

# Singular thinking 1: Applause to you, you are doing great!

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**L**ast night I woke up at 3 am. Musing about the energy transition, I was reminded of the well-known storyline of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). In the legend of "The Grand Inquisitor" (in *The Brothers Karamazov*), the returned Christ is initially not recognized by the major ecclesiastical institutions (for example, the Grand Inquisitor is too busy with speeches and ceremonies). When he silently performs a miracle - bringing back a girl from the dead - he is recognized after all, only to be told that his return is now ill-timed. The institutionalized pomp and circumstance based on the "previous" Christ worship has its own agenda, and this also means that Dostoyevsky's 19th century Christ as a prisoner is silenced, now by the church instead of Pontius Pilate.

I realize with horror that I have always seen this story as institutionalized insincerity, that the lords of the church simply could no longer open themselves to the true sincerity of Christ. But now I see that probably also "the Grand Inquisitor" and other Church Fathers sincerely believed in their own stories and truths. Scientists, journalists, administrators, all of us, are no different.

For example, I read almost weekly about 'the energy transition' (singular), about how electricity can be generated more economically, for example with bromine from seawater for batteries, or about promising fusion processes. As if this transition is only about being able to generate and use more energy, which will preferably remain available for a longer period of time and is less polluting. In doing so, we are overlooking a much more important transition, which is taking place in our own home this winter: driven by enormous energy and fuel prices, we are using significantly less energy to heat our home. We appear to be able to turn down the thermostat, put on a warm sweater and thus change our own behaviour. Why are we not proud of this? Why don't we applaud? The wholesomeness that returns in this behaviour change seems totally beyond us. Apparently the stage for energy transition is entirely reserved for tech: renewable energy. The problem is singular thinking! More than ever, we're in a polycrisis; interconnected global crises that are entwining and worsening one another. All the different areas are connected. Technology (including energy, labour, raw materials, anthropogenic mass: the anthropocene era), economy, ecology, climate, biodiversity, all these problem areas are interrelated. Moreover, the more global the world systems become, the stronger these connections are, and the more inadequate it becomes to characterize them with only one solution or problem direction (the climate, the energy transition).

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) do point to solutions in human actions. IDG 2 is about Critical Thinking, in line with what higher education aims for, a population that can critically assess the value of opinions, evidence and plans. Never before have we had so many people with an academic education, but the thinking capacity to deal with the crises seems to be largely lacking. The description of IDG 2 includes 'Complexity awareness, Understanding of and skills in working with complex and systemic conditions and causalities', as well as 'Perspective skills, Skills in seeking, understanding and actively making use of insights from contrasting perspectives', 'Skills in seeing patterns, structuring the unknown and being able to consciously create stories' and 'Long-term orientation and Visioning, Long-term orientation and ability to formulate and sustain commitment to visions relating to the larger context'.

It is important to note that ordinary people, with their thermostats turned down and winter sweaters on, and the increasing focus on vegetarian and vegan diets, may be much more important features of the energy transition than merely hoping for better technology. By encouraging the latter and not naming the former (not recognizing the returned Christ because we are too busy with our tech "religion"), we are putting ourselves at great risk. Unlike Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, I applaud you: using less energy is the best thing that can happen to us! Thank you!