



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PROF. GIOVANNI MARIA VIAN  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO"  
FOR THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION**

*To the Most Distinguished  
Prof. Giovanni Maria Vian  
Editor-in-Chief of L'Osservatore Romano*

One hundred and fifty years are truly a considerable length of time for a daily newspaper, a long and important journey rich in joys, difficulties, hard work, satisfaction and grace. This important anniversary of *L'Osservatore Romano* — whose first issue came out on 1 July 1861 — is therefore first and foremost a cause of thanksgiving to God *pro universis beneficiis suis*: in other words for all that his Providence has disposed in this past century and a half, during which the world has changed profoundly, and for what it disposes today, with the ever more rapid transformations, especially in the communications and information sector.

At the same time, this happy event also affords an opportunity to reflect on the history and on the role of this daily, commonly known as “the Pope’s newspaper”. As Pius XI, of venerable memory, said in 1936, exactly 75 years ago — we are therefore invited to “take a look at the ground we have covered and another at the ground that has yet to be covered”, stressing above all the uniqueness and responsibility of a daily which has made known the magisterium of the popes for a century and a half and is one of the privileged instruments at the service of the Holy See and of the Church.

*L'Osservatore Romano* came into being in a context both challenging and decisive for the papacy, with the awareness and determination to defend and sustain the principles of the Apostolic See, which seemed to be threatened by hostile forces.

Founded as a private initiative with the support of the Papal Government, this evening paper claimed to be “religious and political”, setting itself the goal of upholding the principle of justice in

the conviction, based on the word of Christ, that evil will not have the last word.

This objective and conviction were expressed by two famous Latin mottos — the first taken from Roman law and the second from the Gospel text — which have featured in the masthead since 1862: *Unicuique suum* [to each his own] and, especially, *Non praevalerunt* [they (the gates of hell) shall not prevail] (cf. Mt 16:18).

In 1870, the end of the temporal power — perceived as a providential measure despite the abuse and unjust acts to which the papacy was subjected — neither upset *L'Osservatore Romano* nor depreciated its presence and role. On the contrary, about 15 years later the Holy See decided to acquire ownership of it. With time, the direct control of the newspaper by the papal authority increased its prestige and authority. They were subsequently to develop further, because of its line of impartiality and courage in particular, staunchly maintained in the face of the tragedies and horrors that scarred the first half of the 20th century, “faithful as an international and supernational institution”, Cardinal Gasparri wrote in 1922.

Tragic events ensued: the First World War, which devastated and changed the face of Europe; the affirmation of forms of totalitarianism with harmful ideologies that denied the truth and oppressed human beings; finally, the horrors of the *Shoah* and of the Second World War. In those terrible years and later during the period of the Cold War and of the persecution of Christians perpetrated by the Communist regimes in many countries, despite its straitened means and shortage of personnel, the Holy See’s newspaper was able to inform with honesty and freedom, supporting the courageous work of Benedict XV, Pius XI and Pius XII in defence of truth and justice, the only foundation of peace.

Thus, *L'Osservatore Romano* succeeded in emerging from the Second World War with its head held high, as authoritative lay voices immediately recognized. So also, in 1961, did Cardinal Montini, who was to become Pope two years later with the name of Paul VI: “It was like what happens when all the lights in a room are switched off and only one is left on: everyone’s gaze is directed to the one left on; and fortunately this was the light of the Vatican, the calm bright light fed by the apostolic light of Peter. *L'Osservatore Romano* then stood for what essentially it has always been: a guiding beacon”.

In the second half of the 20th century the paper began to circulate throughout the world by means of a series of periodical editions in various languages, no longer printed only in the Vatican: actually eight, including, since 2008, also the version in Malayalam published in India, the first to be printed entirely in non-Latin characters. Since that year, in a difficult season for the traditional media, the distribution has been supported by co-publishing with other newspapers in Spain, in Italy and in Portugal, and now also by means of an increasingly effective presence on the internet.

A “singolarissimo” (most unusual) newspaper because of its unique features, *L'Osservatore Romano* in the past century and a half, has first and foremost maintained its service to the truth and to Catholic communion on the part of the See of the Successor of Peter. Accordingly the daily published the Pontiff's interventions regularly, followed two Councils celebrated at the Vatican and the many Synodal Assemblies, an expression of the vitality and wealth of the Church's gifts. Besides, it never forgot to highlight the presence, work and situation of the Catholic communities across the world that sometimes live in dramatic conditions.

In our day — frequently marked by the lack of reference points and the removal of God from the horizon of many societies, even of those with an ancient Christian tradition — the Holy See's daily stands as a “paper of ideas”, an organ of formation and not only of information. It must therefore be able to stick faithfully to the task it has carried out in this past century and a half, paying attention in addition to the Christian East, to the irreversible ecumenical commitment of the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to the constant quest for friendship and collaboration with Judaism and with the other religions, to discussion and to cultural exchanges, to the voice of women and to bioethical topics that give rise to questions crucial to us all.

By pursuing its open policy towards new signatures, and an increasing number of contributors — and highlighting the internet dimension and breadth of readership, present since the daily newspaper's very beginning, after 150 years of a history of which it may well be proud, *L'Osservatore Romano* knows how to express the Holy See's cordial friendship for the humanity of our time, in defence of the human person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ.

For all these reasons I wish to address my grateful thoughts to all those have worked on the newspaper of the Holy See from 1861 to this day: to the Director, to the editorial staff and all the personnel. To you, the Editor-in-Chief, and to all who cooperate today in this exciting, demanding and praiseworthy service to truth and justice, as well as to the benefactors and supporters, I assure my constant spiritual closeness and warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 24 June 2011*

**BENEDICTUS PP. XVI**

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