CENTRAL HISTORICAL QUESTION -
WAS GALILEO REALLY A HERETIC?

PICTURED BELOW: 19th century depiction of Galileo facing the Roman Inquisition

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S)

1.) **ANALYZE** evidence of Galileo’s alleged heresy

2.) **ARGUE** whether or not Galileo was a heretic

PART I: DO NOW & DEBRIEF

DIRECTIONS: Make note of the questions posed during the mini-discussion of this section. Use the space below.
MODELS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

GEOCENTRIC MODEL

MEANING: ________________________________
MEANING: ____________________________
HISTORICAL CONTEXT:
HELIiocentrism & the Catholic Church Timeline

1543: Nicolas Copernicus published a book supporting the heliocentric theory.

1545: Pope Paul III called the Council of Trent to stop the spread of Protestantism and to revive the Catholic Church. It said only the Church could interpret the Bible, and it set up the Inquisition to combat heresy.

1564: Galileo Galilei was born.

1600: The Roman Inquisition tried Giordano Bruno and burned him at the stake for heresy. He supported the heliocentric theory.

1609: Galileo invented a telescope that convinced him of the heliocentric model.

1615: The Catholic Church told Galileo to stop sharing his theory in public.

1615: Paolo Antonio Foscarini published a book defending Copernicus and arguing the heliocentric model did not go against the Bible.

1616: The Catholic Church added Copernicus’s work (and others supporting the heliocentric model) to its list of banned books.

1632: Galileo published *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*.

1633: The Inquisition charged Galileo with heresy and tried him in Rome.

1642: Galileo died.


1758: The Catholic Church ended the ban on books teaching the heliocentric model.

1939: Pope Pius XII called Galileo a hero of research.

1979: Pope John Paul II ordered an investigation into the Church’s treatment of Galileo.
Some years ago I discovered in the heavens many things that had not been seen before our own age. The novelty of these things ... stirred up several professors against me. They hurled various charges and published numerous writings filled with vain arguments, and they made the grave mistake of sprinkling these with passages taken from places in the Bible, which they failed to understand properly.

The reason given for attacking the opinion that the earth moves and the sun stands still is that in many places in the Bible one may read that the sun moves and the earth stands still. Since the Bible cannot err, it follows that anyone who claims that the sun is motionless and the earth movable takes an erroneous and heretical position.

With regard to this argument, I think in the first place that it is very pious to say and prudent to affirm that the holy Bible can never speak untruth- whenever its true meaning is understood. But I believe nobody will deny that the Bible is often very complex, and may say things which are quite different from what its bare words signify. . . .

I do not believe that the same God who has given senses, reason and intellect has intended us to not to use them. . . . He would not require us to deny sense and reason in physical matters of direct experience . . . . Can an opinion be heretical and yet have no concern with the salvation of souls?

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**SOURCE:** Galileo Galilei, 1615. Galileo wrote this letter to the Duchess of Tuscany, Christina. The Duchess was a high-ranking person of power in Italy who knew very little of astronomy.
GUIDING QUESTIONS

1.) Who Galileo? How does his background impact the usefulness of this document as evidence in response to the central historical question? (Sourcing)

2.) What is the main idea of this letter? (Close reading)

3.) Look at your timeline. What surrounding circumstance might influence Galileo write a letter like this at this point in time? (Contextualization)

4.) According to Galileo, why do some people think his teachings are heretical? How does Galileo defend himself against these charges? (Close Reading)

5.) Look back to your timeline. Based on the surrounding circumstances, do you think the Catholic Church would accept Galileo’s defense? Why or why not? (Contextualization)
DOCUMENT B: CARDINAL BELLARMINE

As you know, the Council [of Trent] prohibits interpreting the Scriptures contrary to the common agreement of the holy Fathers. And if you would read not only the Fathers but also the commentaries of modern writers on Genesis, Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Joshua, you would find that all agree in explaining that the sun is in the heavens and moves swiftly around the earth, and that the earth is far from the heavens and stands immobile in the center of the universe. . . .

It would be just as heretical to deny that Abraham had two sons and Jacob twelve, as it would be to deny the virgin birth of Christ, for both are declared by the Holy Ghost through the mouths of the prophets and apostles. . . .

I say that if there were a true demonstration that the sun was in the center of the universe and the earth in the third sphere, and that the sun did not travel around the earth but the earth circled the sun, then it would be necessary to proceed with great caution in explaining the passages of Scripture which seemed contrary, and we would rather have to say that we did not understand the Scripture than to say that something was false which has been demonstrated. But I do not believe that there is any such demonstration; none has been shown to me. . . . [One] clearly experiences that the earth stands still and that his eye is not deceived when it judges that the moon and stars move.

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**SOURCE:** Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, “Letter on Galileo’s Theories,” 1615. Cardinal Robert Bellarmine was in charge of dealing with difficult issues connected to the Church’s power and beliefs during the Galileo controversy. He wrote the following letter to Paolo Antonio Foscarini in response to Foscarini’s book defending Galileo.
1.) Who Cardinal Bellarmine? How does his background impact the usefulness of this document as evidence in response to the *central historical question*? (*Sourcing*)

2.) What is Cardinal Bellarmine’s position (i.e. geo vs helio) on the solar system? What are two reasons he gives for believing so? (*Close reading*)

   POSITION: ___________________

   REASON #1: ___________________

   REASON #2 ___________________

3.) How did Cardinal Bellarmine respond to the following arguments from Galileo’s argument that the model of the universe (heliocentric or geocentric) is not a matter of salvation (*Close reading*)

4.) Why do you think the Catholic Church was so committed to defending the literal meaning of the Bible passages? (*Contextualization*)
HOMEWORK

DIRECTIONS: Using the documents & notes from today’s lesson, in one page, type up an essay response to the central historical question:

**Was Galileo really a heretic?**

***Your response should be double-spaced, 12pt-font***

**THIS IS NOT GRADED**

*DUE: NEXT CLASS*

**HERETIC: Someone whose beliefs go against the teachings of the Church.*