

In the field of the physical sciences we find at once that many mistaken and outmoded conceptions appear in the Bible. That the earth is flat, the center of the universe, created in a week --- these and other equally indefensible ideas are either explicitly stated or taken for granted. The protracted struggle of theology to defend the inerrancy of the Bible against the findings of astronomy, geology, and biology has been a series of retreats, ending in a definite defeat which has led all wise theologians to move to a better position. There are many insights that strike us as remarkable in such an ancient book, but they are as irrelevant for Christian faith as the mythological presuppositions of the times, which the writers of the Bible on the whole accepted without question (s. 38). Having distinguished the areas of truth with which religion is vitally concerned from those that have no immediate relevance for religious faith, we are not disturbed by the unscientific notions in the Bible. We recognize that for ancient Hebrew or early Christian writers to express themselves in terms of modern science would have been as impossible, and also as unhelpful, as it would have been for them to write in English. PAGE 44.

A defensible view of the inspiration of the Bible must also contemplate something quite different from verbal dictation and inerrancy. In the first place, most Christians must read the Bible in translation, and no translation can be infallible. Strict literalism in the use of the Greek and Hebrew texts also is excluded by the differences of interpretation among equally competent commentators. In fact, the text itself has suffered extensive corruption, so that the original wording can no longer be determined in detail.

Before the books of the Bible were written at all, the materials they contain had passed through many vicissitudes. Much of the narrative material in both Old and New Testaments rests on oral tradition, handed down in some cases for many generations before being reduced to writing at all. PAGE 20.