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HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 12

GALILEO THE SCIENTIST

The Pope and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) persecuted or brought to trial any person who refuted any teaching of the Church. This was not limited just to so-called religious “heretics.” It also included any scientist who published findings disagreeable to the Church. Such was the case for renowned scientist, astronomer, and mathematician, Galileo Galilei of Italy.

Galileo’s observations and calculations led to his conclusion that the sun had a fixed position in our solar system and the earth revolved around it. This was in contrast to the centuries’ old publications of Ptolemy that held the earth to be the center of the universe with the sun, planets and stars revolving around the earth. The church and most scientists believed Ptolemy.

Copernicus, in the early 1500’s, is the first known scientist to propose the heliocentric view of the sun with earth revolving around it. However, his view had not really caught on yet. The geocentric (earth centered) view was still strongly held. The RCC even declared that the Bible held earth as the center.

Galileo is today often called the “father of observational astronomy” and “father of modern physics” and “father of the scientific method” and even “father of modern science.” Because of the science of his heliocentric publications the RCC only saw him as a “heretic,” saying that his views contradicted scripture and the church.

This came as a charge against him in the Roman Inquisition of 1615 which concluded that heliocentrism was foolish, absurd, and heretical. However, Galileo was seen favorably by Pope Urban VIII and the Jesuits, so no specific action was taken against him.

Later, Galileo’s views published in 1632 appeared to attack the Pope and the Jesuits who then turned against him. He was again tried by the Inquisition and found guilty of heresy. He was forced to recant. Because he recanted, he escaped torture and death. Instead, he was allowed to live the rest of his life under house arrest. That did not stop him from still writing scientific works on other matters.

Yes, just because he challenged the Catholic Church’s view of earth as the center around which the whole universe revolved, he was twice tried by the Inquisition of the Roman Catholic Church. Nobody could challenge the RCC and get away without being severely punished.

The Apostle Paul was also severely punished many times for the sake of the gospel, yet he also continued to write his epistles and preach truth. So must we stand for the gospel despite opposition or even torture. God will reward us in eternity.