

BAPTISM OF FIRE



2020 has begun with a baptism of fire in many areas of our beautiful Australia. Day after day, we are faced with fires on many fronts. Those of us not directly in the paths of the fires watch the images on the media. The sheer enormity, ferocity, intensity and prolongation of the crisis has us bewildered and worried.

At the same time, I am deeply moved by the courage of fire fighters and those in the path of the fires, by the spontaneous generosity, kindness and compassion of people reaching out to each other in support; I am moved by the loss and grief of those who have lost homes, stock, and livelihood, and I grieve the loss bush creatures and their habitat, and the damage to the planet....

What is our CEN response to this crisis? What kind of light can our daily hour of contemplative presence bring to this situation? It has to be something more than the demands for action on climate change which are growing louder and angrier by the day. Action is certainly needed. But action alone will not lead to long-term solutions. Action needs to come from a larger vision, from a new kind of consciousness.





What might such consciousness look like? While its character is still in the process of emerging, we do know it will see beyond the conflict and tensions inherent in a binary world. It will be a consciousness arising out of a sense of the whole, able to embrace the opposites at the root of wars and divisions, violence and destruction in our world, and it will create a universal harmony where all can flourish.

The blackened countryside left by the fires, mirrors back to us what happens to our souls – both our individual souls and our collective soul – when we are caught up in the binary world of individualism and consumerism that shape so much of our culture and the way we live in the western world.

When we forget that we are part of something much, much greater than our individual selves, when we live in a small world defined by our immediate concerns, we find ourselves living in a world of us-and-them or us-and-it. We separate ourselves from our essential relationship with, and participation in, the larger reality that is cosmic. The price of that separation is the loss of soul, including the soul of Earth herself.

Of the countless images of the fires I have seen this summer, the most awe-inspiring are those of the fire tornados. I find myself mesmerized by their beauty and awed by the terror of their power. Yet they remind me of the Hebrew scriptures where we read:

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

Exodus 13: 21.



I wonder whether, in some mysterious way, the pillars of fire and smoke arising from the bushfires call us to wake up anew to the guiding presence of God, not only in the crisis of the moment, but in our total approach to life. We human beings tend to look to science and technology to answer all our problems and to create the life we want. We have become gods, thinking we can solve every obstacle in our paths. We have become masters of the Earth – and masters over peoples and creatures. But we haven't yet mastered how to live attuned to the Presence in the pillars of cloud and pillars of fire by which God desires to lead us.

Yet when we open ourselves to the new level of consciousness that is evolving, the vision of one of our modern-day prophets will come about:

Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, (and bushfires?) we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.

Teilhard de Chardin



It is the *energies of love* that we harness as we daily sit in contemplation, holding our fractured world in hearts of compassion. In our contemplation we yearn to open ourselves to those energies of love, that we ourselves may be transformed by them and so become instruments of such transformation in our world. We pray that we might grow into that new consciousness.

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