

Galileo's Defense

Galileo's Defense (May 10, 1633)

When asked if I had signified to the Reverend Father, the Master of the Holy Palace, the injunction privately laid upon me, about sixteen years ago, by the order of the Holy Office, not to hold, defend, or "in any way" teach the doctrine of the motion of the Earth and the stability of the Sun, I answered that I had not done so. And, not being questioned as to the reason why I had not intimated it, I had no opportunity to add anything further. It now appears to me necessary to state the reason, in order to demonstrate the purity of my intention, ever foreign to the practice of simulation or deceit in any operation I engage in.

I say, then, that, as at that time reports were spread abroad by evil-disposed persons to the effect that I had been summoned by the Lord Cardinal Bellarmine to abjure certain of my opinions and teachings and also to submit to penitence for them, I was thus constrained to apply to his Eminence and to solicit him to furnish me with an attestation, explaining the cause for which I had been summoned before him; which attestation I obtained in his own handwriting, and it is the same that I now produce with the present document. From this it clearly appears that it was merely announced to me that the doctrine attributed to Copernicus, of the motion of the Earth and the stability of the Sun, must not be held or defended; but that, beyond this general announcement affecting everyone, there should have been ordered anything to me in particular, no trace thereof appears in it.

Having, then, as a reminder, this authentic attestation in the handwriting of the very person who informed me of the command, I made no further application of thought or memory with regard to the words employed in orally announcing to me the said order not to hold or defend the doctrine in question; so that the two articles of the order--in addition to the injunction not to "hold" or "defend" it--to wit, the words "not to teach it" and "in any way whatsoever"--which, I hear, are contained in the order enjoined on me, and registered--struck me as quite novel and as if I had not heard them before; and I do not think I ought to be disbelieved when I urge that in the course of fourteen or sixteen years I had lost all recollection of them, especially as I had no need to give any particular thought to them, having in my possession so authentic a reminder in writing. Now, if the said two articles accompanying attestation, there is no doubt that the injunction contained in the latter is the same command as that contained in the decree of the Holy Congregation of the Index. Hence it appears to me that I have a reasonable excuse for not having notified to the Master of the Holy Palace about the command privately imposed upon me, it being the same as that of the Congregation of the Index.

Now, if so be my book was not subject to a stricter censorship than that made binding by the decree of the Index, it will, it appears to me, be sufficiently plain that I adopted the surest and most becoming method of having it guaranteed and purged of all shadow of taint, inasmuch as I handed it to the Supreme Inquisitor at the very time when many books dealing with the same matters were being prohibited solely by

virtue of the said decree. After what I have now stated, I would confidently hope that the idea of my having knowingly and deliberately violated the command imposed upon me will henceforth be entirely banished from the minds of my most eminent and wise judges; hence those faults which are seen scattered throughout my book have not been artfully introduced with any concealed or other than sincere intention but have only inadvertently fallen from my pen, owing to a vainglorious ambition and complacency in desiring to appear more subtle than the generality of popular writers, as indeed in another deposition I have confessed; which fault I shall be ready to correct with all possible industry whenever I may be commanded or permitted by Their Most Eminent Lordships.

Lastly, it remains for me to beg you to take into consideration my pitiable state of bodily indisposition, to which, at the age of seventy years, I have been reduced by ten months of constant mental anxiety and the fatigue of a long and toilsome journey at the most inclement season--together with the loss of a greater part of the years to which, from my previous condition of health, I had the prospect. I am persuaded and encouraged to do so by the faith I have in the clemency and goodness of the most Eminent Lords, my judges; with the hope that they may be pleased, in answer to my prayer, to remit what may appear in their entire justice the rightful addition that is still lacking to such sufferings to make up an adequate punishment for my crimes, out of consideration for my declining age, which, too, humbly commends itself to them. And I would equally commend to their consideration my honor and reputation, against the calumnies of ill-wishers, whose persistence in detracting from my good name may be inferred from the necessity which constrained me to procure from the Lord Cardinal Bellarmine the attestation which accompanies this.

Source: *Giorgio de Santillana, The Crime of Galileo Affair*, pp. 258-260 (University of Chicago Press 1955).

Linder, Douglas O., "Famous Trials: Galileo", University of Missouri Kansas City: School of Law, collected Jan 8th, 2012 from <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/galileo/defense.html>.