

Faith, Hope and Responsibility

By Wayne Visser

This week, I conducted an interview with Paul Ehrlich, author of the controversial 1968 book, *The Population bomb*. And yesterday, I was reviewing an interview I did a few weeks ago with Bjorn Lomborg, author of the equally controversial 2001 book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*.

Both are packed with facts. Both are based on science. But they couldn't be more different in the conclusions they reach about the fate of the world. Ehrlich is all doom and gloom, while Lomborg is more of an optimist. Ehrlich is filled with despair, Lomborg is full of hope.

This battle of contradictions is not unique to these two authors either. Many of the thought-leaders that I have interviewed over the past months, including Nobel Prize winners, are similarly dispersed along the spectrum of hope.

So who is right? In the end, I am coming to realise, that is the wrong question. In their own way, following their own logic, they are all right. A more useful question is, what is effect of hope versus despair - on our response to the world, and on our personal wellbeing?

This is where I find the work of psychiatrist Victor Frankl, survivor of four Nazi concentration camps and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, quite helpful. He shows that an attitude of hope is the one thing that enables humans to endure suffering and lead fulfilling lives.

Without hope, we lose our faith in life. And without a belief that we can make things better, we become disempowered, rendered ineffective in the world. Without hope, we die, if not physically, then mentally and emotionally. Hope is an attitude of effectiveness and a source of energy.

So in my mind, hope is a necessity. I am not advocating blinkered denial or blind faith. On the contrary, the more we are aware of the challenges, the more we are able to find a way to respond positively. But there is a danger that we get caught in the mire of the problems.

Reality is what we focus on, so it helps if we focus more on the solutions. There is always something constructive we can do, even if it is just by changing our attitude. And it is in our response - and that of others - that we find cause for hope. To hope is our greatest responsibility.

*(postscript: Thanks to Roberto Salazar for the title of this blog entry)

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