

Dialogo sopra i Due Massimi Sistemi del Mondo, Tolemaico e Copernicano

By Galileo Galilei

Florence: Giovanni Battista Landini, 1632

Galileo was a professor of mathematics at the University of Pisa, where he became interested in astronomy and invented his own telescope to study the night sky. As he became more and more acquainted with astronomical theory, Galileo became convinced that Copernicus' heliocentric theory was correct. This theory, which states that the earth moves around the sun, was considered heretical by the Catholic Church. Galileo had consistently had trouble with the Church and the Inquisition throughout the 1610s and 1620s, and he chose not to publish his findings until 1632.

In the *Dialogo*, Galileo openly contradicts the accepted scientific and theological doctrine that the sun moves around the earth. The book is called the *Dialogo* because it contains a dialogue between a character called Salviati, who argues in favor of the Copernican theory, and Simplicio, who favors Ptolemy's earth-centered theory and loses all his arguments to Salviati. A neutral participant, Sagredo, starts out a skeptic, but is convinced of the correctness of the Copernican theory in the end. These three characters are depicted in a beautiful etched and engraved frontispiece by the prominent illustrator Stefano della Bella at the beginning of the book.

Although the Church originally approved of the *Dialogo's* publication, Pope Urban VIII later forbade its dissemination and called for all copies to be confiscated, claiming that it was a heretical treatise after all. In 1633 Galileo was called before the Inquisition in Rome, forced to recant his views publicly, and sentenced to house arrest until his death in 1642. His writings were removed from all Church libraries, and the Inquisition commanded that any favorable reference to him in other writings be changed or expunged. The *Dialogo* remained on the Church's *Index of Prohibited Books* until 1823.