

**Discourse of the Commander Geronimo of Carranza on honor and the Insult Laws**  
(written ~mid 1500s)  
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**A letter to King Philip II**  
**by Geronimo de Carranza**

After the Devil was kicked out of Heaven for the ingratitude and disobedience he had towards God's ineffable power, he found himself affronted and bereft of all glory. Thereafter, he diligently set about to deprive others of the same such glory. Thus armed with hatred, envy, and desperation he searched for a means to express his rage. Discovering that honor was the thing most sought after and esteemed in the world, he applied his venom and, unable to exact his revenge against The Creator in Heaven, he would at least war against Him on Earth using His own creations.

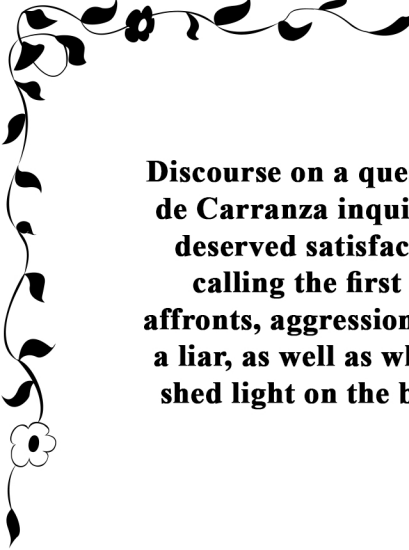
Being an ancient officer of unreasonableness, the Devil planted the thought of dueling in the humble yet arrogant hearts of men, and with such force that it replaced their fear of God and made them care more about being considered honorable than being virtuous or Christian. To give his lies more authority, he sat up on his pestilent seat and preached for many years on honor - that which he himself had forever lost. After he had spread his false laws and encouraged rebellion against God's commandments, he set up an honor tribunal and placed as judges those men who were the least informed on such matters in the entire world. Those men, blind and tricked, declare as affronted those that have not actually been insulted, and they allow the kinds of treacherous revenge that we see in our times, in total disservice to God and to Your Majesty.

Seeing as how these problems grow by the day, as common and ignorant folk are slow to change their ancient habits, drawing upon my studies and experiences I have taken it upon myself to reveal to those eager to learn - and men of good intention regarding this particular science - the truth which the Devil has so diligently oppressed and buried. Thus guided, men shall then run away as if from the plague from these abominations so established by the Capital Enemy of our Salvation.

Thus, in the places I have lived and the time I have spent at court, I have occupied myself with giving means that are just and necessary through which some bitter rivalries have easily come to an end. And so, that Your Majesty may entertain Himself for a time (if he can find Himself unoccupied for a moment from the care needed to run this great monarchy), to His royal hands go this short discourse which I have written regarding the Insult Laws, in which I have pretty much summed up questions of honor that may come about through words alone.

Just a few days after I had finished writing this letter a conflict between two gentlemen broke out which was seen as being so grave that the soldiers deemed it would be a disgrace if the offended one did not beat up or even kill his offender. I have finished writing a book which deals with these particular kinds of situations and it has been approved by the Council but is yet to be published due to my duties towards the Kingdom of Algarve, in which I served Your Majesty with all the care and risk of which many around You can attest. I humbly beseech Your Majesty to order a report on the letters I have written and, if they be worthy, to keep me in mind so as to do to me as done to those others who witnessed me serve. It was a fault of mine to lack the diligence and boldness that they had; by my being rewarded I may grow in spirit and finish other, greater works.

**May God protect His Majesty**  
**- Geronimo de Carranza**



**Discourse on a question that the Duke of Medina Sidonia asked of the Commander Geronimo de Carranza inquiring on the matter of two that had come to blows, asking which of the two deserved satisfaction: the one that called the other a jew or the other which responded by calling the first a liar? Declarations are also made defining virtue, honor, fame, insults, affronts, aggression, defense, satisfaction, insolence, punishment, truth, lies, calling somebody a liar, as well as when doing so counts as an insult and when it counts as defense. These shall shed light on the blindness and errors of the common man as well as the true intelligence of the Insult Laws.**

Virtue is a habit which consists in the moderation of things, with honor and fame being its rewards. While both honor and fame come from the same source, they are actually different effects based on location: honor exists in the presence of others while fame exists in their absence, a result of known virtuous acts. This honor and this fame are stained when opposed by vices contrary to virtue either willingly committed or by attribution by another. When done with words they cause insults or affronts, founded upon insolence, disrespect, or discourtesy, or by reason of defense, satisfaction, or a punishment.

Since the true meaning of the word "insult" gets confused with "affront" and is as poorly understood by commoners as the words "treachery" and "treason", (and thus in their blindness do commoners consider somebody to be affronted without having been insulted) we declare the meaning of these words, with a certain distinction, so that from here on people may judge with certainty an event without needlessly turning it into a potentially life-threatening fight over honor, going from a situation that is easily remedied to one that is unnecessarily difficult to end. Thus will people understand what counts as true charges against honor, and with that knowledge they may give satisfaction to the aggressor and not ask satisfaction of the defender unless he exceeds the moderations mandated by the laws.

#### **Insolence**

Insolence is the disrespect that someone lesser in quality and dignity commits when he unjustly wishes to be equal to his better, an act deserving of punishment. However, when somebody equal in quality and dignity to another unjustly puts him down, making himself to seem better while making the other seem unworthy of their equality, that is an insult. Unless the other had imposed some notable vice towards the first, defense alone is sufficient, but if it was an affront, then he is worthy of both defense and satisfaction between equals.

#### **Insult**

An insult is an unreasonable thing made with put-downs and aggressions that, not having been provoked, has material and form. The word used is the material and the intention is the form which gives it meaning. Given the substance of the word used to insult, the insulted party's obligation may be greater or lesser, as not all insults take away a person's honor, as common folk seem to believe. Insults may be directed against faults in a person's lineage or natural faults, or towards personal vices. Faults in a person's lineage, being inherited, affect a person so that he cannot equate himself to another nor compete in quality with those who lack those faults, although he should not feel insulted by them when dealing with unrelated matters. After all, a person cannot be held accountable for something of which he had no say, nor can he be scolded or punished nor put-down or insulted by those faults even if they were spoken of truthfully or untruthfully. However, if the person having those faults in his lineage overestimates himself in such a manner that underappreciates somebody lacking those faults, that is an insult.



### **Insults in natural faults**

Personal faults that are not vices voluntarily committed nor inherited, but rather accidents of nature that came almost rooted in the subject or were fortuitously gained after birth such as being crippled, blinded in an eye, or missing a hand, are insults but not affronts when spoken of with bad intentions. However, to he that freely and willingly commits notorious vices, it is neither insult nor affront to truthfully tell him of his vices if it can be easily proven that said vices have given occasion to be called out. After all, these vices are called out not to insult the other, as the common man believes, but rather to repudiate, confuse, or shame the perpetrator. However, if spoken of with lies than it is an insult and an affront as the accused has been blamed of a vice he did not have and is left with a damaged reputation until the matter has been investigated.

### **What is an affront**

An affront is an aggression from an indignant soul, pushed beyond reason, made to undervalue and is so naturally pernicious that it always drags along in its substance the harmful intent of the one who commits it. For that reason those affronts that are so-called 'charges against honor' can never be considered legitimate defenses. Either those affronts are vices contrary to the virtues upon which God's Commandments are founded - to which our laws have prescribed the penalty of infamy, and when a judge hands down that sentence the offender becomes officially infamous - or those affronts are vices contrary to moral virtues - to which our laws have no penalty. Cowardice and avarice are two such vices, the first contrary to the virtue of self-fortification and the other pertaining to liberalism, and there are many more. To these only the people may judge and arbitrate, giving or taking away honor by the penalty of moral infamy, the which is not an inseparable accident such as the infamy penalty which the law may pass on those who commit infamous crimes.

With this distinction we can easily judge when cases regarding honor are of only insults or if they are of moral or legal affronts so as to best apply the proper satisfactions based on the damage caused by the aggressions or the excesses of defense. And so, that all cases may be judged scientifically, care must be taken not to be led astray by either intentions or speech for they themselves are not what confirm an affront, rather the doubt surrounding whether what was heard was true or a lie. For where there is no doubt although there may be an insult, there is no affront. For this reason, in doubtful cases a defense is necessary as is the satisfaction from the part of the actor, whereas in doubtless cases only the defense is needed, as we shall prove below.

### **Vengeance is prohibited**

When, via insult or affront, a man is made to lose his patience he must not turn to vengeance for that is an act prohibited by law and one of the things God reserves for Himself alone. The man must instead use a justified, moderated defense conceded to him from natural and positive rights, which is a virtue, a part of justice that lies between aggression and treachery which are its extremes which escalate and de-escalate. For this defense to be without fault the defender must not exceed in its mode, which is to say that we defend ourselves with only that which is convenient to conserve honor, fame, and life. Exceeding this will later bring about fault and it would then be necessary to give satisfaction for those excesses. To avoid this, it is more convenient to defend ourselves of affronts by using a defence that most benefits us but also causes the least damage to the other. For if something was to damage him it would not be the principal intent but rather an accident, following a defense that is just and moderated. If a defense greatly damages the aggressor yet barely benefits the defender, it would not then be defense but rather an insult or affront, greater or lesser, such as its substance and the damage it does to its subject that receives it.



### What does it mean to lie?

Truth is neither virtue nor habit, as some have said, but rather the property of the natural being that God established in things and an equality of the thing that must be understood by the same understanding. Nevertheless, although truth is not a virtue, virtuous are those who always speak it. That vice, truth's counterpart, lying, is saying something from one to another that is contrary to what one knows is true, through which he tricks the other. He who says a lie is not actually lying if he himself is deceived. From here we take that the lie falls upon the subject it describes or upon the person that it is about so that it can be understood that to say to another "that's a lie" or "that's not true" or "that's not what's happening" all of that is to say "you've been fooled". That is not an insult that obliges unless what is said is joined to the person saying it, attributing ownership, such as saying "you're lying" or "you're not saying the truth" which in substance is the same as saying "you're deceiving me, I swear it and I demand you be repulsed!" because it appears to make someone author of a lie and that vice references the person who was saying it and took away the person from what was being said and what it was about. But the bigger insult would be to say "you lie!", which is to call someone a truth thief, trying to deceive others with his lies. Many are those to believe that saying "you lie!" should always be considered an insult, but they are fooled; we shall prove with examples and demonstrations that it is a natural defense and can only ever be an insult when taken out of its natural place.

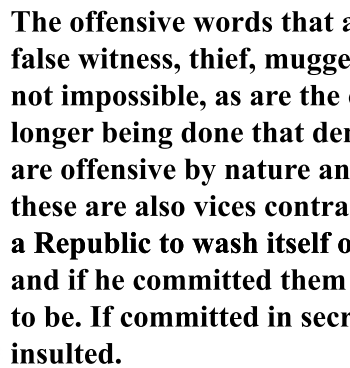
### Insulting somebody with the truth

It is an insult to tell somebody something that is true but cannot be proven or is so obvious that it doesn't need to be. There is no fault in calling somebody lame, one-eyed, or one-handed if they actually are, but this insult did not have any other quality than to undervalue the person without touching on his honor, that prize of virtue that is lost through vices of the soul and not by signs of the body. To be lame, one-eyed, or one-handed are natural or accidental faults, as are lineages, and are not things one may choose for himself, to be reprimanded or insulted by them. For this reason a denial from the lame, one-eyed, or one-handed person would be useless and to his detriment because the other did not say anything against what he understood to be true. Nevertheless, although something true was said, it became an insult by the bad intentions that came with it. That said, the substance of these insults is not enough for the insulted one to resort to a defense, just a complaint. Intention, which shapes an insult, is more understood than seen and can't be judged nor punished in any notable way if it is exterior, only reprimanded, but not in the way that it would be punished if the intention was declared, setting against it some infamous vice with which to affront.

### When a denial becomes an insult

From what has been said we can surmise that for the phrase "you're lying!", a phrase commonly used in defense, to be an insult it cannot be presupposed in the other person the fault of aggression. For if he has aggression, saying things contrary to the truth, it would be a defense and punishment, and not an insult, to deny them in response. Both he who is punished for his vices, and the offended one with a justified defense, even if he lost his life, honor, and fame, do not end up insulted, just as it is not an insult for wrongdoers to be punished by justice. Men affront others in those things that shame those insulted when they say or remember them. Going by this definition the opposing party's fault and aggression make it so that there is no insult in saying "you're lying". If he is not at fault and he is told that he is a liar then it does become an insult. There is no insult with a just cause nor does one who affronts always also insults, aggresses, or offends, just as traitors are always treacherous, but treacherous people are not always traitors.





The offensive words that are defended by denials are the following: jew, reconciled, confessed, Moor, renegade, false witness, thief, mugger, and treacherous. Although at times it can be difficult to prove the contrary, at least it is not impossible, as are the capitals that are in the law, with respect to the works that were done or the works no longer being done that deny or convince with the truth those that contradict. These words, on par with the law's, are offensive by nature and offend honor and fame be they said in the presence or absence of their subject. For these are also vices contrary to the virtues upon which God's Commandments are founded and it is to the benefit of a Republic to wash itself of them by punishing them with infamy. A man either committed these offenses or did not, and if he committed them it was either in secret or public. If in public then he is either already punished or is about to be. If committed in secret, since it can't be proven and thus punished, he also cannot be touched without being insulted.

So that the one who says "jew!", "reconciled!", "confessed!", etc. to another not be implicated in a denial he must have four things: first, that the subject is lineages; second, that the other person has given occasion for the word; third, that it be said truthfully; and fourth, that it be provable with those present or with absentees that are aware of such things. If they were told what everybody knows is not true, that would result in a just denial.

#### **An example**

Let's begin with the reconciled person, which is somebody that from a grave misfortune left Christianity and judaized and yet later, convinced of the Catholic Truths, confessed being deceived and in error and reconciled himself to the faith of Christ, Our Lord. This is a personal vice that he cannot rid himself of. What happens then if another man calls this man a jew yet this man responds with "you're a liar"? Let us judge which of these two men has insulted the other, the one who called the other a jew without having been given occasion to do so, or the reconciled man that responded with "you're a liar" as a defense. We know that a just defense is of such excellence that, provided that it does not become excessive, it can never be considered an insult.

If the one who called the reconciled man a jew was the aggressor, and unfairly insulted him, it is clear that he who legitimately defended himself by denying the accusation did not insult the other. The act of defense being just, natural, and necessary, it follows that in this case and others like it, the denial is not an insult but a defense. Although it may be proven that the man was once indeed a jew, it cannot be proven at that time when the accusation was made. A man is only a jew when he is in the act of judaism.

If the reconciled one is infamous and has already suffered those faults, he may justifiably make denials in his defense against the one who called him a jew. It follows then that one not of that race may also do so with reason without insulting the other with his denial, as the commoners affirm.

However, if the one accused of being a jew responds with "you're lying like a heretic!" then in that case he exceeded the norms and transformed his defense into an aggression. And if the other responds with "you're lying!", both men end up insulted and denied since more doesn't mean a reduction or fault but rather an increase. It's as if both were clearly saying "we're both lying, but you're lying even more!". For this reason the first denier did not end up justifiably defended since stating that his accuser is a heretic does not imply that he himself has left judaism. With this we verify that one affront does not undo another since the office of a defense regarding verbal affronts is to negate and contradict, and regarding acts is to stop their execution.





### **An affront consists of doubts**

What is most convenient for an insulted person is not that the insulter be vicious, but rather that the insulted one lack the vice that he is being accused of. After all, in order to not be seen as a villain, and to defend himself, he had to say and respond with "you're the liar, and you know full well that I am no heretic!" And to the one who spoke the affront it only serves to make him cast doubt on what he said, moreso not to take in any way from the affront that consists in doubting. In this way it becomes a just and moderated defense to respond to the insulter that is seen as a villain, "everybody knows full well that you're a liar and that you're only saying this because you are standing before an equal!" And if the vicious one repeats "you're lying!", it won't be an effective denial in the face of what was said in defense, whether it was said at the beginning or end.

However, if this man that was called a jew says such a thing, being a reconciled person, he would cause insult but not an affront since he himself was already affronted and is truly infamous, an inseparable accident that will accompany him to the grave and beyond. Infamy lives on in the memories of men, undervaluing his descendants, and it is for this cause that he cannot use denials in his defense as they would contradict a notorious truth. If the reconciled man is called a jew and responds with "you're lying!" it is he himself that will be left denied since he contradicts a notorious truth known to all. Moreso, it is not for that that the other stopped insulting him, telling him what he was but is no longer.

The same reasoning can be found if a Christian that happened to be the son of a Moor is called a Moor by somebody wishing to affront him, he may justifiably deny the accusation in defense of the Catholic Truths he professes. A Moor is somebody who guards the precepts of Mohammed. However, if he is instead called a Morisco, which is to say a descendant of Moors, although he may be insulted he may not use a denial as a defense since aggression does not take from him the good that he has nor does it give him the faults the he lacked. The Morisco which gave occasion for the insult does not have license to contradict the public truth, causing offense with his reply. Rather, it is better that each man know and judge himself so that he may not be judged by those that know him.

If somebody calls children of reconciled parents jews, the children may justifiably deny the accusation in their defense for although the father may have been a jew they themselves are Christians and not jews. However, if they are called children of a reconciled man, although it may be an affront to them, they cannot justifiably deny it since they must not deny being their father's children, a fact that has left them infamous. Reason dictates that a father's curse passes naturally through the generations to his children and by that right it is understood that they end up with the shame of infamy, as we all are in the original sin that was born from the first father. Because of this, it is enough to ask forgiveness from those insulted and affronted without giving them more satisfaction. The descendants of those punished for being jews or heretics are of a viler caste than those of a confessed man, although both one and the other are stained and neither can be considered the equal with one as clean as an old Christian.

### **Denials that insult**

Calling somebody a liar is always an insult when it comes from aggression, such as when one tells another "I'm a man of honor, don't mistreat me!" and to that the other replies "no, you're a liar!" This denial was an insult and not a defense since claiming to be a "man of honor" does not offend or insult the other. It follows that he had no reason to defend himself and ended up insulting the other, obliging him to satisfy the other. Well, if this doctrine is truthful, commoners unjustifiably demand satisfaction when someone who, without exceeding in his defense, denies the accusations of another who affronts him, having been called a jew or confessed man, without occasion nor during arguments over lineages. It would be more just for the accused to demand satisfaction from the accuser since this accusation (of being a jew) and others like it can never be used as a defense since every man takes ownership of his virtues or his vices.



### **There are no affronts in taunts**

If people are taunting or playing around with each other and one happens to deny something that the other says, and in response the other throws whatever is in his hands at him, clearly neither the one nor the other is an affront since the basis was a game or joking around and incidents relating to honor, demanding satisfaction, cannot justifiably exist upon such a basis. Just the same, taunts have no place in discussions on honor. An action's end must correspond with its beginning; truths and taunts do not make for a good mixture, noting that one should always excuse himself from taunting when among sane people. The first to start using taunts, thus giving occasion for them, will be at fault and as such is obligated to not feel offended at whatever is said to him in response. If the taunts are spoken in third person then they are best abruptly interrupted since they cannot become truth and the receiver would then have no reason to seek recompense for the damage he received in the other's defense.

### **A defense must be proportional**

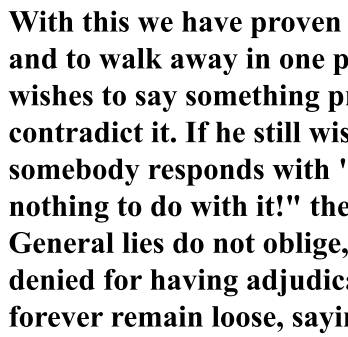
The naturally offensive words which are not defended by denials, since they signify pernicious works contrary to the public good and it benefits the republic to be free of them, are: traitor, cuckold, sodomite, and heretic. These, being crimes that are committed in secret which cannot be demonstrated against and are almost impossible to prove false, cannot be satisfied whatsoever by a denial. After all, it is clearly a bigger vice to be taken for a heretic, sodomite, or cuckold than to be considered a liar. This is the cause for which calling somebody a liar, which is a defense, has no effect against these capital offenses; it is not proportional to the damage caused by the aggression. Only satisfaction can cure the open wounds these affronts cause to honor and fame. Although it is true that through a denial honor can be defended in-person, fame, which exists in somebody's absence, is left defenseless since there was doubt cast over the circumstances regarding which of the two has lied, and this doubt is always damaging to the one who was affronted and not to the one that was called a liar.

Since nobody is so impious that they would test their vices and approve of them, and since guilty and innocent alike deny the vices they are charged with, satisfaction is necessary to remove the doubt that for us and our sins always reaches the greatest guilt, being, as we are, inclined to do evil - an evil that arises such as when one who is known by all to be pure and a gentleman is called a confessed man or a Morisco in order to offend him. It suffices that the affronted gentleman respond with "you're a liar" without the need for another satisfaction since among the witnesses not only was there was no doubt to which they would need to be satisfied but being people untricked by the truth, each one denied in their chest the accusation and could have justifiably made the same defense if the affronted one had remained silent.

### **A sword knows nothing of truths or lies**

In public lies as notorious as the ones above, those that hear them are as offended as the one that is contradicted. However, if they are said where nobody knows the accused or whether he really is a confessed man or Morisco, or once was, even if they deny the accusations in an attempt to defend him, in no way can he be satisfied because among the witnesses there will have been doubt over which of the two is lying. As it is said, doubt is always prejudiced against the one accused of committing the bigger sin. Here satisfaction is necessary; it is not enough to ask forgiveness as in the others. As well, in verbal affronts it is not enough to defend yourself with a sword that can neither tell the truth nor a lie, but rather with the pure truth which is what can deny the accuser and free the witnesses from the doubts left by the lies.

In order to excuse these affronts and other insults it must be noted that whenever there is a conversation in which such grievances may arise, the conversation must then be taken from one of words to one of action. As if one says to another "you don't know what you're saying", or some other insult along those lines, a valourous and secure response in the other's defence is to tell him, with sword in hand, "I will have you know, that I fully understand what I said!". The other will, out of necessity, say "hey, don't!" and in this manner will excuse himself of the denial from both parts because in this case continuing in his denial would be absurd. In these actions, that are on the verge of taking place, there is no truth or lies until they are executed and they take away from the other how they came to pass.



With this we have proven that a denial does not have a place in every occasion, as the commoner seems to think, and to walk away in one piece from an argument, taking advantage of this doctrine, a man must beware that if he wishes to say something prejudicial he should at that time be silent if he is in the presence of somebody who can contradict it. If he still wishes to say it he should add "this is something that others have said is true" so that if somebody responds with "well, that's nothing but a lie, whoever said it is a liar, and whoever else says it has nothing to do with it!" the denial falls upon the business at hand and upon the first author that stated it as a fact. General lies do not oblige, but in the event that the speaker openly states "I'm saying that this is true!" he may be denied for having adjudicated in that manner the debt that he said with prejudice to another. If not, the thing will forever remain loose, saying "this is what they've said", saying and referring it to the commoners.

Finally, I say that against verbal affronts a man should defend himself after they are said, but against offenses of action, before they are committed, which is at the same time as they are going to be executed. If these actions are exchanged, they would be aggressions and not just and moderated defenses.

The one claiming to have been mistaken must ask for forgiveness

For all of these verbal affronts the law has signaled out enough satisfactions, except that they are divided into acts: the first, to confess having said it but having been mistaken; and the second, for one to say what the person who confessed to having been mistaken said, since he said in truth what he heard and what he did not know, it is a satisfaction. After all, he cannot be asked to take back what he said, having said nothing contrary to what he believed was true, which would be properly lying. Moreso, he does not escape from having spoken a lie which is an act of his mistaken understanding. Although retracting a statement is an infamous act unworthy of nobles, in the end, for doing all that is possible, he followed his conscience, although that is not the best satisfaction for the one receiving it.

We can presuppose that the one who retracts his statements insulted the other, something that cannot be revoked or annulled with any sort of satisfaction since he does not have the power to take away the insult that has already been said. But the one who denies having said what he said loses more than the one who retracts his statements, and more than the one who confesses having been mistaken, because he does not follow his conscience, denying what has already been proven in one manner or another. The intention that was meant to be the form of the insult and the reason for which satisfactions are commonly said, neither giving them, nor receiving them, is because any satisfaction presupposes guilt.

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