

The Rock on Rocky Ground: Matthew, Mark and Peter as *Skandalon*¹

Mark Goodacre

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(1) Introduction: Peter's Confession in Matthew

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church (Matt. 16.18)

This commendation and commission has echoed across the centuries, from Simon becoming Peter to Joseph Ratzinger becoming Benedict XVI. It is the

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting 2005, Philadelphia, PA, USA (Matthew Section) and the Graduate New Testament Seminar at the University of Oxford, May 2005. I am delighted to have the opportunity to present it here to Dom. Henry Wansbrough as a token of my gratitude for the encouragement and intellectual stimulation he provided while I was a graduate student at the University of Oxford, and especially in relation to my doctoral dissertation, later published as *Goulder and the Gospels: An Examination of a New Paradigm* (JSNTS, 133; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), for which Dom. Henry was the internal examiner.

foundation story of the Church, and as even beginning students know, one of only two references to “church” in the Gospels.

The endorsement of Peter in Matthew 16 could scarcely be more positive. “Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my father who is in heaven.” The pericope is an ideal one for courses on the Synoptic Gospels, especially Synoptic comparison and redaction criticism. What better example could one find of Matthew inserting material into Mark in a triple tradition context, with wording characteristic of the evangelist, so clearly expressing his favourite Matthean themes, softening Mark’s harsh portrait of the disciples and affirming Peter in apocalyptic, heaven-and-earth language?

Yet sometimes, even our favourite examples require a fresh, more detailed look. Perhaps because they are our favourite examples, we can all too easily miss things that on a closer examination begin to stare back at us and change the way we think about the issue. The difficulty with the way that we look at this pericope, Peter’s Confession in Matthew (16.13-23),² is that we allow ourselves to

² I am wary of the attempt to delineate the pericope too precisely because this is part of the problem – neat pericope divisions sometimes discourage the reader from taking the context in the Gospel seriously. It is clear here that 16.24-28 flow naturally from 16.13-23, and the talk of the cross and denial have obvious

be dazzled by our methodology for reading the text. The [62] glare of Redaction criticism's perennial stress on what is different, what is distinctive about Matthew over against Mark is in fact stopping us from reading and weighing all of what Matthew writes. In short, what we fail to do is to heed Christopher Tuckett's warning in *Reading the New Testament*³ that a writer's views may be made known as much in what he copies from his source text as in what he adds. The very act of copying a piece of text might itself be a statement of one's utter agreement with the sentiments expressed by that piece of text, a sign that here is a place where the author has found what he is looking for.

The verses in question are Matthew 16.22-23, which follow immediately after the strong affirmation of Peter. The narrative takes a dramatic turn:

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of human beings. (Matt. 16.22-23).

resonances with Peter's story.

³ Christopher M. Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament: Methods of Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1987): 122; cf. Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 1992): 41-2, 52.

No longer the darling of the scene, Peter is now Jesus' starkest enemy. The disciple who was called to "Come after me" is now commanded to "Get behind me". In place of his blessing, he is now the Satan. Rather than the revelation of heavenly things, now he is thinking like human beings. Instead of the Rock, he is the Stumbling Block.

The scene at Caesarea Philippi ends, then, on a distinct downbeat. Hearers of the whole of Matthew 16 have Jesus' harsh rebuke ringing in their ears, not Jesus' glowing praise before their eyes. When we choose to appreciate Matthew as story, the redaction critic's obsession with what is distinctive is corrected by some sensitivity to the way that narrative works.⁴

It might be said, of course, that it is Peter as Rock that stays in mind, in spite of the subsequent condemnation of Peter. For the redaction critic, Matt. 16.21-23 is little more than a textual relic of the Marcan source Matthew was for

⁴ The difficulty is enhanced by readings of Matthew that place a division half-way through Matthew 16, e.g. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975): 7-25, which structures the Gospel around Matt. 4.17-16.20 (The Proclamation of Jesus Messiah) and 16.21-28.20 (The Suffering Death and Resurrection of Jesus Messiah). For critique, see F. Neiryck, "Apo Tote Erkzato and the Structure of Matthew" in F. Van Segbroeck (ed.), *Evangelica II 1982-1991*. Collected Essays by Frans Neiryck (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991): 141-82; originally in *ETL* 64 (1988): 21-59.

the most part dutifully reproducing. Under such circumstances, it is useful to ask the broader question: is the pattern of behaviour depicted in Matthew 16 reflected elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel? Is it usually the case that Matthew's Peter is first commended, then rebuked, initially successful, later to stumble and fall? In other words, is there a [63] way of testing whether the depiction of Peter in Matthew 16 is a fluke of Matthew's editing habits, or whether it is something that is part of a consistent narrative pattern?⁵ It is a study that involves us in interesting questions about the way Matthew reads Mark, and the way that contemporary New Testament scholars read Matthew and Mark.

The thesis I will attempt to set out might be summarised as follows. The idea that Mark's negative portrait of Peter is overwritten in Matthew is a scholarly illusion based on an over-emphasis on an over-simplistic application of redaction criticism. Proper narrative-critical scrutiny shows Matthew's

⁵ For the issue of Peter in Matthew, see especially R. Brown, K. P. Donfried and J. Reumann, *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Paulist, 1972): 83-101 and P. Hoffmann, "Die Bedeutung des Petrus für Kirche des Matthaüs" in J. Ratzinger (ed.), *Dienst an der Einheit* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1978): 9-26. For a helpful summary of discussions of the characterization of Peter in Matthew, see Donald Senior, C. P., *What Are They Saying About Matthew?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1996): 95-100. See further n. 6 and n. 20 below.

characterization of Peter to build on Mark's, repeating the pattern of immediate, enthusiastic response followed by falling away.⁶ Peter is temporarily successful in walking on the water but then falters (14.30-31); the commendation for his confession of Jesus as Christ turns to rebuke for rejecting Jesus' suffering (16.13-23); and he promises to stand by Jesus in his Passion only to forsake him (26.33-35; 69-75). Peter behaves like the seed that fell on rocky ground (πετρῶδες) in the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13.20-21 // Mark 4.16-17). When he hears the word, he immediately receives it with joy. But he does not endure. When trouble or persecution arise on account of the word, he stumbles and falls.

If this thesis sounds familiar, it is because it is made famous not for Matthew but for Mark by Mary Ann Tolbert in her seminal *Sowing the Gospel*.⁷ For Tolbert, the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4.1-20) provides the key to the

⁶ For a useful narrative-critical reading of the disciples as characters in Matthew, see Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text Connoted Reader Is Informed* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997). My own approach here is to nuance, clarify and correct redaction-criticism of Matthew with narrative-critical insights, rather than to replace it. See too Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

⁷ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989). The idea is present in a much less developed form in D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982): 128.

unfolding of the narrative of Mark's Gospel, with the different kinds of ground each representing a particular group in Mark's Gospel, the Rocky ground as Peter and the disciples, whose enthusiastic initial acceptance of Jesus' word dissolves into fear and failure as trouble and persecution arises. The first four disciples, when they are called, immediately leave their nets and follow Jesus (Mark 1.16-20); they obey Jesus' commission to go out on mission and are successful (Mark 6.6b-13). But [64] such successes are short lived and the disciples' hardness of heart is narrated and subsequently confirmed at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter belligerently fails to accept Jesus' destiny to suffer and die (Mark 8.27-33). The pattern of fear and failure is a famous feature of Mark's narrative, as the Twelve all fall away and flee, and Simon Peter denies Jesus and Judas betrays him (Mark 14).

This much is familiar territory. But what I would like to propose is that Matthew is on this point, as on many others, a successful reader of Mark.⁸ This

⁸ For the argument that Matthew understands and enhances Mark's portrait of John the Baptist as Elijah, see my paper, "Mark, Elijah, the Baptist and Matthew: The Success of the First Intertextual Reading of Mark", presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Toronto, 2002, Mark Group. [Additional note to web version: this article is now available as Mark Goodacre, "Mark, Elijah, the Baptist and Matthew: The Success of the First Intertextual Reading of Mark" in Tom Hatina (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels*, Volume

first interpreter of the first Gospel has read, marked, learnt and inwardly digested the text that provides the spine for his own new text, and his familiarity with it, his close scrutiny of it, has informed his own presentation far more than is commonly realized. Far from “whitewashing” the disciples, or even “painting them in a positive light”, Matthew in fact shows a remarkable alignment here with Mark’s portrait.⁹ My aim in this article is first to attempt to demonstrate that this is the case, second to explore why it is that we fail to see this, and third to offer an explanation of why Matthew aligns his portrait so closely with Mark’s.

(2) The Peter Pattern in Matthew

One of the best places to begin in reassessing Matthew’s portrait of Peter would be one of Matthew’s most striking additions to Mark, in the Walking on the Water pericope (Mark 6.45-52 // Matt. 14.22-33) in which Matthew adds the

2: *Matthew* (Library of New Testament Studies 310; London & New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 73-84]

⁹ Tolbert herself speaks of “The thorough rehabilitation of the disciples, effected by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke . . .”, *Sowing*, 127, though see further below.

extraordinary scene of Peter venturing out onto the water (Matt. 14.28-31). The pattern is, in miniature, precisely that of the Rocky Ground in the Parable of the Sower: it begins with enthusiastic response to Jesus' call, but his ability to cope against adversity, here powerfully symbolized by the [strong] wind, is only temporary; his feet falter and he begins to fall, here quite literally by sinking in the water. What Matthew has provided is a vignette succinctly illustrating the pattern of Peter's response to the word.¹⁰ Matthew appears to be following Mark not just in terms of the grand narrative plan of joyful acceptance followed by later falling away, but in [65] illustrating the same behavioural pattern in miniature. It is a strong clue that elsewhere, where Matthew follows Mark on Peter, he is doing so not because he has become lazy or fatigued but because he has a point of his own to make.

¹⁰ For discussion of the different ways in which Peter's role can be read here, see David Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2001): 158-60. When I gave this paper in Oxford, Catrin Williams pointed out that I too should make sure I read all the way to the end of pericopae and notice the way in which, in 14.32-3, those in the boat worship and hail Jesus as Son of God. This important point in fact mirrors the portrait of Peter and the disciples in the Gospel as a whole, for when Jesus is worshipped after his resurrection, Peter has been absorbed into the group of the disciples as a whole – see further below.

With a view to examining this possibility further, let us take a closer look at one of the key texts for Tolbert's Marcan thesis, Jesus' prophecy of Peter's failing at the Mount of Olives:

Matthew 26.31-35

³¹Τότε λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Πάντες ὑμεῖς σκανδαλισθήσεσθε ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ, γέγραπται γάρ, Πατάξω τὸν ποιμένα, καὶ διασκορπισθήσονται τὰ πρόβατα τῆς ποιμνῆς: ³²μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐγερθῆναί με προάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν. ³³ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Εἰ πάντες σκανδαλισθήσονται ἐν σοί, ἐγὼ οὐδέποτε σκανδαλισθήσομαι. ³⁴ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρεῖς ἀπαρνήσῃ με. ³⁵λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος, Κὰν δέη με σὺν σοὶ ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι. ὁμοίως καὶ πάντες οἱ μαθηταὶ εἶπαν.

Mark 14.27-31

²⁷Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι Πάντες σκανδαλισθήσεσθε, ὅτι γέγραπται, Πατάξω τὸν ποιμένα, καὶ τὰ πρόβατα διασκορπισθήσονται: ²⁸ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸ ἐγερθῆναί με προάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν. ²⁹ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἔφη αὐτῷ, Εἰ καὶ πάντες σκανδαλισθήσονται, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγώ. ³⁰καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι σὺ σήμερον ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ πρὶν ἢ δις ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρεῖς με ἀπαρνήσῃ. ³¹ὁ δὲ ἐκπερισσῶς ἐλάλει, Ἐὰν δέη με συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ πάντες ἔλεγον.

Matthew is, as through so much of the Passion Narrative, very close to Mark here, and most of the differences are simply stylistic variation. But as well as Matthew's reintroduction of the name Πέτρος in 26.35, it is worth noting how

Matthew picks out and enhances the σκανδαλίζομαι vocabulary in 26.33 as well as making Peter's resolution all the more emphatic with the addition of οὐδέποτε, εἰ πάντες σκανδαλισθήσονται ἐν σοί, ἐγὼ οὐδέποτε σκανδαλισθήσομαι, "If all fall away on account of you, I will *never* fall away".

This seizing on language of σκανδαλίζομαι and σκάνδαλον is a striking feature of Matthew's portrait of Peter and provides good evidence that he has understood and is applying Mark's Rocky Ground symbol in the Parable of the Sower. It is worth reminding ourselves of the language there: [66]

Matthew 13.20-21

ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ τὰ πετρῶδη σπαρεῖς οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τὸν λόγον ἀκούων καὶ εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνων αὐτόν 21 οὐκ ἔχει δὲ ῥίζαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρός ἐστιν γενομένης δὲ θλίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζεται

Mark 4.16-17

16 καὶ οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐπὶ τὰ πετρῶδη σπειρόμενοι οἱ ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνουσιν αὐτόν 17 καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ῥίζαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιροί εἰσιν εἴτα γενομένης θλίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζονται

Tolbert's interpretation of the Marcan verses as telling the story of Peter is persuasive, amongst other things, because the σκανδαλίζομαι language occurs in connection with θλίψις ἢ διωγμός, trouble or persecution, the very things that in fact cause Peter and the others to stumble from Gethsemane onwards.

With this thought in mind, it is worth returning again to our starting point, Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, in particular Matthew 16.23, for here, far from just copying out the Marcan wording, Matthew has made an addition that further aligns his own portrait of Peter with Mark's, σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ, "you are a stumbling block to me". The addition is important. Matthew reintroduces the σκανδαλίζομαι / σκάνδαλον language at just the moment where trouble and persecution enters the picture, with the first prophecy of Jesus' Passion.

But Matthew's point is made not only by the additions to the Marcan Caesarea Philippi scene, but also in the new resonance that is given to the shared words because of their new context. Those glowing words, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my father who is in heaven" (16.17) are now drowned out by Jesus' rebuke – Peter is no longer thinking the thoughts of God but of human beings, of flesh and blood; it is not revelation from a heavenly father but the personification of Satan. That blessing of Simon bar Jonah has not lasted five minutes. "Blessed is the one who is not scandalised by me" (καὶ μακάριός ἐστιν ὃς ἐὰν μὴ σκανδαλισθῆ ἐν ἐμοί), Jesus had said in Matthew 11.6, and here is Peter, scandalised by Jesus (σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ) and no longer able to be the recipient of blessing. It is such a thorough turn around that we

cannot help reflecting on the appropriateness of the name that Matthew uniquely provides: this is Simon *bar Jonah*, the son of the reluctant prophet who rejected his divine commission, who resisted the preaching to the Ninevites.¹¹

The revised Caesarea Philippi episode in Matthew in fact utilizes a clever literary technique. Just when the reader thinks that the key characters are on the side of the hero, with the prospect of a positive resolution in the offing, [67] the narrative throws up a fresh problem focusing on the very person who had only just appeared to be the key to that positive resolution. The problem is that Peter, the Rock, who appreciated Jesus' identity and was set up as the foundation stone, is now apparently the rock threatening to trip Jesus up. What we have at the end of this crucial chapter at the mid-point of the Gospel is a fork in the road. Will Peter continue to be Satan and *skandalon* to Jesus? Can Peter again come under that blessing as a foundation stone? Is it rock or rocky ground? At this (literal) crux in the narrative, the reader's expectations for Peter are not positive,

¹¹ I am grateful to John Hambidge for this point. The mention of Jonah is all the more striking in a chapter in which Matthew brings up the sign of Jonah for the second time in his Gospel (16.1-4, cf. 12.38-42). Perhaps too it is worth noting that for Matthew, one element in the Sign of Jonah is his spending of three days and three nights in the belly of the whale (12.40). Perhaps this implies that for Peter the resurrection will be the final turn-around.

marked as the narrative is with the inevitability of the seed that has fallen on the πετρῶδες, which will surely not bear fruit.

(3) Why is this not seen?

But if there are grounds for thinking that Matthew has understood and taken forward Mark's presentation of Peter as πετρῶδες, it needs to be said that this goes markedly against standard perceptions of Matthew's rewriting of Mark. Perhaps most strikingly, it goes against what Mary Ann Tolbert herself writes about Matthew in *Sowing the Gospel*. On the rare occasions where Tolbert comments on Matthew, her tendency is to see him as providing an alternative to Mark, not an elaboration of it. She speculates that Matthew understood Mark's πετρῶδες wordplay, but developed his own etiological legend "to counter it in a forthright and striking manner".¹² "Mark's hard-hearted disciple," she says, "has become in Matthew the sure foundation of the church."¹³

The problem with this as an explanation of Matthew's characterization of Peter is, as I have already hinted, that it is too indebted to redaction-criticism's

¹² Tolbert, *Sowing*: 146 n. 32.

¹³ Tolbert, *Sowing*: 146.

stress on what is distinctive about Matthew.¹⁴ It is so focused on just one segment of one scene in Matthew that it misses the pattern of the whole, and the Rocky Ground behaviour that characterizes the narrative. To put it another way, Tolbert focuses here only on the extent to which Matthew's Peter here "immediately receives the word with joy"; she does not [68] notice how far, "when trouble and persecution arise," he "immediately falls away". One might as well look only at the moment when Peter steps out of the boat to walk on the water while omitting to mention Peter's sinking. In spite of Tolbert's literary-historical focus, and her unique insight into Mark's narrative, it is the legacy of

¹⁴ Tolbert does, however, make the following useful remarks: "While Matthew and Luke do present more positive portrayals of the disciples than Mark, this issue may be one place in which reading the three synoptics together tends to distort Matthew and Luke For Matthew, the disciples are learners who do not fully understand who Jesus is until the resurrection, at which point they finally qualify as teachers Mark's view of the disciples is so negative that Matthew's and Luke's descriptions seem positive by comparison. However, if they are read on their own, neither Matthew nor Luke establishes the disciples as insightful followers or faithful models of Christian discipleship during Jesus' ministry." (*Sowing*: 155 n. 44). But it is also important to distinguish Matthew from Luke, especially as the latter drops not only Matthew's "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah" but also Mark's "Get thee behind me Satan." Luke's portrait of Peter follows Mark's much less closely than does Matthew's.

inflated use of redaction criticism that hides the possibility that Matthew had in fact anticipated her interpretation of Mark by some 1,900 years.¹⁵

Tolbert is by no means alone in missing Matthew's successful reading of Mark's characterization of Peter. Still more strident in his criticism of Matthew's rewriting of Mark is Robert Fowler, whose seminal *Let the Reader Understand* offers a brilliant but flawed analysis of the way in which Matthew supplanted, vanquished, superseded Mark's text. Although Fowler characterizes his approach as reader-response, he is in fact surprisingly indebted to the legacy of the kind of redaction-critical approach that he is attempting to correct. Of Jesus' commendation of Peter at Caesarea Philippi in Matt. 16.17-19, Fowler writes "In the radiant afterglow of such a scene, Jesus could next call Peter anything and it would not matter".¹⁶ But could he? Jesus does not here call Peter "foolish" or "hard hearted" or "ye of little faith". He calls him Satan, hardly something that the reader is expected to take lightly. And we have a better idea of what

¹⁵ It is likely that the tendency to look at Matthew's and Luke's redaction of Mark together (see previous note) also has the effect of masking Matthew's retention of some of the Marcan material. Tolbert mentions neither the fact that Matthew retains and enhances Mark 8.33 in Matt. 16.23, nor the fact that Luke omits Mark 8.32-33 after Luke 9.22.

¹⁶ Robert Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991): 243.

Matthew thinks about Satan than we do of what Mark does since he takes care to expand Mark's Temptation story (Mark 1.12-13 // Matthew 4.1-11)¹⁷ so that we have a lengthy conversation between Jesus and Satan, ending with similar words to the ones we now hear Jesus speak, ὑπάγε Σατανᾶ, "Depart, Satan!" (Matt. 4.11). Satan re-emerges at this crucial scene in Matthew to place temptation in Jesus' way, and it is Peter who is his spokesperson. This is not the act of an author who is attempting to vanquish or supplant the Marcan material on Peter as Satan with "revisionary maneuvers".¹⁸

It is worth remembering that there was a live option open to Matthew if he had wished to play down Mark's harsh portrait of Peter; he could have done what Luke after him did. Luke (9.18-22) apparently chose not to include the offending material, no doubt thinking the term Satan inappropriate for this key figure in the narrative of the early church. Ever attempting to salvage what he can from his source material, Luke nods in the direction of Mark and Matthew by

¹⁷ I am assuming that Matthew's sole source for Matthew 4.1-11 is Mark 1.12-13 rather than Q, the existence of which I am not persuaded about, see *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002). So called Mark-Q overlap passages like this in fact cause a major problem for the Q hypothesis.

¹⁸ Fowler, *Reader*: 243.

having Jesus address Peter about [69] how Satan will sift him and the disciples like wheat (Luke 22.31), but for Luke, like John after him, there is only one disciple deserving of description of complicity with Satan, and that is Judas, Jesus' betrayer (Luke 22.3, John 13.27).¹⁹ What Luke and John remind us is that Matthew was not obliged to copy out the Marcan castigation of Peter. There were plenty of other "revisionary maneuvers" available, not least omission of any offending material.

But perhaps it is unfair to focus specifically on commentators like Fowler and Tolbert whose main concern is the Gospel of Mark. What about commentators on Matthew? Do they draw attention to this pattern of behaviour, enthusiastic acceptance followed by falling away when trouble and persecution arise? It would be fair to say that the varying elements in Matthew's portrait are

¹⁹ It is one of the many curiosities of synoptic source-criticism that it is often said that Luke could not have known Matthew because of his non-inclusion of Matt. 16.17-19 (commendation of Peter), while nothing is made of his non-inclusion of Mark 8.33 // Matt. 16.22-23 (condemnation of Peter). But Luke's omission of all of that material in his version of the Caesarea Philippi incident is unsurprising in the light of his treatment of Peter in Luke 22.31-32, which prophesies his sifting by Satan (cf. Mark 8.33 // Matt. 16.23), and his future strengthening of the brethren (cf. Matt. 16.17-19). For Luke, given a different Peter pattern in Luke-Acts, the Peter pattern of Matthew's Caesarea Philippi, commendation followed by condemnation, is not an option and it is omitted.

often spotted. Donald Senior, for example, aptly summarises the scholarship on the topic by noting that:

“The figure in Matthew is a ‘mixed’ portrayal: a prominent spokesman for the disciples, blessed by Jesus, yet also fearful, weak in faith, an obstacle to Jesus, and capable of outright failure.”²⁰

Yet in spite of this realisation, it is unusual for the scholarship to notice the pattern of behaviour in this “mixed” portrayal, and to connect it – all importantly – with the Parable of the Sower.²¹ A rare exception here is Wallace W. Bubar in

²⁰ Senior, *What*: 95. Senior adds that “In some instances Matthew portrays Peter in a worse light than Mark does”, citing the addition of “scandal” in 16.23 and “with an oath” in 26.74 (*ibid.*). For a full and helpful exploration of the role Peter plays in the canonical Gospels, see T. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (WUNT 2/127. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), though Wiarda does not explore the link between Peter and σκάνδαλον language. And for Peter in Matthew, see further Arlo J. Nau, *Peter in Matthew: Discipleship, Diplomacy, and Dispraise* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), and especially 24: “the Matthean depiction of Peter is a literary, emotional and theological rollercoaster for anyone who sensitively reads the First Gospel cover-to-cover”. Nau has a chart that divides Peter’s actions and words into “negative” and “positive”, showing how Peter lurches consistently from one to the other (25).

²¹ One of the exceptions is G. Stählin, σκάνδαλον, σκανδαλίζω, *TDNT*: 339-58. Stählin notes the way that Matthew enhances the σκανδαλίζω language in Matt. 26.31 // Mark 14.27 and Matt. 26.33 // Mark 14.29 and he makes the link between Matt. 13.21 and Matt. 24.10 (349).

an article in *Biblical Interpretation* entitled “Killing Two Birds with One Stone: the Utter De(con)struction of Matthew and his [70] Church”.²² Bubar comes surprisingly close, in respect of Matthew, to what Tolbert outlined for Mark. “It is my contention,” Bubar says, “that this parable [of the Sower] parallels with remarkable exactness the history of Peter's relationship with Jesus. The story of the πετρῶδες is the biography of Πέτρος.”²³ Bubar draws attention to several of the unmistakably negative elements in Matthew's portrait, Peter's failure in Gethsemane, his denial, Peter as Satan and Peter as *skandalon* among them, in attempting to show that “Peter is every bit as shallow as the rocky soil in which the nascent plant struggles unsuccessfully to flourish”.²⁴

Bubar's insight in spotting what many commentators on Matthew have missed is tempered, however, by some surprising omissions. Not only is he ignorant of Tolbert, but he has no exploration of the parallel Petrine portrait in Mark's Gospel, so does not explore the interesting literary-historical questions

²² *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 144-57.

²³ Bubar, “Killing”: 147-8.

²⁴ Bubar, “Killing”: 148.

about Matthew's relationship to Mark.²⁵ He tends to over-emphasize the negative elements in the portrait, at the expense of the places where Matthew's Peter initially "receives the word with joy" – he mentions 4.19-20²⁶ but does not pick up on other examples of the same. And although he comments on the *σκάνδαλον* language in Matt. 16.23,²⁷ he misses the key connection with the Sower here and elsewhere.

The major difficulty with Bubar's study, though, is its failure to make coherent literary and historical sense of Matthew's portrait of Peter. His deconstruction approach provides him with the invitation to do something radical with Matthew, to rethink what so many have taken for granted with their segmented reading of Matthew 16, but the approach leaves the questions that interest the historian unanswered. Consider, for example, Bubar's summary statement:

²⁵ Bubar accepts Marcan Priority (145) but does not see its potential for developing the theme at the heart of his article. Although unfamiliar with Tolbert, Bubar does briefly mention Rhoads and Michie (see n. 7 above) (149, n. 13).

²⁶ Bubar, "Killing": 148.

²⁷ Bubar, "Killing": 151.

In summary, from Matt. 16.13-20 and other related passages, I have deduced the systematic inversion, contradiction, *aporia*, and self-division that plague the Gospel of Matthew. If you are persuaded that these elements are, in fact, imbedded in the text, then you must not avoid the conclusion to which I have pointed throughout the course of this paper: that Jesus' pronouncement in Matt. 16.13-20, historically interpreted to provide legitimacy and authority for the church, paradoxically (if unconsciously) undermines the foundation of the entire Gospel.²⁸

[71] Bubar's ambivalence towards the Gospel of Matthew in the end overwhelms any serious discussion of how the apparent tensions might be overcome. It is an approach that embraces difficulties in the text at the expense of investigating how they function in the narrative and what their history might be. But the value of such an approach is that it highlights a real problem that we have glossed over to this point: *why* does Matthew do what he does? Why does he apparently embrace the Marcan portrait of Peter and how can the tensions in his narrative be resolved? Where is Peter at the end of Matthew's narrative and how have the reader's perspectives changed?

²⁸ Bubar, "Killing": 156.

(4) Matthew's Motive: the Cross as σκάνδαλον

One common view sees Matthew as using the mixture of positive and negative material on Peter in order to construct a narrative about the growth of a leader, and his journey of faith, but this is unsatisfactory because it fails to explain the particularly striking features of the narrative, and especially Peter as σκάνδαλον.²⁹ The question I would like to conclude with is what was it about the idea of Peter as σκάνδαλον that so appealed to Matthew? Why is it that he seizes on this idea of Mark's and runs with it when, as we already know, he appears so keen to promote Peter as the rock on which the Church is built? Is Matthew, as an author, deeply conflicted, on the one hand wanting to promote Peter to preeminent position but on the other wishing to denigrate Jesus' chief apostle? I would like to suggest an answer that makes sense of one of the key consensus elements of Matthew's history, his attempt to write a Jewish Christian Gospel.

²⁹ Pheme Perkins, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction* (Revised edition, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1988): 54, for example, writes "In Matthew's case, Peter was the founder of the church. Throughout the gospel, Matthew shows Peter being prepared for this role of leader. Here [i.e. in 14.28-31], Peter has to learn an important lesson about faith . . . Jesus would guard and protect the church as long as Christians kept up their faith in him."

Matthew, writing after 70, has a huge problem to overcome in writing a Gospel that made some sense of later rejection of Jesus by many of his fellow Jews. It was a problem, of course, that Paul had grappled with throughout his ministry. The crucified Christ, Paul had reminded the Corinthians, was a σκάνδαλον to Jews (1 Cor. 1.23). It is a fact that he does not need to support with evidence or illustration – he regards it as a known, shared perception. No doubt the idea that the Messiah had been crucified was a σκάνδαλον to the pre-Christian Paul too, and a contributing factor in his persecution of the first Christians.

And here is Matthew's problem, the same problem faced by any first century Christian who wanted to construct a gospel narrative that made sense of the problem that so many Jews had not recognized Jesus as Christ. How would one write a Gospel about a crucified Messiah and make it palatable, appealing, persuasive on this key question? Matthew's strategy, far from shirking the issue, is to embrace it, treating it by [72] developing Mark's portrayal of Peter, and so making the chief apostle the spokesperson for "the Jew" for whom cross is offense. He narrativizes the early Christian stereotype of the unresponsive Jew, making Peter the very archetype of the one who is scandalized. And the value, for writers like Matthew, of working through such issues in narrative is

that he can present the opposing view in all its starkness and raw emotion, with curses, accusations and faltering step, and overcome it with a narrative resolution in which the wrong view is seen in all its Satanic menace.

Matthew's Gospel attempts to narrate the Christian Jew's journey. First, one sees how Jesus is indeed the Messiah prophesied in the scriptures, a prophet mighty in word and deed, with a culmination in 16.13-20 when the ever present key character Peter rightly confesses that Jesus is the Christ and is strongly commended for this revelation. Indeed one of the reasons for the fuss Matthew makes at this point is the lack of any attempt to mark the confession as unambiguously right in Mark. Matthew is making it clear that Peter has "got it". But just as important is how the scene continues. Able to understand Jesus' identity but not yet his destiny, Peter is rebuked for failing to perceive that the Messiah must suffer. For Peter, the cross is a *σκάνδαλον*, just as for the Christian Jew, the cross was once a *σκάνδαλον*.³⁰

³⁰ I think it likely that Matthew also holds out hope that his Gospel will persuade some non-Christian Jews that Jesus is indeed the crucified Messiah. On the assumption that Christians like the author of Matthew were converts to Christianity, and not Christians from birth, it is plausible that they attempted to convert other non-Christian Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

But as Peter repeatedly fails to follow Jesus in the way of the cross, by the end of the Gospel there is no longer any scope for failure. As the eleven witness the resurrection, so too, the reader assumes, Peter sees Jesus and is commissioned by him. But in contrast with the other three canonical Gospels, Peter is not even mentioned by name at the end. There is no longer any need to mention him by name. His narrative function, as the symbol of the Jew for whom the crucified Christ is scandal, is complete. He is absorbed into the group of disciples who now witness the resurrection and the commission of Jesus, as the reader too has overcome the scandal of the cross with the glory of the resurrection. The pattern is as in the Walking on the Water pericope (Matt. 14.22-33), the story that tells in miniature what the entire Gospel narrates. First Peter enthusiastically follows, then he falters and falls, and finally he is absorbed into the group of nameless disciples who worship the Son of God. Where Peter is singled out, Matthew is making him the archetype of the unbelieving Jew for whom cross is offence. Once the offence is removed, and the disciples worship the resurrected Jesus, there is no longer any need for Peter to be isolated for special mention.

One of the poignant elements of Matthew's reading of Mark is that it has key similarities with certain contemporary readings of Mark in which Peter and

the disciples are seen not as irredeemable and hopelessly flawed but instead as fallible followers, as foils for Jesus serving Mark's pastoral [73] purpose.³¹ While such views tend to struggle with the unmitigating negativity of Mark towards the disciples, especially at the end, they in fact describe how Matthew sees the disciples. And who is to say that Matthew's conclusion is not the more satisfactory of the two? What sense does it make to say "Go and tell the disciples and Peter" (Mark 16.7), and then to have the women silent (Mark 16.8)? Could any first century reader familiar with widespread tradition like that behind 1 Corinthians 15 have taken Mark 16 seriously? So what Matthew does is to compensate for Mark's failure at the last. He understands Mark, appropriates its plan, works in his own examples, uses it for his own ends, and provides an ending that makes better literary and historical sense. Perhaps Matthew is not, after all, the dilettante that contemporary scholarship so often makes him.³²

³¹ See, for example, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark", *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29-48 and Robert Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role" in W. R. Telford (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985): 169-95.

³² The idea for this paper originated from conversations with Stephen Carlson, who alerted me to the way that Matthew depicts Peter and the disciples. He caused me to look at Matthew in a fresh light. I am grateful to him for setting me on the road to developing his insights in my own way.