

Vatican official says Galileo was a man of faith

ROME - Fourteen years after Pope John Paul II said the Catholic Church erred when it condemned the 17th-century astronomer Galileo Galilei, the Vatican secretary of state said the astronomer was "a man of faith" who recognized God as creator of the cosmos.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the secretary of state, spoke briefly Nov. 26 at the opening of a Rome conference titled, "Science 400 years after Galileo Galilei," designed to bring scientists, ethicists and other experts together to discuss the role of ethics in scientific research.

The cardinal said recent studies and the Vatican's own review of the Inquisition trial of Galileo "have shed light on the shortcomings of churchmen tied to the mentality of their age," but also gave people a more accurate understanding of Galileo's beliefs.

"Galileo, a man of science, also cultivated with love his faith and his deep religious convictions," Cardinal Bertone said, repeating Pope Benedict XVI's statement that "Galileo Galilei was a man of faith who saw nature as a book written by God."

In 1992, Pope John Paul said the church had erred in condemning Galileo for asserting that the Earth revolved around the sun.

After being found guilty of "vehement suspicion of heresy" by the Roman Inquisition at the age of 69, Galileo spent his remaining eight years under house arrest.

The United Nations has proclaimed 2009 the International Year of Astronomy to mark the 400th anniversary of Galileo's use of a telescope to observe the cosmos.

In addition to publishing the text of Cardinal Bertone's remarks Nov. 26, the Vatican newspaper ran an article titled "Thank you, Galileo" on its front page.

Written by Jesuit Father Jose Funes, director of the Vatican Observatory, the article

expressed several hopes for the Galileo anniversary year: that it would encourage people to consider seriously the relationship between faith and science; lead scientists to recognize the role faith played in Galileo's life; and lead theologians to recognize the contributions Galileo made to the church's attitude toward science.

"I think the Galileo case will never be closed in a way satisfactory to everyone," Father Funes wrote in *L'Osservatore Romano*. "The dramatic clash of some churchmen with Galileo has left wounds that are still open."

Still, he said, when errors and misunderstandings are confronted, they can lead to clarification and a deeper level of understanding.

"In that sense, I hope that what was - and perhaps still is - an area of conflict can become the ground for an encounter and dialogue," Father Funes wrote.

Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, told reporters Nov. 25 that he hoped to find a scholarly institution willing to publish a critical edition of all of the documentation related to Galileo's trial.

Although he was placed under house arrest, "Galileo was never condemned" officially, the archbishop said. "The pope did not sign the condemnation because the cardinals could not agree."