

## 2.10 Trial of Galileo – An Alternative Possibility

### Images – Wikipedia



Fresco of Galileo and Doge of Venice (1858)

**Background:** Galileo Galilei (1564-1642 AD) was an Italian scientist whose use of a telescope to study the solar system played an important part in the 17th century scientific revolution in Europe. Based on his observations, Galileo challenged the idea that the Earth was the center of the solar system and the universe. Instead he proposed a heliocentric model with the planets orbiting the sun. His research and conclusions brought him into conflict with leaders of the Roman Catholic Church who embraced the geocentric or Earth centered model of the solar system. In 1632, he was tried by the Inquisition and found "vehemently suspect of heresy." When he was threatened with execution, he agreed to recant his beliefs. He spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

**Instructions:** This play was written by high school students who were unhappy that Galileo disavowed his findings about the solar system in order to save his life. If you were Galileo, would you have recanted or resisted? Why? Read and discuss this alternative contemporary version of the trial of Galileo in your groups. In groups, you will write and be prepared to perform your own skit about the trial of Galileo. In your skit, you must mention and explain specific ideas and information (scientific method, geocentric and heliocentric views, etc.) If you wish, you can change the outcome of the trial. Use your imaginations! Your written script must fill at least three pages, front and back (double-space and write neatly).



Galileo Facing the Roman Inquisition by Cristiano Banti (1857)

### **Trial of Galileo – An Alternative Possibility**

**Narrator:** Galileo walks around talking to himself about his brand new discovery. He had used the newly invented telescope and observed that Jupiter's moon revolved around Jupiter, which brought him to strongly agree with the heliocentric (sun-centered) theory. When he discovered this he immediately dialed the number of his closest friend.

**Galileo:** Hello.

**Friend:** Hello Galileo, what have you been up to?

**Galileo:** I was looking through this hot new telescope I just made and I noticed the coolest thing. From my observations I also have a little problem. The universe is sun-centered. It can't be earth-centered. There is just no possible way. The church and all in authority are wrong. But what am I going to do about this?

**Friend:** Well I am here for you. You are one of my best friends. I promise that if the church ends up catching you and threatens to put you to death, I am here as your friend and lawyer.

**Galileo:** Well thank you, I got to go. If anything comes up I will contact you.

**Narrator:** Little did Galileo know that his best friend was not the only one listening. There was someone spying on him. The anonymous person called up church officials and reported what they heard. The church immediately called for the trial of Galileo. The trial went as follows.

**Prosecutor:** Are you aware Galileo that you have gone against church teachings, gone against the beliefs of your family, but more importantly you have gone against God?

**Galileo:** This is my discovery. I am proud to say I have proved you wrong. All my life I have been taught to follow what was told to me and now I have proof that you are wrong and what has been told to me is wrong. I am the one to prove you all wrong!

**Prosecutor:** So you admit all of these accusations. You have made these discoveries and stated them for all to hear. Please do us a favor and state them again so there will be proof to put you to death.

**Galileo:** I have stated it once and I will not state it again. I will not apologize either. If you have something wrong with your ears, well then so be it. But you know what I have stated. Whether or not I state it again, you will be putting me to death, will you not?

**Prosecutor:** Oh, yes. We will put you to death no matter what. But you do not ask me any questions. I ask the questions around here. I am a representative of the church. I am the lawyer. It is not my decision to put you to death. Your future, if you will have any, lies in the hands of the judge.

**Narrator:** Just then the lawyer for Galileo comes into the room. All changes as she walks in.

**Friend:** Sorry I'm late, it's a long story. May I have a moment with my client?

**Prosecutor:** Yes go ahead.

**Friend (to Galileo):** So what is going on? Will they be trying to put you to death? I am so sorry that I am late but it wasn't my fault. I cannot, I mean I will not let them put you to death.

**Galileo:** Its okay you were late, it is only my life we are talking about. I have a plan. You see the windows right there? I am going to escape. You are my dear friend and you can come with me if you would like.

**Friend:** I would love to go with you but they will kill us both and I am not willing to lose my life. I will miss you though. I wish you the best of luck. I hope they will not capture you. You do know that if you get caught after this, things will be even worse. You will probably have a more painful death.

**Galileo:** Yes, I know, but the thing you don't get is that in order to kill me, they have to catch me first.