

# New Paradigm Thinking in Science and in Theology

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<b>New Paradigm Thinking</b>	
<b>In Science</b>	<b>In Theology</b>
The old scientific paradigm may be called Cartesian, Newtonian or Baconian since its main characteristics were formulated by Descartes, Newton and Bacon.	The old theological paradigm may be called rationalistic, manualistic, of Positive-Scholastic since its main characteristics were formulated in theological manuals based on Scholastic proof texts.
The new paradigm may be called holistic, ecological or systematic – but none of these adjectives characterises it completely.	The new paradigm may be called holistic, ecumenical, or transcendental-Thomistic but none of these adjectives characterises it completely.
New paradigm thinking in science includes the following five criteria – the first two refer to our view of nature, the other three to our epistemology	New paradigm thinking in theology includes the following five criteria – the first two refer to our divine revelation, the other three to our theological methodology
<b>1. Shift from the Part to the Whole</b>	<b>1. Shift from God and Revealer of Truth to Reality as God’s Self-revelation</b>
In the old paradigm it was believed that in any complex system the dynamics of the whole could be understood from the properties of the parts.	In the old paradigm it was believed that the sum total of dogmas (all basically of equal importance) added up to revealed truth.
In the new paradigm the relationship between the parts and the whole is reversed. The properties of the parts can be understood only from the dynamics of the whole. Ultimately there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in and inseparable web of relationships	In the new paradigm the relationship between the parts and the whole is reversed. The meaning of the individual dogmas can be understood only from the dynamics of revelations as a whole. Ultimately revelation as a process is of one piece. Individual dogmas focus on particular moments in God’s self-manifestation in nature, history, and human experience.

<b>2. Shift from structure to process</b>	<b>2. Shift from revelation as Timeless Truth to Revelation as Historical Manifestation</b>
In the old paradigm it was thought that there were fundamental structures and then there were forces and mechanisms through which these interacted thus giving rise to processes	In the old paradigm it was thought that there was a static set of supernatural truths which God intended to reveal to us, but the historical process by which God revealed them was seen as contingent and therefore of little importance
In the new paradigm every structure is seen as the manifestation of an underlying process. The entire web of relationships is intrinsically dynamic	In the new paradigm the dynamic process of salvation history is itself the great truth of God's self-manifestation. Revelation as such is intrinsically dynamic.
<b>3. Shift from objective science to 'epistemic science'</b>	<b>3. Shift from theology as an objective science to theology as a process of knowing</b>
In the old paradigm scientific descriptions were believed to be objective ie independent of the human observer and the process of knowledge	In the old paradigm theological statements were assumed to be objective ie independent of the believing person and the process of knowledge
In the new paradigm it is believed that epistemology – the understanding of the process of knowledge – is to be included explicitly in the description of natural phenomena	The new paradigm holds that reflection on nonconceptual ways of knowing – intuitive, affective, mystical – has to be included explicitly in theological discourse
At this point there is no consensus about what the proper epistemology is, but there is an emerging consensus that epistemology will have to be an integral part of every scientific theory	At this point there is no consensus on the proportion in which conceptual and nonconceptual ways of knowing contribute to theological discourse, but there is an emerging consensus that nonconceptual ways of knowing are integral to theology
<b>4. Shift from Building to Network as metaphor for knowledge</b>	<b>4. Shift from Building to Network as metaphor for knowledge</b>
The metaphor of knowledge as building – fundamental laws, fundamental principles, basic building blocks etc – has been used in Western science and philosophy for thousands of years	The metaphor of knowledge as building – fundamental laws, fundamental principles, basic building blocks etc – has been used in theology for many centuries
During paradigm shifts it was felt that the foundations of knowledge were crumbling	During paradigm shifts it was felt that the foundations of doctrine were crumbling

In the new paradigm this metaphor is being replaced by that of the network. As we perceive reality as a network of relationships our descriptions, too, form an interconnected network representing the observed phenomena	In the new paradigm this metaphor is being replaced by that of the network. As we perceive reality as a network of relationships our theological statements, too, form an interconnected network of different perspectives on transcendent reality
In such a network there will be neither hierarchies nor foundations	In such a network each perspective may yield unique and valid insights into truth
Shifting for the building to the network also implies abandoning the idea of physics as the ideal against which all other sciences are modelled and judged, and as the main source of metaphors for scientific description	Shifting for the building to the network also implies abandoning the idea of a monolithic system of theology as binding for all believers and as the sole source for authentic doctrine
<b>5. Shift from truth to approximate descriptions</b>	<b>5. Shift in focus from theological statements to divine mysteries</b>
The Cartesian paradigm was based on the belief that scientific knowledge could achieve absolute and final certainty	The manualistic paradigm of theology suggested by its very form as “summa” or compendium that our theological knowledge was exhaustive
In the new paradigm it is recognised that all concepts, theories and findings are limited and approximate	The new paradigm, by greater emphasis on mystery, acknowledges the limited and approximate character of every theological statement
Science can never provide any complete and definitive understanding of reality	Theology can never provide a complete and definitive understanding of divine mysteries
Scientists do not deal with truth (in the sense of exact correspondence between the description and the described phenomena); they deal with limited and approximate descriptions of reality	The theologian, like every believer, finds ultimate truth not in the theological statement but in the reality to which this statement gives a certain true, but limited expression.