

THE ROLE OF PARADIGMS*

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Abstract. The study approaches, in addition to parallels in the structures of scientific and religious inquiry, also the role of imaginative models, and investigates several interesting similarities in the role of paradigms in the two fields. There are as well identified important differences that must be explored. The investigation looks successively at paradigms in science, in religion in general, and then in Christian thought.

Keywords: scientific research, religious inquiry, Christian thought, imaginative models, the role of paradigms.

In addition to parallels in the structures of scientific and religious inquiry, and in the role of imaginative models, there are some interesting similarities in the role of paradigms in the two fields. There are also, of course, some important differences that must be explored. We will look successively at paradigms in science, in religion in general, and then in Christian thought.

1. Paradigms in science

Thomas Kuhn defined *paradigms* as "standard examples of scientific work that embody a set of conceptual and methodological assumptions." In the postscript to the second edition of his book he distinguished several features that he had previously treated together: a research tradition, the key historical examples through which the tradition is transmitted, and the metaphysical assumptions implicit in the fundamental concepts of the tradition. The key examples, such as Newton's work in mechanics, implicitly define for subsequent scientists the type of explanations that should be sought. They mold assumptions as to what kinds of entity there are in the world, what methods of inquiry are suitable for studying them, and what counts as data. A paradigm provides an ongoing research community with a framework for "normal science." Science education is an initiation into the habits of thought presented in standards texts and into the practices of established scientists.

* Religion and Science Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, 1997, pp. 125-136.

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