

THE SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

The Biblical Basis for the Papacy (John Salza, Our Sunday Visitor Inc. 2007)

David Carter

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The author of this book clearly hopes to demonstrate to Catholics and non-Catholics alike that the papacy has a firm biblical basis and is not solely dependent upon an interpretation derived from later tradition. He has certainly surveyed an impressive amount of biblical material and makes interesting links between God's provision for leadership of his people under the Old Covenant as well as the New. This is a particularly strong feature of the book and gives plenty of food for thought by reflective Christian thinking about God's ways in such provision.

He is quite right to draw attention to the sheer frequency of references to Peter in the New Testament, in total far more than to any of the other eleven original disciples. Clearly Peter is seen as an immensely significant figure of abiding importance for the Church. Whether one can then make the links and connections with the Petrine ministry as currently theologically understood and practiced within the Roman Catholic Church is more debatable, as is the manner in which Salza reads back some of the current practice of the Catholic Church into his interpretation of the biblical Peter. It remains the case, however, that Roman Catholic theology has wrestled more thoroughly with the significance of the biblical Peter than have the theologians of other churches and this very fact remains a challenge to others, not necessarily to agree with all their assumptions but to examine a rich vein of testimony.

What is a pity about this book is that the author does not engage with John Paul II's own invitation in *Ut Unum Sint* to the leaders and theologians of other churches to engage with him in fruitful dialogue on the nature and manner of exercise of the Petrine ministry; rather, he seems to rest content with a particular and rather

maximalist account of its purpose and significance. Nevertheless, this book reminds us that there was a ministry of leadership, encouragement and discernment within the infant universal Church that seems to have been exercised by Peter and that it is important for us all to wrestle with the question not just of the possible form of its subsequent transmissibility but also with the question of how it can be exercised today to further the God-given purposes of unity and mission. That is a common task for us as we advance further towards unity.