

Pope praises Galileo's astronomy

Pope Benedict XVI has paid tribute to 17th-Century astronomer Galileo Galilei, whose scientific theories once drew the wrath of the Catholic Church.

The Pope was speaking at events marking the 400th anniversary of Galileo's earliest observations with a telescope.

He said an understanding of the laws of nature could stimulate appreciation of God's work.

In 1992, Pope John Paul said the church's denunciation of Galileo's work had been a tragic error.

Galileo used his scientific methods to demonstrate that the Earth revolved around the Sun and not the other way around.

His view directly challenged the church's view at the time - that the Earth was static and at the centre of the universe.

Galileo was accused of heresy in 1633 and forced to publicly recant his theories.

He lived the rest of his life under house arrest at his villa in the hills outside Florence.

Pope Benedict had been criticised in the past for appearing to condone the heresy verdict against Galileo.