

CHAPTER 4

WORLDVIEWS AND SCIENCE

EXCERPTS FROM GALILEO'S *LETTER TO THE GRAND DUCHESS CHRISTINA: CONCERNING THE USE OF BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS IN MATTERS OF SCIENCE* (1615)

I believe that the intention of Holy Writ was to persuade men of the truths necessary for salvation, such as neither science nor any other means could render credible, but only the voice of the Holy Spirit. But I do not think it necessary to believe that the same God who gave us our senses, our speech, our intellect, would have put aside the use of these, to teach us instead such things as with their help we could find out for ourselves, particularly in the case of these sciences of which there is not the smallest mention in the Scriptures; and above all, in astronomy, of which so little notice is taken that the names of none of the planets are mentioned. Surely if the intention of the sacred scribes had been to teach the people astronomy, they would not have passed over the subject so completely.

Holy Scripture cannot err and the decrees therein contained are absolutely true and inviolable. . . . Though Scripture cannot err, its expounders and interpreters are liable to err in many ways . . . when they would base themselves always on the literal meaning of the words. For in this wise not only many contradictions would be apparent, but even grave heresies and blasphemies, since then it would be necessary to give God hands and feet and eyes.

These propositions uttered by the Holy Spirit were set down in that manner by the sacred scribes in order to accommodate them to the capacities of the common people, who are rude and unlearned. . . . Whenever the Bible has occasion to speak of any physical conclusions (especially those which are very abstruse and hard to understand), the rule has been observed of avoiding confusion in the minds of the common people.

To prohibit the whole science [of Copernicus] would be but to censure a hundred passages of Holy Scripture which teach us that the glory and greatness of Almighty God are marvelously discerned in all His works and divinely read in the open book of Heaven.