**Galileo’s Verdict**

"So, do you, Galileo Galilei of Pisa, officially, publicly and unreservedly, recant whatever you have said against Copernicus's tome 'On the Revolutions?' " thundered Cardinal Bellarmin as he moved to within three feet of me.  
  
I had no choice. For nearly twenty-five years, I had been studying the heavens. My principle of scientific doctrine had taught me that the Sun was at the centre of things, and the Earth and the other planets moved around it. I had criticised the "*geocentric model*", yes, but so far, none of the inquisitors whom I stood before had bothered to ask even one scientific question. To them, Aristotle and Plato were Holy Grail. Fine. But what about me? My thinking? My findings? My mathematical deductions? I was being asked to embrace the Biblical view of the Earth being the only heavenly body with life on it; of Earth being at the centre of the Universe; of Earth being bestowed by God with the only living beings in the entire Universe. How was I to "unbelieve" what Science had taught me? How was I to fall on my knees before this "august" body of self-serving, despotic Catholic inquisitors and recant Truth? Was I, in fact, not admitting that *God did indeed exist?*  
  
"Are you listening, Galileo?"  
  
Cardinal Bellarmin was an obese man. He moved with a sure step. He spoke with a booming voice. He had deep, penetrating eyes and he wore impeccably pressed, absolutely white robes each day of this trial. He had been considerate at least on two counts: He had allowed me to sit on a wooden bench and he had allowed me a short afternoon recess of 20 minutes - I needed that to take my medical potions and to rest my ever-weakening eyes. However, when he held centre-stage, he was like a man possessed! Well, perhaps 'possessed' is an unfortunate choice of word, since only a Devil may possess someone's soul, and Cardinal Bellarmin was, as I wrote earlier, a man of God.   
  
"I heard you, Father. I was only thinking ..." I began plaintively.  
  
"You have been accused by this Council of heresy and atheistic leanings. You have shown disrespect not only to Plato and Aristotle, both men of God, but also flayed Copernicus's book repeatedly. Your writings and teachings constantly put the Sun, a mere speck in the sky, before the Glory of our shining Earth, something that a mortal like you may not do! Do you admit to your guilt?"  
  
It was the year of our Lord 1634 A.D. I had been hounded for the last 10-12 years by the clergy from Rome. Initially, Maffeo Barberini (he later became Pope Urban VIII), who had been my close friend, had sympathised with my plight and had tried by all means available to him to steer me away from the Inquisition and all its evils.   
  
Alas, he did not succeed as the Papal decree forbid me from pursuing any further writing on any scientific topic and put me in house arrest. I was aging, but what was that to the religious bigots who wanted my head at any cost? I had been threatened with torture, pain and even death. One of the Italian papers had already called this year-long trial a travesty of justice; it had quoted a Council member as having said that the trial would "force Galileo to abjure, curse and detest his work and would ask him to denounce others who believed in the *heliocentric model* of the Universe".   
  
I gripped my satchel that contained my book on heavenly bodies, the *Siderius Nuncius*, more tightly than before. I had no choices really. If you, the reader of this parchment, are a scientist too, then you will understand why I capitulated. I did not wish to be burnt at the stake.   
  
I looked up at the Council and shed tears. I cast a glance at Cardinal Bellarmin. I looked at my two witnesses, Romeo Salvatore and Stefano Silvio, and pronounced thus:  
  
"Respected Father and Members of the Council,  
  
"I stand before you all in total humility. I was led astray by the Devil, who nightly visited my corrupt mind, and fed it lies and all manners of travesties."   
  
At this point, I had a short bout of cough. The Pope leaned forward to catch what I was saying. The Councilmen were looking at each other with glee.   
  
I was served a glass of water. I continued.  
  
"I would gaze at the skies and all thoughts of God and the Bible would flee from my mind. Only the bright lights in the sky mesmerised me: I forgot who I was, who my family were, when I had last had my meal ... in fact, I forgot my religion, my roots, the God Almighty above. The twinkling stars shone in all their glory. And I was lost, looking upon them with my telescope.  
  
"I haven't opened the Bible since I don't know when. I haven't sung a Psalm, since I don't know when. I haven't joined a Mass, since I don't know when.I haven't prayed a Novena, since I don't know when. And yet, I have to say this: Creation fascinated me. I was wrong to question existing thought, but then, I was never in doubt that God existed. I knew He did. I knew it was He who had made the Earth. It was He who had made all Celestial bodies. It was He who had created Me.  
  
"Forgive me, dear Father. I was wrong. I am wrong. I admit my guilt."  
  
I had come to the end of my confession, such as this lie of lies was. I was seeking pardon at any cost. I was 70, but not yet tired of life. I had so many things to still do. I wanted to live. Pursue my dreams. Read. Write. I sat down on my bench, spent and relieved at the same time.  
  
Already I knew the verdict. They would accept my statement, perhaps save me from Death, but there would be no pardon and no mercy. I was doomed to a life of penalties and proscriptions.  
  
The world, as I saw it, would have to wait to know the Truth.  
  
Galileo Galilei  
  
20th September, 1635

**Writing Prompt:**

*Imagine you are a commoner and a Catholic in the 17th century. You just found out the verdict of Galileo’s trial. Explain the events of the trial. As a faithful Catholic do you agree with the verdict? Why or why not? How have your views about the universe changed? How have your views of the Church changed?*

Your response should be at least **700** words. You should share it with me on Google Docs. This is a FORMAL essay. You should include a your name, date, name of class, and a title. Organize your ideas into paragraphs.

My email is aflowers@dunklin.k12.mo.us.

Please save it as “The Galileo Trial-*Your Name*.”