**Document B: Cardinal Bellarmine**

*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. Historians don’t believe Bellarmine ever saw Galileo’s 1615 letter (Document A).*

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.

***Source:*** *Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, “Letter on Galileo’s Theories,” 1615.*



**Vocabulary**

contrary: against or the opposite of something

Genesis, Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Joshua: sections of the Bible

prophets: someone who speaks for God apostles: religious messengers

scripture: text from the Bible

**QUESTIONS**

1) (Close Reading) Explain two reasons Cardinal Bellarmine gave for believing the geocentric theory.

a.

b.

2) (Close Reading) How did Cardinal Bellarmine respond to the following arguments from Galileo?

a. The Bible passages about the sun standing still should not have been interpreted literally.

b. The model of the universe (heliocentric or geocentric) is not a matter of salvation.

3) (Context) Why do you think the Catholic Church was so committed to defending the literal meaning of the Bible passages?