

Astronauts Answering the Pope's Questions

L'Osservatore Editor Reflects on Benedict XVI's Visit With Space

VATICAN CITY, MAY 25, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI's visit with the astronauts at the International Space Station was a unique event indeed: Not only was the Bishop of Rome connected with space, but it was the Pope who asked the questions.

Giovanni Maria Vian, editor of L'Osservatore Romano, reflected on the Saturday [dialogue](#) in an editorial titled "An Adventure of the Human Spirit."

"It was truly a historic occasion," Vian wrote. The audio-video link-up with space was of course a first-ever (the Pope could see the astronauts; they could only hear him), and the reversal of the question-and-answer format, with the Pope doing the asking, was also unprecedented.

"Although," Vian reflected, "Paul VI confessed that he would have preferred to keep quiet and listen to the scientists of aerospace and aeronautic medicine, whom he had received in audience on Oct. 5, 1963."

The editor saw in the Pope's virtual trip aboard the Space Station another indication of the Church's "interest and support of space programs," which Paul VI affirmed "during the period of the first missions into space."

"More generally, the role played by Catholicism in the promotion of astronomy and of science from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the modern age is very important," he said, "as anyone knows who looks at history without ideological prejudice or old stereotypes, which would have the Church an enemy of scientific progress."

"A half century after the first space missions began in a bitterly competitive context of a race for supremacy between Soviet and American superpowers, much has changed," Vian observed.

But "the problems raised in the conversation in space with the Pope, who declared himself like Paul VI to be 'very curious to listen,' have not yet been resolved."

"How can science contribute to the cause of peace? What is the best way to assume responsibility for the future of Planet Earth, a fascinating small dot in the immensity of the cosmos? The astronauts gave convincing answers to these questions, which are demanding for everyone," Vian said. "Everything, as Paul VI said on July 20, 1969, celebrating the first landing on the moon, 'still depends on the hearts of men.'"

On ZENIT's Web page:

Transcription of Pope's conversation with astronauts: www.zenit.org/article-32639?l=english