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Faith, hope and the creation

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I see poignant tragedy in Nassivera's recent column about apocalyptic environmentalism and the loss of hope. Yes it is real: as we burn the fossil fuels and slow the cooling of the earth to space, more than 90% of the excess energy is being stored in the oceans, and much of the rest is melting ice in the Arctic. The climate is on a roll for centuries ahead, and more powerful storms and weather extremes are becoming more frequent. Our greed and selfishness will drive so many species to extinction.

Remarkably he seems unaware of how most churches have colluded in the blind march of humanity towards global environmental disaster; and how this in turn has contributed to the marginalization of the mainstream churches. The great exception was the 2015 Papal Encyclical that exposed in elegant detail the exploitation of the Earth and the poor by the amoral global capitalist economy. It was the fossil fuels that gave us the tremendous power to exploit on a global scale.

Looking back over the centuries, the churches were complicit in decimating the indigenous people's world view of humanity as a deeply interconnected part of a sacred natural world. Arrogantly convinced of their superiority, they opted for the church doctrine that humanity was above the created world (in E. F. Schumacher's language), and therefore free to exploit it; with the naive belief that humanity would be protected from the consequences.

But there is a deeper challenge in the ongoing rapid transformation of the human world, first by the industrial revolution driven by fossil fuels, and then the rise of science and technology to world dominance. We invent things and if they can be marketed by individuals and corporations to make a profit, they usually are, without any social or moral controls. So the freedom to exploit and pollute on a global scale goes unchecked, mindless of the future survival of the natural world that we all depend on. On all these critical issues, separation of church and state has meant that the church has been largely silent. Just when moral guidance is needed, it is easier to retreat into the familiar comfortable walls of century-old doctrine, tacitly complicit in the amoral transformation of the Earth. All around us, we see society and its institutions clinging to the gospel of business as usual, enshrined in the freedom of the global market to exploit humanity and the created world.

Certainly we need the virtues of faith and hope, but rooted in the present reality not in the past. Over the centuries, the definition of faith was shifted from understanding the interconnected unseen web of the creation into believing and accepting church doctrine, so as

to protect the church hierarchy. Hope changed into our dreams and wishes for the future, rather than the powerful grounded motivating force which sees and creates a path to the future; as in 'Thy will be done on Earth'.

Deep humility, clarity of vision and the virtues of faith, hope and love would realign humanity as a community with the interdependent living creation. For most of us, this means sitting in the wilderness and listening deeply till we reconnect. That was exactly what Christ Jesus did; but 2000 years on, the churches suffer when they do not follow his lead.