock. When did this renaming happen? As almost every scholar, commentator and historian will tell you—and I could produce dozens of Evangelical Protestant commentators to substantiate my claim—it most likely happened at Caesarea Philippi. Even *if* his new name had been given earlier, it was *here* imbued with spiritual and theological significance—it was *here* the significant sign of a new designation, a new calling, a new office. In either case, Simon is now Rock and the Church will be built on him and the office established through the designation of the keys. Sorry Mr. Mathison.

Again, if this is an example of Mr. Mathison’s exegetical methodology, why should anyone trust anything he writes? And a warning, if Mr. Mathison depends upon William Webster’s book on Matthew 16 (pg. 184) and considers it “thoroughly documented” I would advise him to read the correspondence on my website where Webster’s “scholarship” in that book is not only questioned, it is found to be embarrassing. If this is the kind of material upon which Mr. Mathison depends for his research, it is a sad day. Webster’s book is so riddled with typos, misquotes, errors, and selective quotations that I suggested in all charity that he remove it from the market until he has corrected it. These glaring errors are pointed out in our website debates.

Where was Jesus when He Renamed Peter?

That Jesus stood at the massive rock which was the major center of pagan worship in the whole Roman Empire and Middle East, cannot be proven, but neither can the fact that Matthew wrote Matthew. So, from this standpoint Mr. Mathison is correct: I cannot *prove* Jesus was standing in the shadow of the most notable and imposing site in or near Caesarea Philippi during the first century. Granted. However . . . ,

. . . to deny that this singular site is not only the most probable but the most reasonable and expected location for the delivery of these most profound words of Jesus, is either due to irrational skepticism or the fear of damaging his own Fundamentalist tradition. By refusing to accept what any reasonable man would find not only likely but, considering the teaching style of Jesus, expected and unquestioned, it seems again to be an exegetical weakness on the part of Mr. Mathison.

On page 188 of his book, Mr. Mathison says that I “place a lot of emphasis upon where Jesus was supposedly standing when he uttered this remark to Peter”. He then attempts to downplay the likelihood of the rock as the backdrop for Jesus’ words. *Why do I place great emphasis on where Jesus was standing?* Because I have spent a lot of time studying Jesus—and his teaching style in the Gospels—and a lot of time in the Holy Land.

What is Jesus’ teaching style? He loved backdrops! Jesus was concerned with teaching the average men and women. He did not depend primarily on deeply theoretical rhetoric, but taught using stories and the everyday life of his listeners. He talked about the birds and flowers of the field. As he walked through the rocky basalt countryside of Galilee he spoke about sowing and reaping, rocks and sand, seeds and harvest. It was at the tomb of Lazarus where he told the crowd he was the resurrection and life, it was while standing at a mountain that Jesus, presumably looking out over the land of Israel as far as the eye could see, told his disciples to go into all the world, giving them the Great Commission. It was at a barren fig tree that he talked about spiritual fruitfulness. He loved dramatic backdrops for his teachings.

Does it seem likely that Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi by chance? Did Jesus do anything by chance? Did he *not* know he was going to make this majestic pronouncement to Peter? Was Jesus unaware of the imposing, singularly impressive site of pagan worship and a pagan Temple on a pagan rock? Did Jesus not pick the most striking and appropriate backdrop for this appointment and renaming of Peter? Mr. Mathison would have you doubt this. I am not sure why he asserts such a strong opposition—unless of course it threatens his own Fundamentalist tradition.

Caesarea Philippi, now named Baniyas due to an Arabic corruption of the original name Paneas, was way out of the way—far north into Gentile territory, though once it was in the land of Dan. It was not the normal area Jesus and the disciples frequented. Why did Jesus choose to go all the way up there to rename Simon “Rock” and appoint him as the steward with the keys (one has to understand the Old Testament to understand the message of the keys)? The reason, as I have made very clear in my book and in my upcoming documentary video *Peter, Keeper of the Keys*, is because no site in all Israel—in all the Middle East, in all of the Roman Empire—provides a better backdrop for the pronouncement Jesus was making, than the pagan site of Caesarea Philippi.

Here is a rock, a temple (or church), and a false Lord (or Messiah). Here is a “gate” or cave into the nether world, hades. See Josephus for more on this. Here is a temple to the divine Caesar Augustus which was built at this rock before the time of Christ to provide a pagan temple of worship to a false Lord. So Jesus appoints a true rock, for the true church, for the true Lord. Did Jesus come here by chance Mr. Mathison? Hardly. (For pictures of this magnificent site, see my website at www.catholic-convert.com or click [here](#).)

Then we have the ancient name of the city, Paneas, which is named after the pagan god Pan who was worshiped at this site for centuries before Christ. Pan was the god of sheep

and shepherds. The pagan god of flocks and it is here the True Shepherd is appointing Peter to lead his church, his flock. Oh, this site is so rich! We have only scratched the surface! I have just finished filming a documentary video on location at Banias and the evidence is overwhelming. (For information on video [Peter: Keeper of the Keys](#), click on the link.) To deny the correlation is not only foolish, but exegetically irresponsible. (I think Mr. Mathison used that as a description of me, but I think the objective reader will know the truth.) I will not belabor the parallels between Banias and the words of Jesus, nor will I insult anyone's intelligence by questioning whether Jesus was aware of this site, chose it by accident, or was not wise enough to use it as a backdrop as he was wont to do.

Mr. Mathison says that the Gospel of Mark mentions that Jesus was “on a ‘road’ in the towns of Caesarea Philippi” and therefore he could not have been at the rock. But, anyone visiting this site today will notice that the main road through the center of the town of Caesarea Philippi, based on the current excavations by Pepperdine University, runs right past the massive rock and the pagan site of worship. Mark's gospel sets the stage perfectly!

But, let's bend over backwards to understand and give Mr. Mathison the benefit of the doubt. Even if Jesus was *not* standing exactly in front of the rock, what does it matter? Was he not using the backdrop of Paneas in either case? Imagine that you walked past the shore of Ellis Island and began talking about liberty, statues, and immigration. Would anyone doubt you were alluding to the specific location and the Statue of Liberty, especially if the speaker drove you three days out of your way to arrive at that location? Or what if you were taken on a three-day drive and the car stopped near Plymouth Rock and the teacher began teaching about religious liberty, independence and the need to step out in faith and forge a new life? Would Mr. Mathison say, “What proof does Steve Ray have that he was referring to Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims?”

This is all a matter of cultural and biblical literacy!

To deny the great likelihood that Jesus was standing at this rock is exegetically irresponsible. If this site emphasized or gave credence to the *sola Scriptura* theology, Mr. Mathison would most assuredly have jumped in with both feet and drawn the appropriate Fundamentalist conclusions. He does not object to my conclusions about the location of Jesus' pronouncement about Peter's primacy because it is reasonable and feasible—he objects to it because it flies in the face of his Fundamentalist Protestant tradition. It seems quiet obvious to me that his objection is based on his theological bias and not much else.

The skepticism of Mr. Mathison might be the result of having never visited the actual site and experienced the stunningly impressive impact of the massive rock and all the additional aspects of this spectacular site. I have not asked Mr. Mathison if he has visited the site so I don't know if he has or not, but I have been there six times conducting my research and I am always overwhelmed by the wisdom of Jesus in picking this as the backdrop for such a momentous pronouncement—one that laid the foundation for the

coming Church. If Mr. Mathison has not visited Caesarea Philippi, I would encourage him to do so. I would be more than happy to accompany him.

On page 188, Mr. Mathison mentions the Fathers of the Church and their use of the term “rock” to refer to Peter, his faith, his confession, or Christ. This verse has a rich exegetical history in the writings of the Fathers. For more on this I would refer you to my book *Upon this Rock* and my detailed correspondence with protagonist William Webster available on my website at <http://www.catholicconvert.com/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=77> .

Who Does Jesus Pray For?

Jesus prays for Peter and commissions him to pray for and strengthen the other disciples. This has been understood from ancient times as a commission by Jesus for Peter to lead and support his fellow disciples. Mr. Mathison goes into some interesting gymnastics to explain away what Jesus says to Peter. He uses the parallel passage in Mark 14:29 to come up with an interesting speculation as to why this verse does not give Peter a special responsibility to care for and govern his brothers—the other apostles. On page 193, Mr. Mathison says that this passage demonstrates nothing about the special prerogatives of Peter, and especially not for his successors. This is the problem with textual criticism when it strips the Bible of its deeper meanings and divorces it from its native environment—the Church.

The writers of the gospels were not just giving us dry history. They were teaching and when John explains that Jesus teaches that one must eat his flesh and drink his blood, he is writing to first century Christians at a time when they were practicing and teaching the “Real Presence of Christ” in the Eucharist, he is not teaching them something new, or just telling them a good story. He is teaching them theology! At the turn of the first century the Christians were using the Eucharist and fervently defending the Real Presence of Christ (see Ignatius of Antioch). The Gospels are not just a surface level story, they are deeply theological. The Christians, by the time Luke’s gospel was written, already understood the office of Peter and his authority in the Church, even though Mr. Mathison has not yet discovered it 2,000 years later.

No one builds the primacy of Peter and Rome from this verse in Luke alone, anymore than we build our entire theology of the Trinity from John 1:1 (a theology which was developed over 400 years and never mentioned in the Bible explicitly). We look at the Bible as a whole and take into account the development of doctrine over the centuries. As the canon of the New Testament was developed and flowered over the centuries, so did the Church’s teaching on the primacy of Peter.

Did the early Church understand Peter’s primacy to govern even the other apostles? Did the first Christians understand the teaching of succession? (My book *Upon this Rock* goes into great detail on the teaching of succession which can be traced back to the apostles and their disciples. Why trust Mr. Mathison when I can read the first Christians who learned from and passed on the teaching of the very apostles whom Mr. Mathison claims to love and respect.)

One Father and Doctor of the Church, the man who eventually brought St. Augustine to Christ was St. Ambrose ((340–397). He understood this passage as a commission Peter. He wrote, “After having been tempted by the devil [Lu 22:31–32], [Peter] is set over the Church. The Lord, therefore, foreshowed what that was, that He afterwards chose him as the pastor of the Lord’s flock. For to him He said, But thou when converted confirm they brethren.”

The authority of Peter to govern his fellow apostles was also clear to St. John Chrysostom who wrote,

“ ‘He saith unto him, Feed My sheep.’ And why, having passed by the others, doth He speak with Peter on these matters? He was the chosen one of the Apostles, the mouth of the disciples, the leader of the band; on this account also Paul went up upon a time to enquire of him rather than the others. And at the same time to show him that he must now be of good cheer, since the denial was done away, **Jesus putteth into his hands the chief authority among the brethren;** and He bringeth not forward the denial, nor reproacheth him with what had taken place, but saith, “**If thou lovest Me, preside over thy brethren,** and the warm love which thou didst ever manifest, and in which thou didst rejoice, show thou now; and the life which thou saidst thou wouldest lay down for Me, now give for My sheep” (Homily 88 on John, NPNF1,XIV:331).

Chrysostom could not have made it any clearer. According to Chrysostom, Peter had authority over the other apostles, or in Chrysostom’s words Peter had, ‘the chief authority among the brethren.’ Peter, not James nor any other apostle had this increase in authority. Mr. Mathison might counter this unambiguous passage by citing passages describing the other apostles with phrases such as, ‘chosen one of the Apostles,’ ‘mouth of the disciples,’ and ‘leader of the band’ in order to obfuscate the truth. Chrysostom anticipated Mr. Mathison’s reply when he writes a few lines later:

“And if any should say, ‘How then did James receive the chair at Jerusalem?’ I would make this reply, that He [Jesus] appointed Peter, not of the chair [in Jerusalem], but of the world” (Homily 88 on John, NPNF1,XIV:332).

In one fell swoop, Chrysostom destroys Mr. Mathison’s novel notion that James was equal in authority to Peter.

Are Peter and his Successors Shepherds of the Flock?

In times past, most Fundamentalists dug their trenches much further back. The likes of Fundamentalists like Harry Ironside, Jimmy Swaggart, and their camps refused to accept the fact that Peter ever visited Rome. The theory went something like this: Keep Peter out of Rome and the Catholic teaching of the primacy of Rome crumbles at the root—especially since the Bible says nothing about Peter being in Rome (or so they assumed and wished).

Once that silly argument became untenable due to overwhelming witness of archaeology and history (I have about fifty pages documenting Peter's presence in Rome), these Fundamentalists drew a new battle line. New trenches were dug. This time the defense was the Peter was not head of the early Church and certainly not the rock foundation. "Peter" meant "little stone" and not rock—Christ was the Rock foundation. This was of course a new argument, based on confessional bias, but it rose up nonetheless. Oscar Cullmann rang the death knell to that nonsense in his book *Peter* by Westminster Press. It was obvious that Peter was the rock and had a special place and authority. Kittel's classic *Theological Dictionary of New Testament* confirmed this and also agreed that the commission of Peter as shepherd in John 21 was a commission over the universal Church.

So, where do the Fundamentalists run to hide now? At the last line of defense—succession! Most have conceded on the other points but "succession" is do or die defense line. Here they stand. They cannot budge, even if the point is reasonable and biblical, for to budge means they might have to accept Catholic conclusions—the conclusions of historic Christianity and they cannot accept that. They are reinventing the faith and to accept succession is to watch their house collapse. So, fight on! And fight on they do.

However, if anyone wants to see what the early Church taught on succession all they have to do is pick up my book *Upon this Rock* and start with the very first century with Clement of Rome in 96 AD. He was a disciple of Peter and Paul and the third successor of the bishopric of Rome from Peter. Here's what he says and his witness could be multiplied (why trust Mr. Mathison when I can listen to personal friends of the apostles!):

"The Apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was God's Ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God and the Apostles with a message from Christ. Both of these orderly arrangements, therefore, originate from the will of God. And so, after receiving their instructions and being fully assured through the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as confirmed in faith by the word of God, they went forth. . . . From land to land, accordingly, and from city to city they preached, and from their earliest converts appointed men whom they had tested by the Spirit to act as bishops and deacons for the future believers. And this was no innovation, for, a long time before the Scripture had spoken about bishops and deacons; for somewhere it says: 'I will establish their overseers in observance of the law and their ministers in fidelity'. *Our Apostles, too, were given to understand by our Lord Jesus Christ that the office of the bishop would give rise to intrigues. For this reason, equipped as they were with perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the men mentioned before, and afterwards laid down a rule once for all to this effect: when these men die, other approved men shall succeed to their sacred ministry.* Consequently, we deem it an injustice to eject from the sacred ministry the persons who were appointed either by them, or later, with the consent of the whole Church, by other men in high repute."

I wish I had more time to deal with this but I don't think it a wise use of my time to reproduce what I have already laid out in detail in my book and on my website. When these non-Catholics deny the papacy and the succession of apostolic authority, it is curious to see what they espouse as the alternative. *They have no alternative*. They usually say, "We have the Bible" and yet the latest statistics published this year in Oxford's *World Christian Encyclopedia* informs us that there are now over 38,000 denominations in Christendom (all supposedly claiming to have the Bible as their final authority). The alternative to Peter and popes is spiritual anarchy, the same kind of anarchy any company, army, baseball team, or government would have if everyone espoused Mr. Mathison's belief that no one is in charge and the only authority is the Bible and there is no infallible or authoritative interpreter of the Bible (other than Mr. Mathison and every other individual of course).

Is James the Judge, or Peter?

Next, Mr. Mathison falls for the same poor exegesis of Acts 15 along with many of his Fundamentalist counterparts. It seems to be driven by their desire to "de-throne" Peter more than a desire to be good exegetes. Starting on page 196, he discusses the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and then on page 198 again refers to me and my book.

If anyone wants to read my thoughts on this matter they can do so by reading pages 52–55 of my book. The church called a council to deal with the toughest theological issue of the day—Mr. Mathison and I agree on this. But what we disagree on is the issue of church authority and the particular authority within that church in Jerusalem. Who was in charge: Peter or James or neither? But, what an amazing thing we find! *Men* get together and pronounce a decision from the Holy Spirit! Fallible men come up with an infallible decision from the Holy Spirit which is binding on the churches! Not only apostles are involved, but elders as well. This is the prototype of Ecumenical Church councils from that time forward. The authority of the council was not dependant upon the Book alone but on the words of Peter. James quotes two authoritative sources: the prophet Amos, and equally so the words of Peter! Peter clearly makes the doctrinal, dogmatic determination; James simply makes a pastoral application. I will say no more on this for I have explained myself in my book.

My question for Mr. Mathison is this. He states that "some problems were simply too large for a single church or a single man to handle" (pg. 198). I agree. But where do the scattered and disputing Protestants go today to call a council? Who speaks for God today? Is Mr. Mathison the authoritative voice? Is his parochial denomination or marginalized theological school the voice? What council does he accept as binding upon his soul today?

What a sad state of affairs! Protestant chaos is rampant and it's only getting worse. Blessed be God for a voice in the universal Church and the councils that still speaks today and stands for doctrinal orthodoxy and moral certitude. While Protestant communities and sects are scattering, splintering, dividing, and in chaos morally and theologically, thousands of disillusioned Protestants are finding their way back home to the Catholic Church.

I stoop to repeat myself as I conclude, repeating also the words of Chrysostom. Chrysostom could not have made it any clearer. According to Chrysostom, Peter had authority over the other apostles, or in Chrysostom's words Peter had, 'the chief authority among the brethren.' Peter, not James nor any other apostle had this increase in authority. Mr. Mathison might counter this unambiguous passage by citing passages describing the other apostles with phrases such as, 'chosen one of the Apostles,' 'mouth of the disciples,' and 'leader of the band' in order to obfuscate the truth. Chrysostom anticipated Mr. Mathison's reply when he writes a few lines later:

“And if any should say, ‘How then did James receive the chair at Jerusalem?’ I would make this reply, that He [Jesus] appointed Peter, not of the chair [in Jerusalem], but of the world” (Homily 88 on John, NPNF1,XIV:332).

What is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth?

Finally, on pages 204–205 Mr. Mathison discusses the pillar and ground of the truth which Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3:15 is the Church of the living God and which some Protestants wish were the Bible, not the Church. I often ask, “How would you advise St. Paul to reword this verse to better reflect your Protestant tradition and avoid Catholic conclusions?”

Mr. Mathison says that “the church is not without any authority” but I would like to know which church he is referring to and what kind of authority. Is it the kind of binding, infallible authority as assumed by the Church Council in Jerusalem, or is it more like a “suggestion” committee that imposes no real demands and assumes no real authority. Is it the Baptist church, the Methodist, the Lutheran, the Pentecostal, the Nazarene, the Presbyterian, the Coptic, the Armenian, the Assemblies of God, the National Council of Churches?

He then says that the church, without telling us which one, has the responsibility to “uphold the truth of Christianity”. Which one? It was the councils of the Catholic Church that defined the doctrines of the deity of Christ, the Trinity and the canon of Scripture, not to mention thousands of other things. We are told there is “the church” in Matthew 18. In order to “bring it to *the* Church”, it must be a visible, recognizable Church with recognizable leadership. Which “church” is Jesus referring to? If my brother offends me, which “*the* church” do I take it to? And if my brother goes to one local church and I to another, which “*the* church” do I take it to if he offends me? Which church has authority to judge, to bind and loose, to exclude and include, to forgive? And what authority does “my church” have to excommunicate him if he is unwilling to repent? What a farce the current denominationalism makes of Jesus' words.

If this passage in 1 Timothy 3 were to say that the Bible was the “pillar and ground of the truth” it would be touted up and down the street as proof positive that *sola Scriptura* was clearly taught in Scripture (something the poor *sola Scriptura*-atist doesn't have, since it is never taught in Scripture). It would become the proof text! But since it is not the Bible

but the Church that is given the title of “pillar and foundation of the truth” Mr. Mathison must extricate himself from the obvious.

The Church is the body of Christ on earth. He still works through her by his Holy Spirit. He still speaks through councils as he did in 49 AD in Jerusalem. He still speaks through his bishops. But never, never, never does the Church claim equal authority with or over Jesus or the Bible. She is the interpreter, the safeguard, the gatekeeper. But that is what Mr. Mathison seems to consider himself or his theological school or sect to be. I however, have chosen to cast my lots with those who have a 2,000-year track record and consistent evidence of historical continuity with the apostles.

The Church is not only “the place where the truth may be found” it is also the place that still speaks authoritatively and infallibly for God the way she has from the time of the apostles. I would ask Mr. Mathison, WHICH church is “the place where the truth may be found”? How does one find that sect today that has the final binding word? Is it your little group or someone else’s? Dr. Francis Schaeffer (whom I studied with in Switzerland in the 80s) taught Infant Baptism. So did Calvin and Luther. Do you teach Infant Baptism? If not, why not? Which of your churches is the “place where the truth may be found”? Can you lose your salvation? Is Christ present in the Eucharist, even as Martin Luther taught in his own way? Was Mary ever-virgin as Calvin and Luther both taught? Please Mr. Mathison which church do we go to—which of the 38,000+ denominations “is the place where the truth may be found”?

Mr. Mathison sadly misrepresents me and the teaching of the Church by saying we believe that Catholics “subordinate Scripture to the Church or else puts the Church on an equal level of authority with the Scripture.” This is not only inaccurate, but is demonstrates just how poorly Mr. Mathison misrepresents the Church and myself. This is bearing false witness and if done intentionally or with disregard to the facts, it is a sin. Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* carefully and it is very clear that the Church is *subject to* the Scriptures and the Tradition. Such misunderstanding and misrepresentation by anti-Catholics has done great harm to Christianity and to their own credibility. Here is the teaching of the Church on this matter to set the record straight:

CCC 85 “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

CCC 86 “Yet **this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant.** It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”

Conclusion

In closing, I would hope that people would read the source material in context and not take Mr. Mathison's word for things. *Second*, remember that he has a tradition himself, and a relatively new tradition which did not exist before the 16th century and only a hundred years or so in its current form, and he has a vested interest in defending it even though it is out of continuity with historical Christianity (see my book *Crossing the Tiber*). *Third*, I have nothing personal against Mr. Mathison and suspect that if we sat down for dinner we would get along famously and share what we have in common with charity and pray together for the unity of the Church. *Fourth*, this is a very short and cursory treatment of the quotes and allusions taken from my book. I am in the middle of a five-year video project entitled *The Footprints of God: the Story of Salvation from Abraham to Augustine* and don't have the time to give Mr. Mathison's book more attention. *Fifth*, I accept Mr. Mathison as a brother in Christ and though we disagree on many "in-house" issues, I would willingly stand shoulder to shoulder with him for the faith for any moral cause and would love to have lunch with him sometime (my treat). *And finally*, I pray that one day we may all be joined in one house, eating one meal at one table—true ecumenism.

May the Lord Jesus bless us all.

Steve Ray

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