

Officials in 15th Century Lose Battle with Galileo

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Emerald Staff Writer

Galileo may have lost the battle of "Galileo vs. the Professors and Inquisition" during his lifetime, but in the long run the professors and the officials of the Catholic church of the 15th Century turned out to be the real losers.

This was the message Duane Roller, McClasland professor of history of science at the University of Oklahoma expressed in his lecture Monday. Roller is a visiting professor at the University this term under the auspices of the Honors College.

Galileo spent most of the 70-some years of his life trying to convince the world that the Copernican theory that the world spun on an axis and moved around the sun was a physical reality.

Unfortunately, Galileo could not prove this mathematically based theory, when invited to do so by a church official. This didn't stop him from maintaining that "what is mathematically beautiful must also be true, even if it is contrary to observed facts." The Aristotelian world of Galileo's time believed only what it could experience in terms of the senses. As far as the scholars of the day were concerned the observed facts were that the earth was a round ball in the center of a round universe and the sun, moon, stars, and the other five planets revolved around it.

Up to 1632 when his book was published, Galileo's main trouble was with fellow physicists and scholars. He was flunked out of a university for his "absurd" ideas about mathematical truths, and was run out of town everytime he opened his mouth on the topic of physics. About this time he began to study Copernicus, and became entranced.

At this time the church was on his side. One cardinal even wrote Galileo a letter saying if the Bible is interpreted literally, it says the earth is motionless, but added he would be willing to change the interpretation to fit the motion theory, if necessary.

The church remained on Galileo's side for some years, despite an anti-Galileo lobby group called derisively the "Pigeon League" because the surname of its leader meant "dove."

The church's stand was if it is really true the earth moves, the present interpretation of the Bible must be wrong, for it can't contradict scientific knowledge. In order to have scientific knowl-

edge there must be evidence. There was no way Galileo could prove his belief, and as a result, the church could no longer accept his views.

Galileo did succeed in getting permission from Pope Urban VIII to write a book in which both sides of the question were to be equally and fairly presented.

What Galileo actually wrote was an argument killing the geocentric theory and totally replacing it with the heliocentric theory. Urban didn't bother to read the manuscript because he thought he knew what Galileo had written. Several lesser church officials and scholars also read the manuscript, but their ignorance and feeling that the book was all right, since the Pope himself had already approved it, prevented them from withholding the book. It was published and distributed.

Almost immediately, there was

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a scramble to place the blame for the book's publication.

Galileo was tried for heresy and treason. When proof was presented that undeniably established his innocence, a charge of perjury was trumped up. This time they were able to find Galileo guilty with the help of a forged document and a falsified summary of his case. His book was prohibited.

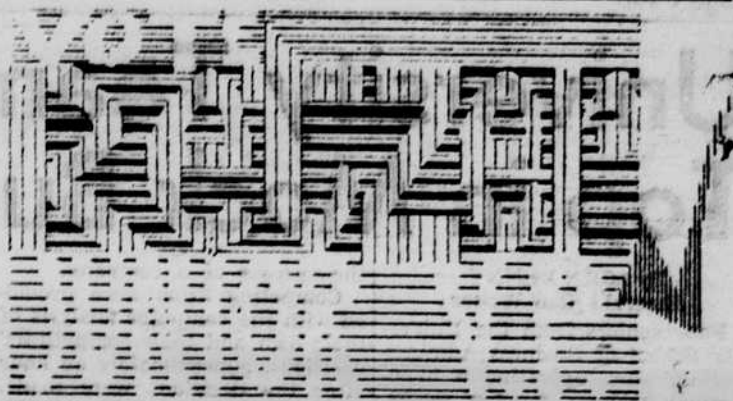
Galileo had been persecuted for his ideas and found guilty of a non-existent crime.

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