



Peter's primacy and the development of doctrine

Opinion

13 March 2005 | Professor Anthony J. Frendo, Head, Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Malta, Msida. | 

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Over the past few weeks there has been some correspondence in your paper with reference to the primacy or otherwise of the Pope as the successor of Peter (see, for example, the letter by Dr Joseph Mizzi of February 6).


I would simply like to point out a few things relative to this matter, without entering into a controversy. In the first place, it should be kept in mind that current biblical scholarship (of all mainstream Christian denominations) holds that the Hebrew and Christian communities were very much alive and kicking before they produced their respective writings (the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament) as a reflection of their faith

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It was the community which produced Scripture and not the other way round; indeed, the Hebrew Bible is a prime example of this, since for nearly a whole millennium there was a constant rereading and rewriting of the texts in the various historical epochs of ancient Israel culminating in the final format of the text as we have it today (for a brilliant study about this, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, reprint with corrections, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Hence, scripture should be read in its wider context (both textual and historical).

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Secondly, the Catholic Christian community has never claimed that Scripture is the only channel of revelation; indeed, it is a commonplace that it upholds two channels, namely Tradition and Scripture. If something is not found in Scripture, it does not automatically follow that it cannot be an object of Christian belief.

Thirdly, John Henry Newman had amply shown beyond any reasonable doubt that Christian doctrine undergoes development: what was present as a seed in the period of the Primitive Church blossomed later on in various moments during the last two millennia (see John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th edition, London/New York: Longmans/Green, 1890).

Finally, when one quotes scripture, one should not be selective: all the evidence should be taken into account. Hence, I am amazed that the passage in Luke 22: 31-32 was simply
 closed over in the above mentioned correspondence. This text reads thus: "Simon, listen to me. If you turn back, I will pray for you that your faith does not fail. For if you should turn back, I will pray for you that your faith does not fail. For if you should turn back, I will pray for you that your faith does not fail." Privacy

glossed over in the above-mentioned correspondence. This text reads thus: "SIMON, SIMON, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you [in the singular and addressed only to Simon, see the original Greek text] that your [in the singular and referring to Simon, see the original Greek text] own faith may not fail; and you [in the singular and addressed only to Simon, see the original Greek text], once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." I do not think that Christ had ever addressed such words to any other apostle.

Since I wrote the foregoing points simply by way of qualifying certain matters and not to enter into a controversy or to write up all that we could possibly know about the subject in question, I shall not be answering any letters which might be written as a response to what I have said.

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