

# A LETTER TO THE POPE

July 2015

**Querido Papa Francisco**  
**Dear Pope Francis**

This morning I was listening to the radio. I was very upset by the latest bad news about climate change. I decided to take a walk in God's creation. This has been how I have eased my pain and sought wisdom for the future since I was a child.

God can be encountered in the beauty of nature.

I walked along the forest path by the shore of the much-loved lake near my home. I came to a place where wild strawberries grow. Many had been ripened by the sun, and I bent down to pick and eat them. My mind was filled with gratitude.

I also thought about you with gratitude. I thought about the letter that I, along with billions of others, had received from you: your encyclical *Laudato si'*. In recent weeks I have made it the focus of my reading, and I appreciate it so much. Its analysis of our age is so much to the point, and it contains wise ideas for charting a course through this crisis.

As I knelt among the wild strawberries, I decided to reply to your letter.

I imagine that you have a lot of work to do, and I assume that you won't be able to find the time to answer me. I don't expect it. I decided to write an open letter, so that I could invite anyone to join in a dialogue – anyone who wishes to be involved in the highly important discussion about the role of spirituality and the Spirit in a time of necessary transformation.

I wish to engage in dialogue with anyone who is haunted by questions like these:

*How can humanity survive as the wind of this ecological and social crisis grows stronger?*

*How can we minimise and alleviate the suffering that these pronounced changes cause – especially to the poorest and most vulnerable, and to countless other species?*

*What kind of Christianity can withstand this collapse of a civilisation? How can churches not only survive but be equipped to offer meaningful support? How can Christian spirituality, even today, guide us towards wisdom and a profound transformation of our lives?*

*How can different religions and convictions join forces to give birth to the change that is so necessary?*

*We need to distance ourselves from many aspects of the dominant world view. What might the new one, a world view that supports life, look like?*

I long for dialogue with many different people, a multi-dialogue. This is a word used by my Bolivian friends. (Latin America is close to my heart: I'll tell you more a little later.)

As a Finn I am intimately part of this self-destructive Western culture. At the same time the roots of my own culture go deeper, to another soil. For example, my mother tongue, Finnish, does not belong to the Indo-European languages, but to the relatively small Finno-Ugrian language group. My language contains echoes of a different world view and a different understanding of the human being. It is also said that the Finno-Ugrian relationship with nature has characters that distinguish it from the dominant Western thinking.

I call these valuable elements that I find in my own Finnish tradition *forest wisdom*.

I am a theologian, which means that I fumble for words about the God who is beyond human understanding. To be more precise, I work as a researcher. My doctorate in theology was about the wisdom of the earth, and I still search for a wisdom that might help us, humanity, to survive and live with dignity.

I find myself nearly despairing in this search. But only nearly.

I seek wisdom in the deepest layers of my culture's soul, and I seek it in Christianity. In my heart these two great currents have never been in conflict. I feel that they strengthen each other.

I have also aspired for multi-dialogue with thinkers who represent the world's indigenous peoples. Europe's only indigenous people, the Saami, live in the north of Finland. They are close language relatives of we Finns. I have conversations with them, and occasionally I do some pastoral work in the parishes of the Saami region (I speak some North Saami).

Recently I have also made some connections with some Bolivian theologians, philosophers and activists, who draw insight from their roots as the indigenous Aymara people.

My work consists in full time thinking and writing, because I think these huge issues demand it: they demand time and peace for new thoughts to emerge.

But basically I am a priest. I was ordained as a pastor of the Lutheran Church in Finland nearly twenty years ago, and for years I have done normal parish work. It is work I appreciate and love deeply. Now, however, I do pastoral work only occasionally. From time to time I teach at the nearby university: I teach the Holy Mass and the theology of liturgy to theological students.

I feel I am presently following my calling in my research work and in my engagement with civil movements.

My own Lutheran church is dear to me, although I clearly see its shortcomings, too. Nevertheless, this church has connected me to the central treasures of the Christian tradition. With these I am able to seek union with the Triune God through biblical wisdom and the holy sacraments. Of course, The Holy Three also speaks through creation and everything in nature.

My beloved church has been able to live in the river of tradition while finding ways of renewal. It has opened its arms to me: as a woman I can give all my gifts and talents to God's work. Similarly, Finnish society has offered me the magnificent opportunity of education, and I realise how privileged I am in this world. I am so thankful! And I want especially to serve those who lack all the opportunities I have had.

I believe the struggle against climate change is also a way of defending the poorest of the world and their livelihoods. At the same time it is a way of struggling on behalf of countless species which cannot adapt to changes that are too sudden and radical.

In my quest for wisdom, and a Christianity capable of surviving this collapse, I wish to maintain an open and ecumenical mind. The ancient churches – yours, which is the mother church of mine, and the Eastern Orthodox Church – have in a special way maintained the continuum with a cosmic, more integrated understanding of faith. This is your strength, as it is of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople (whom I also value highly), as humanity waits for spiritual guidance and leadership from you.

The Orthodox heritage is venerable here in Eastern Finland. We Lutherans have a warm relationship with our Orthodox sisters and brothers. (By the way, uniquely at the University of Eastern Finland both Western and Eastern theology are taught in the same unit.) From time to time I make a retreat at the guest house of the Orthodox monastery of New Valamo, where I can breathe the peace of the monastery.

So, what I miss is a multi-dialogue about the issues that you have raised in your encyclical. In what follows I shall try to concretise my own insights with examples from my daily life in Finland. I hope it doesn't get boring! My idea is to show how an alternative world view continues the struggle to stay alive in the midst of the hegemonic Western culture. Perhaps Finno-Ugrian thinking has something to contribute to the search for alternatives to addictive consumerism. Can the Western way of life be renewed?

As I was walking home from my patch of strawberries, I picked up some plastic rubbish from the path. I did this, firstly, because it was terribly ugly. Secondly, pieces of plastic do not belong in nature. A small animal might swallow them and suffocate.

The kingdom of plastic and oil thinks it is invincible; but the Kingdom of Christ is stronger. Or, as you put it, the Kingdom of beauty.

You, and the beautiful way you bear your responsibility, make me happy.

Despite everything, there are many reasons for joy. Joy – especially the joy of the Gospel – changes the world.

***“I have a sacred place in the forest.”***

That's what I wrote in my diary as a little girl. At the same time I started to read the New Testament by myself.

I noticed that you tweeted this summer: “For indigenous communities, land is not a commodity, but a gift from God, a sacred place.”

We Finns are not an indigenous people, but we are a “subarctic forest people”. I recognise the sacredness of nature. It is extremely important and a great joy for me to know that this sense of the sacred also has its place in the Christian tradition.

Sorry to write so much about myself! I'm trying to show the direction in which my intuition is leading me.

Where did a child get this sense of the sacredness of creation from? Was it communicated to me by the forest itself? I used to play alone there – in doing so, did the Creator speak to me?

I come from a Christian home, and little by little my faith grew more personal. At my confirmation camp, when I was fourteen, our pastor introduced us to St Francis of Assisi. I remember being very impressed by the story of how the saint tamed the wolf of Gubbio.

Years later I became a student of theology. The theme of poverty, so important to St Francis, was combined in my thinking with questions about the suffering of the world's poor. I discovered Latin American liberation theology and Gustavo Gutiérrez, among others. I learned from him that material poverty meant suffering and premature death and all this was a scandal in the eyes of God. I learned about base communities, where poor people read the Bible for themselves, and found the power to survive and transform their communities.

I spent six months as a volunteer in El Salvador, where the cruel civil war had just ended. That was an important period of my life.

I wrote my first thesis about the spirituality of liberation theology. Later I continued my studies in Costa Rica, and discovered the biblical hermeneutics of Latin American women. I noticed the gradual emergence of ecological perspectives in the continent.

My doctoral thesis was about the concepts of knowledge and theology in the thinking of the Brazilian nun, philosopher and theologian Ivone Gebara, who reflects on the extended development of the history of ideas: the process by which the Western world adopted a mechanistic concept of reality that is now outdated. We are now challenged to understand the world in a more integrated way, as a great living organism.

These ideas resonate with my own experience. They have given me words for the deep sense of interdependency that I have felt since my childhood spent in the shelter of the forests and by the lakeshore, feeling a connection with the animals and the fields my father cultivated.

In recent years I have attempted to do theology arising from my Finnish cultural context. I call it "forest theology". One of my principal goals is to restore the ancient sense of the sacredness of nature to my culture.

I am glad that the sacredness of creation belongs, in its own way, to the original insights of Christianity, and especially to its Wisdom tradition. In the Psalms the whole creation sings its praise. The glory of God is present in nature. Saints like St Francis and St Hildegard of Bingen have understood that all creation is alive because it is the place of God's holy presence.

Throughout the ages the Eastern Church has maintained an understanding of the sacramentality of creation. In the thinking of Martin Luther God is simultaneously this-worldly and other-worldly. Luther sees God's presence in every grain and in every leaf of a tree.

But Western mechanistic and rationalistic culture wants to close its eyes to this reality of the sacred. And this is where it goes astray. A new sense of the sacred might return the lost sense of limits to humanity and point us in a new direction, towards life.

## ***A culture capable of restraining itself***

Dear Pope Francis, in paragraph 105 of your encyclical you write that at the moment “we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint”.

Your interpretation of modern culture hits the mark. More than this, you go on to suggest paths towards something more sustainable than this world’s obsession with consumption and making money.

We need a spirituality that restores a sense of our limits. An essential part of such a spirituality will be the renewed recognition of the sacredness of nature and of every human being.

The inviolability of each person’s body and soul must be respected. This is not reflected in human trafficking or in extreme capitalism and the ways it contrives to mould our minds.

Every forest, every sea and all their animals are sacred, protected by this inviolability. We humans have the right to take from the Earth what we need to live, but with moderation and without causing unnecessary suffering to each other or to other species.

This new civilisation will be a civilisation of moderation, of a simple lifestyle; we call it *kohtuus* in Finnish. *Kohtuus* is an important virtue in the Finnish thinking of old.

In this new culture we won’t strive for limitless growth, but for balance. It’s an ideal that is still very much alive in Aymara culture.

The Saami think that nature is complete. It does not need to be “developed” by human beings. The task of human beings is to leave as small a trace of themselves in nature as possible.

These are wise ideals, but we seem to find it extremely difficult to live by them. Doing so will require a shift in our collective world view. We will need to move from a mechanistic belief in progress towards a holistic, organic concept of reality and *kohtuus*.

And why not? If the dominant world view in the West was changed some centuries ago – by both the scientific and technical revolution and the Enlightenment – why can’t it change again? (If it can’t, humanity will die.)

As we move towards a new world view, it would be foolish to abandon those things that are good and sustainable in the Enlightenment and modern thinking. These tools are also needed to make the change. But we must distance ourselves as a matter of urgency from all that blinds us to the sacredness of nature and humanity, and the power of the Spirit of God.

The new civilisation will no longer be an either/or culture. It will combine elements that coexist and interact with each other. The new culture will acknowledge spiritual reality. It will also allow space to seek a connection with the Spirit. Where else might we find a counterbalance to mammon, or in today’s language to overconsumption and over-technologisation?

This new civilisation will be contemplative. In the face of collapse it is essential to remain calm. This calm, for Christians at least, comes from our unity with Jesus Christ. But more about this later.

*There was once a visitor to Finland from another country. He observed that the Finns are a contemplative people. He said that he could see this in our sauna culture, among other things: people love the silence of the sauna. When Finns swim between bathing in the sauna or sit outside it contemplating the lake, there is a prayerful atmosphere.*

*The sauna is not an immoral place for us: it is ancient and holy. Bathing in the sauna is a cosmic rite of restoration, in which the human being restores her or his relationship with the elements: fire, water, air and soil. The sauna has been a traditional place for giving birth or for washing the departed. The sacredness of sauna is still respected – you are supposed to remain silent in it, and no one brings their mobile phone into it.*

*It is true that we Finns are comfortable with silence. You notice this in the spring, for example, when the lakes are still frozen: crowds of Finns go fishing. Men and women can sit for hours by a tiny hole in the ice, whether they catch any fish or not. This is clearly an act of contemplation, a wordless prayer of both looking and listening.*

### ***As the winds grow stronger***

It is probably unnecessary to describe in detail the many ways we have managed to disrupt the balance of nature. People living in the Arctic and near the Equator especially experience this in their everyday life in countless, frightening ways. We have not listened to or respected the wisdom of nature herself.

And now all this threatens to lead us to extinction. In the worst case the story of humanity may come to its end. One can hardly bear to think about it.

The winds are growing stronger. At the beginning of the summer of 2015 it was exceptionally windy in Finland. The winds at our summer cottage hit our boat against some rocks, making three big holes in it (which my husband repaired).

There are an increasing number of tremendous heat waves: in Pakistan, in Southern Europe – everywhere. The poorest can only dream of air conditioning. The elderly die because of the heat.

The loss of nature's biodiversity, the acidification of seas, forests, clean water... The ecological crisis is only one dimension in the collapse of this complex civilisation. Other dimensions are the financial crisis (will this recession be permanent?), the increasing vulnerability of our societies (because of over-enthusiastic technologisation), epidemics that spread themselves with unprecedented speed (with the aid of air travel), violent extremist movements and huge numbers of people seeking refuge.

Another wise spiritual leader, your friend Patriarch Bartholomew, said years ago that climate change is a symptom of a moral and spiritual disorder. Solutions with lasting significance must therefore be based on a cosmological and spiritual transformation.

Why has Christianity been so toothless, so powerless to stop, or at least slow down, this journey to disaster?

A simplistic answer is that Christianity itself bears the guilt for Western culture's animosity towards nature. The historian Lynn White Jr. argued this in an article he wrote in 1967. Since then the idea

has been repeated, especially in the academic world, to the extent that hardly anybody feels the need to ask if it is true.

According to White the biggest problems where humanity's relationship with nature is concerned in the Jewish-Christian tradition are the idea of our dominion over it (see the Book of Genesis) and anthropocentrism (placing too much emphasis on human beings).

White's critique is justified in pointing out that Christians have often had an overly anthropocentric understanding of faith. This is especially true in the churches of the West.

However, it is important to understand that the original sources of our faith tradition in the Bible and in the theology of the early church are more holistic. Salvation is for the whole creation, the whole cosmos.

Even dominion in the Bible does not mean domination or oppression. One's right to take from nature what one needs for living is immediately balanced with the responsibility to take care of the earth's well-being, to till and keep.

This tradition is not as anthropocentric as it sometimes seems. I think Christianity is really theocentric, or Christocentric. When one's mind and the whole of one's being is directed towards God, it is simultaneously directed towards the service of all who suffer.

So we are not talking here only about feelings of guilt or responsibility; we are also talking about a deep sense of belonging with all that is, and we are talking about love. This was lived reality, among others, for St Francis – who, by the way, is noted by Lynn White as representing the positive attitude towards nature in Christianity.

I believe Christianity today needs to assist Christians to go through a process of thorough self-criticism: we need to ask ourselves what essential things we may have forgotten, where we have gone astray and begun to accommodate ourselves to mammon. We need to do this honestly.

This needs to be followed by a time of repentance or *metanoia*, a time to look forward. What can this tradition offer to humanity so that we can avoid disaster and unite in struggling for a different future?

According to the Gospels the main message of Jesus of Nazareth was: "The Kingdom of God has come close. Repent (*metanoiēte*) and follow me." The Greek word *metanoia* means repentance or a change of mind. It has rich connotations. *Noia* means mind; *meta* means something beyond or something greater. Was Jesus urging us to search for a connection with our larger, broader minds?

One of my minds is narrow: it is my everyday mind, in which my thoughts fly around. It easily becomes worried about everything; it becomes scared and turns in on itself.

My broader mind is like the calm water of the deep beneath the surface where the waves are roaring. It is the home of intuitions, feelings and wisdom.

It is this latter mind that Jesus hopes we may connect with, so that we are not afraid when the winds grow stronger and we find ourselves paralysed as the structures of our societies begin to collapse. The calm mind will always see the hole in the wall we can climb through. It may be a hole we have never seen before.

My church's Archbishop, Kari Mäkinen, had a discussion some time ago with the leading Finnish

climate scientist, Markku Kulmala. The Archbishop said that art and spirituality will always pierce the walls of our closed and frightening images of the future.

So, what would be the wisest thing to do as the winds grow stronger? It would be to raise the sails to be caught by the wind of the Spirit, who will carry us to the new civilisation of love. No other source of power can make this transformation in time.

At the same time this spiritual crisis presents an opportunity to find new words for the Christian tradition to make it comprehensible again. We have often been unable to convey its spiritual kernel and the wisdom that kernel contains. Your encyclical and your many symbolic actions are already big steps in this respect.

My own church has worked hard to make flesh of the words that protect nature – to make them concrete reality. We have a very practical environmental diploma system, and many of our parishes have integrated it in their work. We also have a Climate Programme, the name of which says something about its aims: *Gratitude, respect, moderation*.

However, all this is done not for the sake of the church but for the sake of the life of the world.

*At the beginning of July I participated in a large spiritual gathering in Sotkamo, two hundred and fifty kilometres north of my home. Sotkamo is in the middle of the wilderness and near some large lakes, and it is where the notorious Talvivaara nickel mine is. The mine is a huge open pit, but new technology proved unreliable, resulting in the pollution of the nearest lakes. Great promises have become a nightmare.*

*At this spiritual gathering of an old revival movement there was a panel discussion on our intergenerational responsibility for nature. The gathering also consisted of thousands of people sitting prayerfully together under God's sky in the rain or the sunshine (in Sotkamo it was mostly in the rain), singing old contemplative hymns and listening to short speeches.*

*At the gathering's final session there is a beautiful tradition: we kneel down during the last prayer. This is always a moment that brings tears to my eyes, as I feel the earth under my knees and join in a prayer of serenity with a multitude of friends.*

*So even this traditional, simple and unassuming Finnish spirituality can unite contemplation and struggle, the struggle for the generations to come.*

### ***The colonisation of the mind and liberation from it***

I have come to the conclusion that we Finns suffer from a colonisation of the mind. Our minds have been occupied, and the truth is that we are not even aware of the pressure from those who occupy them. We suffer from this occupation's symptoms, however: the suicide rate is high, and we are prone to depression and addiction.

Those symptoms suggest that something is broken. The situation resembles that of many indigenous peoples who have been violently torn from their cultures, and sometimes from their landscapes and languages.

We Finns are still connected to this land, landscape and language. So there is hope of healing.

I do not intend to go into detail here, but, as I understand it, the history of our colonisation of the mind is long. The Finno-Ugrians who settled these lands thousands of years ago were a relatively peaceful people. When threatened with conflict, they used to retreat into more remote places, deeper into the forest.

Indo-European newcomers began to arrive from the west – people with new kinds of axe, symbols of dominating power. Later, about a thousand years ago, Christianity arrived, more or less simultaneously from east and west. Unfortunately, it was brought here in an arrogant spirit. The old values – respect for trees and forests, for example – were condemned as pagan.

A gulf opened in the Finnish mind.

Perhaps the most serious phase in the colonisation of our minds came with the arrival of the ideas of the Enlightenment, with their emphasis on the utility of nature to humans. Nature was no longer seen as a home and a refuge, but as a large storehouse of commodities. Today we talk about *natural resources* and *ecosystem services* as if creation were the servant or even the slave of the mighty human being.

The latter half of the twentieth century brought new elements to this process. The Finns have urbanised rapidly, mostly in the search for work. And virtual reality absorbs nearly everyone: children and young people especially communicate increasingly with the world bent over their devices.

I don't wish to deny the positive elements of these phases. In the urban environment people find new ways of connecting and create something that did not previously exist. In the virtual world you can easily communicate with others around the world. I have myself enjoyed being able to create connections with Bolivia from my desk.

However, from the perspective of our relationship with nature, urbanisation and communication via machines are alienating things. How can a child get to know the forest if they never go there? How can an emotional bond be made with the forest? How can they be awakened to the sacredness of nature?

And what of our relationship with animals here in the “developed” world? In a few decades, in my lifetime, the keeping of animals for milk, meat and eggs has become an industrial activity. Millions of animals have been deprived of the possibility to live naturally. And then there are the animals which suffer pain and stress because of human vanity: animals exploited for their fur and most of those used for laboratory tests.

The people who first came to live here had a very different relationship with nature. We could call their cosmovision animal-centric, because in their rock paintings – dating to five or six millennia before our time – the elk is as common a motif as is the human being. Before Christianity the central spiritual figure was the bear.

Our ancestors thought that they were related to the bear, descendants of an alliance of bear and human.

The bear was so sacred that you were not allowed to pronounce its real name. There were lots of euphemisms, one of which – *kontio* – forms part of the name of my current home community *Kontiolahti (Bear Bay)*. Bears still live in the forests here, a fact that is a source of joy for me. I

have never seen a bear in nature, but I am pretty sure that bears have seen me, absorbed in picking blueberries in the forest.

What about Christianity? I return to the idea that we must repent of the mistakes that have been made in spreading its message, and learn from them.

I think it is possible in the twenty-first century to find a new understanding of what Christianity can mean in each person's cultural context. In my own I might ask: how can the respect for nature so inherent in the old thinking again find its place? We Finns and the Saami might hold a mirror in front of the Christian tradition and help it to see itself in a different light and to seek a more understandable Christianity, approached from the perspective of a more holistic world view.

This kind of communal *metanoia* and ecological conversion would reveal the essence of Christianity as a liberation movement. In the twenty-first century a wisdom Christianity can be the most important tool for the liberation of the colonised mind!

The Finnish mind has been stripped, but I see saplings. A new forest is growing.

How this colonisation of the mind has touched other peoples should be pondered by everyone in their own context.

And to be clear: I want to emphasise that an appreciation of the treasures in one's own culture does not stem from a nationalistic urge to think that one is higher and better than others. The aim is precisely the opposite, because when you find a solid rock under your feet, your identity on your cultural continuum, you don't need to be afraid of others. I can admit that my culture is a mixture of different features and appreciate this. And I can turn to others with interest and respect, wishing to get to know how they see the world.

*In 2006 I was shocked to hear that an international mining company was prospecting for uranium on the border between Kontiolahti and the neighbouring community. A uranium mine here? With all these people living here? And so close to the place where these communities pump the water they use every day??*

*A citizens' movement against uranium mining was launched. I asked myself what kind of "ecotheologian" I would be if I didn't join it. So I joined with lots of different people: farmers, artists, students, church people... Together we planned and implemented various events and campaigns. Years passed, and we thought that nothing would stop mammon's plans. But finally, in the autumn of 2013, the mining company announced that it was withdrawing from the project.*

*During the uranium struggle I once dreamed of a pike. The great pike is one of the central figures of old Finnish poetry.*

I am wading in shallow water.

At the bottom of the lake I see the branch of a tree –  
or so I think.

It turns out to be a huge pike.

I feel terror  
when I realise that the water of the lake is polluted,  
radioactive.

The water flowing here from a sacred place  
is dead;  
soon the pike will die  
and we will too.

I want to wake up from this dream.

In the dream the pike moves itself slightly –  
it is still alive.

Perhaps we will awake  
and the pike will not die  
but swim towards us  
to give its ancient wisdom  
to help us.

### *A metamorphosis of world view and a civilisation of balance*

It has been said that when the need for a change of world view becomes urgent, the new thinking required has already been developing beneath the surface, possibly for a very long time.

The process in the twilight, in the dark cocoon, continues until wings have obtained their shape – and the butterfly takes flight. In the last phase the process of metamorphosis can be surprisingly fast.

I hope and I believe that we are on the threshold of the replacement of the mechanistic world view by another, in which the deep and holy interdependency of everything will figure prominently. In this new cosmivision we will again realise that everything is alive, and that the proper relationship of human beings with the rest of nature is an I-Thou relationship.

This new contemplative civilisation will not separate the material and spiritual dimensions of reality. The human being will be seen as an inseparable totality of body and soul – as in the Finno-Ugrian cosmivision (remember the sauna) and in the Semitic origin myths of the biblical narratives.

This civilisation will open new ways of grasping the core message of Christianity and other great spiritual currents.

In narrow, mechanistic, context-ignoring modernity the Spirit cannot breathe freely. As the dominant Western culture collapses, there is a risk that the life's unpredictability engenders violent conflict. But the other possibility is that unforeseen sources of solidarity, sharing and imagination will surface in people.

If the latter is to prevail, we need to be prepared. How?

An important way to construct a contemplative civilisation that respects nature is to seek possibilities for contemplation – the silent prayer of watching and listening. It is wise to slow down. This means a countercultural approach to the phenomenon that you, querido Papa Francisco, describe in *Laudato si'* as *rapidification*.

It is wise to seek silence, following the example of Jesus himself. Everyone can strive to retreat from the fuss of everyday business from time to time. You can exercise contemplative prayer in nature or in church or at home in your little prayer corner, a calm place – perhaps decorated with an icon. Or while sitting on a bus or waiting long hours at an airport.

It is perfectly possible to pass up on at least every other technical innovation. We can resist the pressure to consume created by advertisements or by our social networks. We can simplify our life in the joyful and free spirit of St Francis. One's relationship with technology can and must be severely selective.

We can look for ways of *kohtuus*/moderation in our everyday life and liberate ourselves from addictive consumerism.

I wish everyone would read your encyclical's important analysis of all this. You criticise the technocratic paradigm that tends to dominate every sphere of our life. You recommend moderation as an alternative. We share the same objective! :)

With you and many others I would like to find a spirituality that can form a real counterforce to mammon. Here prayer will be key: silent prayer, meditation on the Bible and the prayer of a community, the Christian congregation.

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, opens us to commune with Christ, the nucleus of reality. It helps me to put less important things in their proper place.

We should be prepared to listen to the ancient knowledge that has been proven by the test of centuries. The Christian wisdom tradition is one example, but we also need to engage in dialogue with representatives of other wisdom traditions and join our forces for the life of the world.

Like you, I especially appreciate the experience that the world's indigenous peoples have accumulated about how to be with nature.

For example, the Aymaras (rather like the Finno-Ugrian peoples) hold balance, not limitless growth, as their ideal. They aim for a reciprocal relationship between human beings, animals and the earth.

I yearn for a civilisation of balance at whose core are un-hierarchical, respectful and loving relationships. This brings to mind the central Christian image of God as the Holy Trinity, of three equal persons related by love.

The new civilisation will be based on non-violence. Men and women will value each other and everyone will be allowed to give of their best for the construction of a new humanity. It will strive to distance itself from patriarchy, the kind of male domination that often enables the maintenance of structures of violence – and this no less in our relationship with nature.

People will again recognise their fundamental belonging with nature, their awesome interdependency and the sacredness of nature.

In this way we can create a counterbalance to the one-sided belief in progress and to a modern culture that has lost its capacity to stop. We will learn to stop again, to contemplate the birds of the sky and the moss carpet of the forest and the beauty of human faces in their various colours.

We will stop, be still, check our direction. We will listen to the voice of wisdom. We will listen to

the call of Jesus, the Wisdom of God, who summons us to *metanoia* and discipleship.

Dear Pope Francis, you also wrote about intergenerational solidarity:

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” (*Laudato si'*, paragraph 160)

This made me think as follows:

- *We will value children, who are still connected to the larger mind (I suppose Jesus, too, talked about this). We will let them be children long enough. We will protect them from violence in every possible way.*
- *We will support young people as they face the pressures of this age. We will encourage those who are afraid that their whole future has been cancelled. The future is not cancelled, it is God's future. The new heavens and the new earth are in formation. We will summon them: “take heart and trust in God's power. Prepare yourselves to assume your own place in working for the life of the world.”*
- *We will respect the fact that many middle aged people want to engage in a quest for deeper thinking and the meaning of life. We will find ways to live as a community that can nourish this quest with the spiritual treasures of the Christian tradition. This age can, at its best, be a precious time of metanoia and radical commitment.*
- *We will respect the wisdom that often comes with age. We will take good care of the elders. We will remember past generations and value their insight.*
- *We will also feel connected with the generations to come in the spirit of intergenerational solidarity.*

### **“Maailma” – Finnish tools**

I would like to return briefly to the elements I have found in my own, living culture that might help to build a new civilisation. I hope you're not already bored!

My beloved language has maintained something of another world view that was once more integrated. The Finnish and Karelian regions have also given birth to a rich tradition of rune singing. In the nineteenth century a huge number of poems were collected and saved for future generations. For example, it is suggested that our national epic, the Kalevala, is based partly on the ancient knowledge of the shamanistic age.

The structure of Finnish differs considerably from Indo-European languages, like Swedish or

Russian. In most Indo-European languages many prepositions are used, whereas in Finnish you attach endings to words. So our words are long and contain a lot of information.

Take the Finnish word *maahanmuuttajataustaisillekin*. To translate it into English requires a lot of words, something like “also for those who come from an immigrant background”.

This section’s title contains the Finnish word *maailma*. It says something about our language and the way we think: take two elements, first *maa*, which means “earth”, and then *ilma*, which means “air” or “sky”. Put them together as a pair of equals, and you create a new totality.

Repetition is typical in our old poetry. This reminds me of liturgy, where repetition is also important.

My mother tongue is remarkably onomatopoeic, which means that it mimics different sounds. This tells me that my ancestors listened carefully to the sounds of their environment and included them in their speech.

There is no grammatical gender in Finnish. We refer to both women and men with the word *hän* (“she” or “he”). What a gift to theologians: every time I speak of God I do not need to define God’s gender!

Finnish could be a rich theological and philosophical language. Unfortunately, only Greek, German and American philosophy have been considered “real” and “universal”. But there are now voices, for example, from Latin America (like Enrique Dussel), that want to make it clear that this kind of (Indo-)Eurocentrism is outdated. We need philosophies, ways of loving wisdom, from other contexts. We need different mental models, because every model has its blind spots.

The old Finnish thinking did not like exact definitions and categories. Borders can be porous. Reality is not either/or, but *sekä/että* (“both/and”).

You may ask if this fabulous Finnishness has any weaknesses. It does. The tendency to avoid conflict can also be a problem. Sometimes conflict has to be faced and the most valuable things protected. And perhaps we are too melancholic. Some more joy, please, the joy that changes the world!

The Finnish way of being is in certain ways static or stiff. To balance this we need some Indo-European dynamism. It’s good to be a mixture.

If we could only appreciate the most valuable things in our old world view and free ourselves from the colonisation of the mind we could *consciously* integrate the eastern and western elements of our souls. This would heal our inner wound – our gulf – and liberate a huge amount of energy for the construction of a new civilisation.

Perhaps all this could happen on a global scale? If we who belong to the modern dominant Western culture were to become humbler and listen to others with respect, humanity’s gulfs could be bridged.

Accusations of romanticising (not from you, querido Papa Francisco, but from some others...) are already ringing in my ears. But not every quest for ancient wisdom means romanticising. Indeed, I don’t think nineteenth century Romanticism can offer a sufficiently strong basis for the cultural shift we need now. We must connect ourselves with something much deeper; we must throw our nets into deeper waters (as Jesus told Peter in Luke 5), where there are an abundance and power that

may surprise us.

I start by throwing my nets into the deep waters of my own culture. But I very much need companions for dialogue, and I have found them in Bolivia, for example.

### **“Suma qamaña” – Aymara wisdom**

My multi-dialogue with the Bolivians began through the mediation of a book. It is a book about the interconnectedness of creation and salvation in theologies around the world. I wrote an article for it (about Ivone Gebara), and so did María Chavez, an Aymara theologian.

This summer I followed your visit to Bolivia via the internet. I appreciated the beautiful way you expressed your respect for the indigenous peoples of the country and for their thinking. You also apologised for the Church’s historical sins against them, which was a much needed gesture.

Anyway, I grew interested in the thinking of the Aymaras as I was reading María’s article *Land as Mother*. In her text I first encountered the Aymaras’ call to a respectful multi-dialogue of equals. I decided to answer the call because I felt a need to meet people who, like me, were working with the fascinating theme of theology’s sensitivity to its context.

So last spring I spent three extremely interesting weeks in Bolivia. I had discussions with Bolivian – most of them Aymara – philosophers, theologians, pastors and activists. I was filled with wonder at the landscapes, I ate delicious food and for the first time in my life I contemplated the Southern Cross in the starry sky.

I also had the opportunity to visit the holy Lake Titicaca. With the group of students I was travelling with I stayed overnight in a small Aymara village by the lake. The lake was wonderfully beautiful and the village people hospitable.

I did not meet María in Bolivia because, as I had already heard some time before, she had died of cancer. But I am so grateful to her for what her thinking has taught me.

The Earth is at the core of the thinking and spirituality of María and other Aymara theologians. From this perspective the dominant global economic system is gravely inadequate. The consumerist culture disrupts Earth’s delicate balance systems.

According to María modern Eurocentric thinking, the Enlightenment paradigm, allows the maltreatment of our Mother Earth. This requires us to listen to the insights of indigenous peoples.

Latin American indigenous peoples start their God-Talk consciously from within their own contexts and cosmovisions. On this contextuality they base the larger, global significance of their insights. The aim of their theologies is to get rid of the burdens of colonisation and patriarchy, so that the transformative power of spirituality can be released.

These approaches to theology are unabashedly political, in the broadest meaning of the word. How could they not be, born as they are in the midst of the struggles of everyday life? In Bolivia most of the indigenous population belong among the poorest, so there are more than enough everyday problems to solve.

Indigenous theology is done by both Catholic and Protestant Christians. They have a serious and respectful dialogue with their own culture and with its ancient spirituality. During the last five

hundred years the old spirituality and Christianity have been mixed together. Many have experienced and experience in their hearts an often painful search for a balance between these two sources. I got the impression during my stay that many have also found a balance.

My colleague María addresses the theme I have worked with for a long time: it is time to return to an understanding of the earth as sacred. Such a return should be done on the basis that God is present in nature, but not identical with it. She writes:

“By drawing from indigenous worldviews and traditional wisdom, indigenous theology opens space to consider the earth as sacred. Earth/Creation is not conceived only as material nature but as a living reality with whom relationships characterized by mutual care are possible. Creation is considered as a web of life where the human being is not the apex or superior but just part of the whole living organism. The whole cosmos is perceived as connected and integrated. Earth is at the centre of religious experience. This relationship with Earth is deeply spiritual.” (p. 307)

María uses the Aymara word *Pachamama* of Mother Earth, the maternal matrix of the entire cosmos. This is close to St Francis’s tender language about the Earth as mother and sister.

And thank you for your words at the civil movements gathering in Santa Cruz, Bolivia in July. There you spoke for the goal that there should no longer be any family without a lodging, any farmer without land, any peoples without self-determination, any child without a childhood, any young people without opportunities and any old people without a dignified old age. You also called everyone to take good care of Mother Earth.

During my trip I became acquainted with a couple of insightful philosophers, or rather, where Josef Estermann was concerned, with his several books. Josef worked for a long time in Bolivia, although he is now based in Switzerland. His investigations concerning Andean philosophy and theology are profound, and I got the impression that the Aymaras and Quechuas appreciate his work.

Josef also thinks that Christians suffer from a colonisation of our minds or souls. This can be seen in the idea that only European, Hellenistic philosophy can offer theology a suitable frame of reference. This is not so, for “Hellenistic” theology is only one contextual theology which boasts of being universally relevant.

What we need is a de-Hellenisation of theology. Indeed, even the word *theo-logy* is somewhat burdened, because the Greek words *theos* (god) and *logos* (word, teaching, etc.) have long histories. These histories and the meanings they have given to these words do not necessarily meet the thinking of other contexts.

Would it be better for me, too, to speak more about the *wisdom* of the forest than a theology of the forest?

Josef reflects on the question of the kind of rites we Christians need in this era of climate change. What kind of rites could support the transition to a new civilisation?

And I also ask what we might retrieve from the riches of Christian tradition, and how we might celebrate them in a way that opens up horizons for the people of our times.

The philosopher Javier Medina in La Paz, Bolivia, has also considered the transition from an either/or paradigm to a different, more holistic one. Aymara culture is strongly reciprocal (both/and). You can feel this, for example, in their concept of the human being: a man and a woman together (in marriage) are considered a whole human being. And community leadership belongs to

men and women together.

Javier, together with many Aymara intellectuals, has established the concept of *suma qamaña*, in Spanish *vivir bien*, in English *to live well*. The concept points to the indigenous Andean idea that you can only live well in connection with a community consisting of other people, animals and land. From this, new civil movements have emerged.

In Eastern Finland we have our own movement called *Kohtuusliike* (the Moderate Lifestyle Movement). It is a little like the *suma qamaña* movements in that we also attempt to be connected with the deepest waters of our own culture.

Back to Javier... I want to mention how enthusiastic he is about the philosophical implications of the newest findings in the natural sciences. Quantum physics especially has shown that one cannot understand the whole of reality with mechanistic models. At both the smallest and largest scales there are different, more holistic and reciprocal rules at work.

We can see a convergence here of the Western natural sciences and the ancient and still living Aymara or Finno-Ugrian world views. This is fascinating.

*In the tiny Aymara village by Lake Titicaca we were at an elevation of nearly four thousand metres. The village is not frequented much by tourists, but is a normal village, most of whose inhabitants are elderly. The younger generations have migrated to the cities. There are, however, still enough young families with children for the village to have a working school. My companions and I slept on its floor.*

*The villagers welcomed us warmly with traditional ceremonies at the lakeside. We sat down on the ground, and the women opened the cloths they carried on their backs, which contained tasty local food: potato, dried potato, Titicaca fish, corn and cheese.*

*Later we celebrated a rite of restoration. It was led by an elderly man called Calixto, who was assisted by his wife. He introduced himself as a deacon of the Catholic Church, but also as someone who continues the traditional Aymara spirituality. The rite of restoration was about restoring our balance with the Earth. It was also about recovering our inner balance, for Calixto was of the opinion that there is a significant internal vacuum inside so many today. During the rite we were also able to ask for health, liberation from anxiety and success in making our own callings true.*

*Calixto set a colourful cloth on the ground and on it a white sheet of paper. The rite began with words of confession and purification, using Christian formulations. Various symbols were then put on the paper as a way of expressing gratitude to Mother Earth for her gifts, or our grief for the imbalance that reigns in this world between human beings and Earth.*

*The villagers and we visitors participated in many ways, placing little symbols on the paper. Finally, the cloth and everything on it was thrown into a fire; the gifts to Mother Earth were burned. We stood silently by the fire and smoke. The rite concluded with the Our Father and the Ave Maria.*

*I felt touched by the rite. I was thankful for the opportunity to take part in it, to glimpse how Aymara spirituality lives not so much in words but in rites of healing. As a Christian theologian I found myself asking why I couldn't find the same healing and sustaining divine reality at work in our own "rites of restoration" like the Eucharist. During the evening I had long discussions about*

*all this with Calixto. His journey has led to a life and work in which Christianity is reconciled with the old cosmivision that expresses itself especially through healing rites. Jesus and Pachamama meet.*

### ***The latest science supports the metamorphosis***

Unfortunately I cannot claim to be an expert in the fields that follow, but I have decided not to let it stop me from selecting some of their very interesting features. I have tried to find specialists who express themselves clearly and lean on them.

These fields of research are quantum physics and the philosophical discussion it raises, brain research and linguistics. I consider all of them to be important discussion partners for theology today.

The social sciences have been important discussion partners for liberation theologies. They still have much to contribute, but I am a little critical of their methodologies these days. Can I perceive in them, at least in the background, some mechanistic presuppositions?

The fundamental findings of *quantum physics* a hundred years ago revolutionised science's understanding of the essence of matter. Not everything is as clearly defined as in Newton's models. Matter is more inconstant: there is always an element of inexactitude that alerts us to the fact that the setting of an experiment is in itself in interaction. It depends on the researcher and the moment of the experiment if matter is perceived as a particle or a wave.

These results have done away with the image of the universe as a machine composed of separate parts. But in the face of this challenge most physicians have abandoned the attempt to understand the innate essence of the world. Many of them have simply stated that quantum theory works and that with it you can control reality, even though you cannot understand it. It was in applying the theory that they began to develop televisions and digital computers...

But there are some who do not abandon the philosophical questions. For example, in Finland there is a team of researchers who are asking if we are already on the brink of a new world view – one which encompasses a new scientific world view. In this world view there is no definitive border between organic and inorganic nature.

In other words they are saying that every living thing is conscient, at least in some rudimentary form. Everything is alive.

I have been afforded a glimpse into the fascinating world of *brain research* especially through the ideas of Iain McGilchrist. He is a psychiatrist and philosopher who has tried to integrate the important findings of neurological experiments about the qualities of the human brain with an analysis of the history of Western culture. With this kind of global picture one needs to ignore some details, but, in spite of the risks, I think we need this kind of approach.

McGilchrist's most renowned book is called *The Master and His Emissary. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (2009). The central claim of the book is that the brain's hemispheres differ from each other not so much in *what* they deal with but *how* they deal with it.

For example, both hemispheres deal with language. The left approaches language by making distinctions and categories and in striving for unambiguity. It is not concerned with context.

The right hemisphere is at home with intuition and feelings, and it immediately perceives things as large totalities. The language it prefers consists of images, parables and poetry. It values the multifaceted nature of reality and consciousness of context.

Iain McGilchrist emphasises that we need the cooperation of both hemispheres. But the right one, the one that understands totalities, should be the leader – the Master, as the book's basic theme expresses it. We are meant to advance with the guidance of wisdom, and the role of analytical reason is to act as a servant and emissary.

And yet in the history of the Western world we have witnessed a development over a long period in which the servant has begun to think too much of itself. The left hemisphere sees itself as the leader, and it wishes to ignore and marginalise the working methods of the right. The more it does so, the more it wants to.

Does this sound familiar? For example, theology (that is, Western theology and, admittedly, especially Protestant theology) has been understood since the Middle Ages predominantly as *scientia*, as Sure Knowledge. Theologians have defined their task as making definitions and systematising, using doctrine as a means of control. Meanwhile, the *sapiential*, or wisdom, dimension of theology has been undervalued.

And in today's academic world scarcely anyone admits to be searching for wisdom. Our ideal of science is largely defined by the criteria of the left hemisphere. Researchers prefer analysis, clear and unambiguous definitions, formulas and mechanistic models. Science is becoming ever more fragmented, and it risks losing sight of totalities.

Fortunately, there are some dissenting voices in the academic world. Is science capable of repairing itself after all? Or will the philosophers inspired by quantum theory, for example, be left on the margins?

Like Iain McGilchrist, I am worried about the strength of the colonising power of the left hemisphere. I wonder, for example, what all this unruly technologisation is doing to the brains of children and young people and to the development of their minds. If your child already has an iPad in his or her early years, will its daily use make them prefer the working of the left hemisphere at the expense of a more balanced approach?

Will the parts of a child's brain that prefer play and wonderment of nature wither away? The part of the child's mind that Jesus praised?

This again brings to mind your criticism of overenthusiastic technologisation in *Laudato si'*. How I wish people would listen to you!

Finally, a couple of words about *linguistics*. The Norwegian researcher Frode Strømnes seems to value the right hemisphere when he writes that in producing language we do not principally rely on separate words but on more integrated mental models.

He suggests there are many such mental models. He illustrates this by referring to Swedish and Finnish. In brief, in Swedish there is extensive use of prepositions. They express movement. The mental model of Finnish is more static, and one attaches endings to words.

Different mental models influence how speakers describe the different phenomena of reality. Based on Strømnes' research there has been discussion about the blind spots every concept of reality has. For example, Indo-European linear thinking believes in the possibility of limitless growth. This is a

little problematic on a limited planet.

So we need different mental models to operate at the same time if we are to form a more truthful picture of reality. This is why I am so interested in researching the Finno-Ugrian layer of my own culture and the Aymara cosmovision. I suppose they both represent models in which the relationship between the right and the left hemispheres is more balanced than in our dominant Western culture.

We need a multi-dialogue if we are to find the wisdom that will allow us to dwell in harmony on the only home we have, this planet Earth.

*In Bolivia I stayed at an ecumenical institute called ISEAT. The Rector is an Aymara theologian called Vicenta Mamani. She is a beautiful sight in her traditional dress, which she even wears on work days. Vicenta comes from a small village. Although she has studied theology extensively, she has not forgotten her roots.*

*In some of her writings Vicenta describes potato cultivation in her home village. It was holy work. During the cultivation year different phases each had their respective rituals. You talked to the potatoes as you worked, even telling them jokes, because the potato – and everything else – is considered alive.*

*Vicenta sees no conflict between this ancient cosmological wisdom and Christianity.*

### ***Civil movements allow people to live in the new civilisation***

Last May I participated in the Finnish Social Forum in Helsinki. The keynote speaker was the well-known Philippine activist, Nicanor Perlas. It was truly inspiring to hear his views about what civil society should be doing now, and how it should be organised.

Indeed, his ideas often came very close to your ideas in *Laudato si'*. For example, Perlas believes the rush of technology towards an increasingly powerful artificial intelligence is receiving too little attention as a future threat.

Perlas hopes that civil society can see a uniting of the power of movements seeking societal transformation with consciousness movements. I suppose by consciousness movements he means, for example, those that see spirituality as an essential element in changing the world (deep ecology, mindfulness, etc.).

In the movements that have been influenced by *suma qamaña* (to live well) thinking spirituality is an inseparable part of the totality. Everything is based on a spiritual relationship with Mother Earth.

In secularised Finland the alliance of activism and spirituality may seem strange. But its time is about to come.

In our moderate lifestyle movement (*Kohtuusliike*) we are seeking a counterbalance and alternative to consumerism. So we bring together reasonable, high quality societal analysis with art and being in nature. We want to connect with the whole human being, to activate the cooperation of both brain hemispheres in the quest for the most effective ways to act.

Our movement was born in a village called Koli. Koli Hill is an ancient holy mountain. It is now partly a tourist site, but, thank God (and through the work of a courageous civil movement some decades ago), most of the area is now protected as a national park. From the top of the hill a most beautiful view opens onto Lake Pielinen.

Our movement consciously seeks to cherish the connectedness with nature and the sense of the sacredness of creation of which Koli is a symbol.

Every other autumn we organise a three day seminar, the first day of which takes place at the university in the city and the rest in the village of Koli. Part of the seminar involves wandering in the national park, possibly accompanied by theatre, dance or silence.

From time to time there are also elements of Christian spirituality in our activities, although by no means everyone in our movement is Christian. But when the spiritual dimension has been offered without any imperialism, and preferably in surprising ways, it has found its place.

And when a space opens for Christian spirituality, one has to proceed from the nucleus, from the wisdom tradition and silence – and one has to make the political significance of all this visible.

I value your idea, querido Papa Francisco, that we need a deep spirituality if we are to nurture a culture that can form a real alternative to the modern Western culture that is so focused on consumption and technology – a culture that can restore a sense of limits and apply the brakes to this unruly technologisation and extractivism.

I gather that you know the Canadian author Naomi Klein and her book *This Changes Everything* (2014). In it she describes the crisis faced by modern capitalism and the madness of extractivism in the era of climate change.

Naomi sees quite a lot of hope in the way ordinary people around the world come together and create movements to act for nature and for their own spheres of life. New alliances are being made, for example between traditional civil movements and movements of indigenous peoples.

Nevertheless, Naomi remarks that these efforts will be fruitless unless they are understood as part of a much broader battle of world views. I wonder if she is longing for a multi-dialogue to achieve this. Religious communities have tools for this battle, if they know how to use them. You, dear Pope Francis, know how to use them; you are working for this kind of transformation. Those activists who see the importance of the power of spirituality and open themselves to it also form an important part of the battle.

Joy transforms the world. I can see this in our own *Kohtuusliike*: alone it would be too depressing to ponder the massive global problems, but with others the anguish is relieved when it is channelled into action.

It is enjoyable to brainstorm and to bring ideas to fruition. And at the same time we simply have fun, organising outdoor parties and going to the theatre.

I also enjoy seeing that with so little (almost no) money so much can be achieved when people are enthusiastic and devote their time and skills to a shared objective. When you seek ways to live well with others, you are already living well. We already live in a new, communal civilisation. I have found all this an intensely spiritual experience.

*Some recent examples of the activities of our Kohtuusliike:*

- *We acquired more information about the free trade agreement (TTIP, an agreement between the European Union and the USA) negotiations. We participated in an event on the market place and told people about our criticisms of the negotiations.*
- *We went to the village of Selkie to learn about traditional fishing practices. We caught some fish and a local man taught us how to prepare it. It was delicious.*
- *We visited the theatre. Some young drama students had produced an impressive interpretation of Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov.*
- *We invited local members of parliament to a "hearing". We also invited other civil movements to give their view of what they think they should be doing now. On the same evening we had a brainstorming session – in which the MPs participated – addressing the theme "What kind of new work and new economy do we need to construct a sustainable society?" It was an interesting evening.*
- *We wrote a pamphlet called Kohtuus in danger – happy times on a limited planet?*

*A tip: anyone can start a movement like this, combining ideas and energy with a few others.*

### ***Wisdom and an integrated mind***

As Western civilisation – which has spread to so many areas of the world – collapses, it is essential to remain calm. That way paralysis can be avoided and new possibilities can be seen.

It is good to try to be ready for crises. A task of our *Kohtuus* movement is to look far ahead, anticipate threats and start mental and also material preparation for change.

The Christian wisdom tradition offers expert knowledge about mental preparation. It is an experience of millennia and presents a deep understanding of how the human mind works. The wisdom teachings of different religions often converge here. So it is not surprising that Christian meditation has much in common with eastern traditions of meditation, for example with the Buddhist or Taoist traditions. There are also convergences with Jewish and Sufi (Islamic) mysticism, as you have shown in your encyclical.

Of course, there are also differences. For example, as I understand it, although mindfulness practices are based on Buddhist ideas, they are meant to offer people a way of meditation independent of religion. If I am right, mindfulness seeks to direct one's attention towards one's own mind and its conscious presence, whereas Christian meditation seeks to direct oneself consciously towards God (and thus outwards, towards loving one's neighbour).

It has been said that in contemplative prayer one is led to action by an irresistible power.

What are meditation and contemplation all about? They are about finding the connection between the everyday mind and the larger mind. My everyday mind, my ego, is the one that easily turns in on itself, worrying about the past and the future.

The larger mind allows me to let go of my all too human need for security, prestige or control.

Framing this in reference to the picture Iain McGilchrist draws of the essences of the brain's hemispheres, I cannot help but think that the right hemisphere is the natural home of the wisdom traditions. But of course the greatest mystery, our awakening to communion with God, cannot and

need not be explained by the natural sciences.

In any case the integrated mind connects both hemispheres and creates a certain balance between them. When this happens the larger mind gets the leadership role it is meant to have. It is the source of wisdom. An integrated mind is open to how art approaches reality. It understands the language of images and metaphors, and it is often drawn to silence.

This brings to mind the Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt. His life story can serve as a pattern for the whole of Western culture. Pärt's music of the 1950s sounds rather chaotic to my ears. I suppose it describes the atmosphere of Soviet Estonia well. But it does not open a way to another world.

Pärt was longing to find his own voice. For nearly a decade he ceased composing, dedicating himself to researching the tradition of the European music of old. And he joined the Orthodox Church. Orthodox spirituality is strongly grounded in the right hemisphere...

Out of all this Pärt's later, calmer music, which brings together nature and culture, east and west, emerged. In his simple music I hear repetition that reminds me of the old rune singers of the Finno-Ugrian cultures. I hear sounds of nature, like the sound of ice melting and water drops striking the surface of a lake.

And all the time Pärt is not "only returning" to something old, "romanticising", but he is creating something new.

Similarly, some Finnish artists have sought to create a *sekä/että* (both/and) culture. Near our summer cottage a sculptor called Eva Ryyänänen lived and worked. Nature, animals and children were central themes for her. One can sense something of the spirituality of the Finnish relationship with nature in her work.

In the graphics of Outi Heiskanen the border between human beings and animals is porous. Miina Äkkijyrkkä depicts cows, especially, with love and great skill. The poet Eeva Kilpi defends animals.

I wonder if these Finno-Ugrian cultures – Finnish, Estonian and Saami – might serve as bridges between east and west. What other bridges might we find or build?

One Saami leader has expressed the hope that churches might be bridges from a mechanistic to a more holistic world view.

Churches know about both brain hemispheres and how to bring them together. The tradition of Christian mysticism offers a variety of good ways. For indigenous peoples (and for Finns, too), nature is often the central place of prayer.

It is time for churches to awaken to what they have to offer seekers. At the same time, this presupposes that churches themselves are ready to let go of the driftwood that has attached itself to the stream of tradition. It is an obstacle to contemporary people understanding what Christianity is all about.

I am thinking about patriarchy, for example, or the overemphasis on words in some churches, or the stiffened structures of others. Communities as well as individuals need to face a time of *metanoia*, because it is necessary and urgent that the waters of tradition be allowed to flow. When water stands still it becomes stagnant. We are in such an emergency that we desperately need living, flowing water and the free liberating winds of the Spirit.

*My beloved spiritual mother was a poet and theologian called Anna-Maija Raittila. She expressed her wisdom theology in silence, action, poetry, prayer and her diaries. I wish to share one of her poems with you:*

A short mass

Silent  
as mushrooms and grass and ants  
in the rain  
were the heavens and earth full  
of God's glory

*(translation by Maria Immonen)*

### ***The contemplative groundwater of Christianity***

I am writing this to you from our summer cottage by Lake Pielinen. On the other side of the lake I can see the Koli Hill. It is a powerful landscape.

Just a moment ago I found the first ripe blueberries in this sunny place. Hmm... Soon the berry picking season will begin and there will be no more time for writing letters. The time of berry picking meditation will begin.

So far I have emphasised the significance of the wisdom tradition as the central feature of Christianity. I believe that when we approach other dimensions through it they find their own places and become comprehensible.

These other important dimensions are doctrine and ethics. If the wisdom tradition or spirituality is the master, doctrine is its emissary or servant. Its task is to shelter the mystery and the paradox. It is good to respect doctrine because it helps us to maintain the tradition's identity, and is thus a living continuum with its transforming power. But we must not allow doctrine to think too much of itself (which it is inclined to do).

Ethics means concrete deeds of love. In Lutheran theology we greatly value the universal church's understanding that when a person is touched by the grace of God, there arises a deep gratitude in them which is channelled to neighbourly love. And Christians have no basis for drawing borders in space or time to define who their neighbour is. Those yet unborn – up to seven generations (as the North American indigenous peoples say) – long for our love.

*Now I feel compelled to tell you what I am watching while I write this. From the window in front of me I can see the lake, and a big stone near the shore. A mother goosander has just clambered on to the stone to rest with eleven of her young. Yes, it seems that they are all safe and well. Now the young ones are already teenagers, but they were hatched under this cottage.*

In contemplation one is led – God leads the person – to act. The human being feels they are so filled with love that it spills over to others. At least, one can pray that this happens. One can remove obstacles from the stream of love by searching for opportunities to pray silently in nature, in a church or at home. Everyone can look for the way of praying that suits them. Perhaps something you really like can be a prayer? Watching the lake, bathing in the sauna, listening to music, stroking

a cat, brainstorming in a civil movement? God can speak in so many ways.

The spirituality of the Taizé community in France provides a vocabulary for and makes visible the connection between *contemplation* and *struggle*. By struggle they mean the battle for a more just world, “so that no person may again be the victim of another”. The struggle is non-violent.

You are a Jesuit, nourished by the spiritual tradition of St Ignatius of Loyola. I know that in this spirituality contemplation and action are also inseparably intertwined. The human being is a *contemplativus in actione*.

I have admired how you Jesuits have courageously defended the poor in Latin America. In El Salvador I once participated in a procession to commemorate the Jesuit intellectuals who were murdered at the Catholic University. They, like Archbishop Oscar Romero, had given their talents to the struggle for justice. As we walked, we shouted their names: *Oscar Romero, presente!* I felt that they were truly present.

Ignatian spirituality gives us magnificent tools to meditate on the Bible. They help stories that have become “too familiar” to begin to live again and mediate God’s words directly to me, right now, and sometimes in very surprising ways.

These two traditions, Ignatian and Franciscan, are very dear to you and also to me. They are both Christ-centred and in this lies their power.

Jesus Christ himself – his whole life – sets a strong pattern of how silent prayer and courageous action belong together. Jesus regularly retreated to a mountain or to the Mount of Olives or to other deserted places to be alone – or to be with his Father. He returned to crowds that were full of human longing, petitions and accusations. He grasped his work of healing, proclaiming and teaching.

Jesus also taught us to pray with words, especially in the Lord’s Prayer. But his example suggests this pattern: use few words and remain in a quiet place for long periods.

Jesus was and is the Word but he is also Wisdom. In him the groundwater of wisdom originating in the Hebrew Scriptures springs to the surface. It seems to me that this is how he himself experiences his role, because in parts of the Gospels Jesus refers to himself as Wisdom (see for example Matt. 11, 19 or Luke 11, 31-32).

He was a teacher of wisdom whose core message was: change your minds! From one perspective this might mean: connect your everyday mind to your larger mind so the storms will calm. Then you will live as branches of the vine and the life of the vine will flow into you.

Jesus taught with metaphors and parables. With his parables he tried to shake his listeners so that they could detach themselves from the familiarity of the everyday mind that makes us numb.

Querido Papa Francisco, many of your words do the same. For example, these words from your Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*:

“I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

***Steps towards a different world view***

The time has come to end this letter – a much longer one than I had planned – and to draw some threads together.

In writing to you I have tried to find words for my intuitions. I have written a lot about issues that you already know better than well, but my words are also meant for those who do not know much about them.

In my mind I see a church that is deeply contemplative, which also radically loves nature and all who are vulnerable. I don't think this will be possible unless we can replace the Western mechanistic world view with another. The fundamental question is: how can you change a dominant world view in practice?

I ask this of you because you are already working for this transformation in many ways. And I ask it of myself, and of all of us. Might the following steps be useful? What other steps might we take? Let's keep writing!

Steps for those longing for a different world:

1. Go to the forest. (Or to the shore, the mountain, the swamp, the park, everyone to her or his favourite landscape.) Be silent there; use all your senses; just be with nature.
2. Perhaps someone will ask: "What about me? I live in a very urban setting and I don't have a relationship with nature." Well, you can begin to create one for yourself. Perhaps there are trees in your city. Find one, touch it, get to know it and stay close to it in wonderment.
3. Search for places of contemplation or find other ways that silent prayer comes naturally to you. You can make such a place in your home, in a corner that is as peaceful as possible, with a small home altar. Try to maintain a calm, integrated mind.
4. It is good for the Christian to participate regularly in the Holy Mass, in the Holy Communion. Be faithful in this. Perhaps you'll find ways to make the service warmer, more attractive and more joyful. At its best liturgy can be a powerful way to make the new world view concrete. The Eucharist is a meal that banishes despair.
5. Start your own civil movement, and make it as un-bureaucratic as possible. Trust in each other's ideas and creativity. Join forces with other movements. And amidst demanding challenges don't forget to have fun, too.
6. Strive for moderation. If you simplify your life, what is it that you find more time and energy for? How might you then share more with those in need and thus be richer yourself? The quickest way to ease the global energy crisis is to use less energy. Fly only if it is absolutely necessary. Don't buy things without thinking first.
7. Seek dialogue with different people, in a spirit of respect and equality. In true dialogue participants are ready to learn something new. With the help of multi-dialogue it is possible to see the world simultaneously from the perspective of different mental models. It will, at last, be possible to really listen to the views of indigenous peoples.
8. Love and respect animals. This will mean in practice that we use our power as citizens and influence the ways animals that produce milk or meat are treated. What we eat is also a climate issue. (Let's eat less meat!)
9. Let us save pristine nature whenever possible. Get involved in campaigns for the local environment or places further afield, for their forests, lakes and seas. Seek new but non-violent ways to act.
10. If you are young (or even if you are older), think seriously about the work you want to do, and how you wish to use your time and skills. With what kind of work can you best serve your neighbour and nature?
11. Align yourself, as the Taizé community exhorts us, "Let the spirit of the Beatitudes fill you, the spirit of joy, simplicity and mercifulness".

I invite everyone who reads this letter to continue a multi-dialogue with us!

Querido Papa Francisco, I have written this open letter in a spirit of gratitude. I would like to continue a discussion about everything that *Laudato si'* has awakened in my mind – but I don't expect a response from you.

But I do wait with interest to see what you are going to do or say next. :)

To be honest, I write with the energy of despair. I truly hope that the discussion you have emphasised – about the importance of spirituality in making this great change – will continue and grow stronger. It is hard for me to see hope in anything other than the transformative power of the Spirit. I try to cling to the idea that joy transforms the world.

Once again, thank you for your letter! It is a love letter to humanity. May God continue to pour on you wisdom, power and health for your responsibilities. May God give you lots of joy!

In the summer sunshine at the cottage by the lakeside,

Pauliina Kainulainen

My email address is [pauliina.kainulainen@luukku.com](mailto:pauliina.kainulainen@luukku.com)  
Please feel free to contact me to continue the dialogue.

This letter has been translated by myself and proofread by Rupert Moreton: thank you Rupert!

Here are the most important articles or books I refer to:

María Chavez Quispe, "Land as Mother: An Indigenous-Theology Perspective" in: *Creation and Salvation. Volume 2: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements*. Ed. by Ernst M. Conradie. Zürich, LIT 2012.

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. the Climate*. London et al., Allen Lane 2014.

Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. New Haven & London, Yale University Press 2009.