Engaging Conradie’s theses

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Conradie’s twelve theses form a concise and dense text that aims to engage a wide range of conversations between theologians and other scientists. It reads like a mission statement in which he addresses the characteristics and focus of such conversations, whilst providing rules of conduct. With these theses Conradie calls upon Christian theologians to acknowledge that while their contributions to these conversations are valuable, they are also limited. But why state the limited nature of contributions by Christian theologians?

Firstly, Conradie intends to instil trust amongst other scientists by agreeing that Christian theologians will not overestimate their contributions by imposing meta-perspectives over and above perspectives from other scientists. However, Christian theologians also expect that the same courtesy will be shown toward them. This means that all contributions are limited.

Secondly, Christian theologians’ knowledge is limited and other scientists can assist them in clarifying and broadening their knowledge. This is true for all participants, which means all contributions are limited.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that Christian theologians draw on particular core assumptions in developing their understanding and approach to reality. This is not unique to Christian theologians as all participants in the multidisciplinary conversation draw on their own unique set of core assumptions. The limited nature of contributions to the multidisciplinary conversation is a limitation shared by all who are dedicated to “…helping the societies in which we are situated to understand
the world in which we find ourselves, analysing what has gone wrong, and helping societies to respond to contemporary challenges (Thesis 1).”

However, perhaps we should reflect more on the disciplinary fragmentation that is the source of these conversational limitations. If the major societal problems are the result of the difference between how life works and the way we think (Gregory Bateson), is it not rather our assumptions that actually limit us?

At the table of multi-disciplinary conversations

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More fundamental to and preceding the participation by Christian Theologians in a common task of sense making (see Conradie 1), is an understanding of Christian Theology’s role as being a “conversation specialist” (Will Storrar) in the context of the science-religion / theology discourses and as being a “conversation partner” on the genesis of knowledge (that is, on models of rationality). As “conversation partner”, Christian Theology must listen to the dialogue partners, participate in and engagingly contribute to the science of philosophy’s discourses on models of rationality in formulating criteria for making knowledge claims. On these knowledge claims, Christian Theology has no monopoly. It can neither prematurely accept an (self-introduced) designation such as “a particular school of thought” (see Conradie 2 and 11) as vantage point nor prematurely introduce “revelational claims” (see Conradie 3 and 10) as immunisation strategy. Christian theologians indeed may be asked to explain what they bring to the table that is distinctive (see rightly so Conradie 4) for them as “conversation specialists”. Let me formulate and substantiate my argument in response to Conradie only with specific reference to two issues. Firstly to the welcoming, seating and conversation at the table. This table Conradie (see 2) calls – in reference to Van Huyssteen – the table of multi-disciplinary conversations. And secondly Conradie’s statement on the substantive contribution that Christian Theology can make in taking on the common