Annibale Fantoli. *The Case of Galileo: A Closed Question?*
Trans. George V. Coyne, S.J. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. xii + 271 pp. $28. ISBN: 978–0–268–02891–6.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the case of Galileo was by now a closed question. In 1979, Pope John Paul II, admitting that Galileo had "had to suffer a great deal . . . at the hands of men and organs of the Church," called for a reassessment of his condemnation with "loyal recognition of wrongs from whatever side." Two years later he struck a papal commission to this end, which over the next ten years published a number of works on the case. At the official conclusion of the commission in 1992, however, the general tenor of these works was ignored or distorted. Galileo was represented as largely the agent of his own misfortunes, whereas his anonymous judges (no popes or cardinals were named) were excused because, as men of their time, they had the duty to impose upon Galileo this "disciplinary measure." Even in the prepared speech given by John Paul II on that occasion, the whole affair was reduced to a "tragic mutual misunderstanding." Although the press at the time reported that the Church had finally rehabilitated Galileo, many loyal Catholics and Galileo scholars were disappointed with the results of the commission and with the Church's failure unequivocally to admit its errors.

One of them was Annibale Fantoli, who took up the original call for an honest reassessment of the Galileo case in *Galileo: Per il Copernicanismo e per la Chiesa* (1993), a thorough historical and scholarly account of the condemnation of Copernicus in 1616 and of the trial of Galileo in 1633. Another was George V. Coyne, S.J., then Director of the Vatican Observatory, who translated the book into English with the title *Galileo: For Copernicanism and for the Church* (1994). The latest edition of the English version (3rd ed., 2010), drawing on newly discovered documents and the latest specialized research, is now the most judicious and comprehensively documented historical account of the condemnation and trial. By eliminating the extensive notes and preserving only the essential references, Fantoli prepared a shorter version in Italian, *Il caso di Galileo* (2003). This more accessible version is the book translated here, again, by Father Coyne, augmented by revisions from the third English edition, and it is now the best general account of the Galileo case.

After a sketch of Galileo's early career, Fantoli describes the events and controversies that led to Pope Paul V's condemnation of Copernicanism in 1616. He lays to rest — yet again — the old canards that Galileo had provoked the condemnation by his lack of prudence, by presuming to reconcile Copernicanism with the Bible, and by trying to persuade the Church to endorse Copernicanism despite his lack of proof for it. Fantoli also dismisses the claims of later Catholic apologists who excuse the theologian qualifiers of the Holy Office for holding conventional philosophical and cosmological beliefs, and for acting prudently to protect the authority of the Church. For even with such excuses, Fantoli insists, "there is still the grave objective error of having wished to resolve authoritatively and definitively a question that should have been left open, and to have sought to silence in the same definitive manner those who promoted new ideas," an abuse, he adds, of both doctrinal and disciplinary power (120).

In Fantoli's account of Galileo's subsequent trial and condemnation in 1633, of note is his speculation that Galileo could have been spared the humiliation of an abjuration if Pope Urban VIII had not taken a hard line against Copernicanism. Fantoli concludes that Galileo was condemned not because of a doubtful document or a conspiracy of his enemies, but because in the *Dialogue* he was seen clearly to be defending the Copernican system. His condemnation, then, was juridically correct, but it was based on Urban's decision that Copernicanism was "false and altogether opposed to Sacred Scripture," a decision Fantoli attributes to a "myopic authoritarianism from which flowed an undue doctrinal and disciplinary closure to a question that should have been left open" (210).

In the final chapter Fantoli briefly reviews the unedifying spectacle of the Church over the next four centuries attempting to evade the implications of that condemnation, the latest sorry episode of which was the conclusion to John Paul II's commission. For Fantoli, then, neither the Galileo case, nor the general relation of the Church to science, is a closed question. Such questions cannot be decided by the Church through authoritarian decree, he urges, but only by "an attentive, patient, and humble dialogue with the whole of contemporary religious and secular thought" (253).

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