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"Can you believe they put a man on the Moon?" (3B)

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## "VIDIMUS ET ADMIRATI SUMUS": THE HOLY SEE AND THE MOON LANDINGS

**Abstract**

Seven Popes witnessed humankind's conquest of the heavens throughout the six decades elapsed since the launch of Sputnik 1. Pope Pius XII saw the development of rocketry and the first artificial satellite of Earth; in 1956, addressing at Castel Gandolfo the delegates of the 7th International Astronautical Congress, the Pontiff gave the "green light" to the conquest of outer space, stating: - "The Lord God, who implanted in man's heart an insatiable desire for knowledge, did not place any limit on his efforts at conquest when He said 'Subdue the Earth'. It was rather the whole of creation which He offered for the human spirit to penetrate and thus understand more and more profoundly to the infinite greatness of the Creator". Pope John XXIII saw humankind send its first emissary outside the atmosphere; at the end of 1962, addressing the 50 ambassadors to the Holy See, the Pontiff urged nations to join in "a noble contest" to explore space, adding - "The church applauds man's growing mastery over the forces of nature and rejoices in all present and future progress which helps men better conceive the infinite grandeur of the Creator". The Popes of the last 40 years lived to see the rise and fall of the Space Shuttle, the robotic exploration of the Solar System, the discovery of exoplanets, the building of the International Space Station and the advent of the NewSpace companies. Yet it was Pope Paul VI the one who witnessed the most amazing space event of the last century: the Apollo 11 Moon Landing. Having spent the night of July 20/21, 1969, watching the moon through the telescope of the Vatican Observatory at his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo and then the first television transmission from the Moon, the Pope exclaimed: - "Honor, greetings and blessings to you, conquerors of the moon, pale lamp of our nights and our dreams!" and sent the astronauts a telegram reading "Vidimus et admirati sumus" (We have seen and we were filled with admiration". This paper will narrate the history of the Apollo program in the context of the papacy of Paul VI, The Italian Pontiff, whose tenure (1963-1978) overlapped with the Apollo program (1961-1972) had met on many occasions the Apollo astronauts and scientists, some of them sharing the Catholic faith, and has often issued statements supportive of the human exploration of space during his Angeli and other speeches.