

The Real End Times

From Doom to Faith

by Rev. Michael Dowd

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Here we are, immersed in a swirl of biospheric breakdown and societal strife that isn't going away; in fact, it's getting worse. The darkness and distress cannot be passed off as the wrath of an angry God. Rather, we ourselves are at cause, and these are the real end times.

Our species has overshoot the carrying capacity of Earth and the resiliency of this first global-scale form of human-centered civilization. Industrial civilization since its birth has been utterly dependent on fossil fuels. Yet Earth's living occupants are absolutely dependent on keeping those dense stores of ancient sunlight safely underground.

Some of the most unwelcome effects of these oppositional twins — that is, “peak oil” threatening political and economic stability and “peak emissions” threatening global climate stability — are already making headlines. Other effects, no less real, have been triggered. Their eventually cascading consequences may be as unseen today as a tsunami in mid ocean, yet they will be far more devastating, cumulative, and impossible to fix, solve, or repair.

There are no solutions to this paired predicament of peak energy and peak emissions. Doom indeed lurks on the horizon — and has already arrived for all too many. Nevertheless, there is something that I and others have begun calling post-doom. It is marked by acceptance that the catastrophic course underway cannot be stopped. It will accelerate, deepen, and darken.

Even so, meaningful modes of being and ways of acting need not disappear. Shift they must, but as my post-doom colleague Jordan Perry likes to say, “I'm not hopeless; I hope less. I'm no doomer; I do more.”

A post-doom perspective is practical without promoting nihilism or lethargy. Trust, a secular name for faith, is its foundation. From there, generous and compassionate actions can continue, but they tend to be smaller in scope. They are here and now. They are free of frantic imperatives to engage in protests with the aim of transforming “the system.” Post-doom overall is hope-free.

Dipping even one toe into this cool pool of acceptance can begin to yield benefits — emotional, spiritual, and relational benefits. How to begin?

A well-trod pathway through and beyond one's instinctive stages of blame-casting and dismissal of doom is Reinhold Niebuhr's *Serenity Prayer*: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time. Accepting

hardship as the pathway to peace.” By grace, we can accept reality as it really is. We can transit from a foreboding sense of doom to the freedom of faith/trust, and thereby away from the throbbing gray of despair and toward equanimity that, in turn, opens the way for spontaneous gratitude, including moments of joy.

Scholars of human history in general, and especially those focused on an ecological interpretation of that history, offer another healing journey. The writings of William Catton, William Ophuls, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Teddy Goldsmith, Dolores LaChapelle, Joseph Tainter, Meg Wheatley, John Glubb, Clive Ponting, and John Michael Greer all reveal that previous civilizations collapsed, too — every single one of them. Thomas Berry reached back even farther in examining Giambattista Vico's 17th century writings for his doctoral dissertation.

What one learns from these academic and independent scholars is this: Collapse is an ingrained and thus deeply familiar pattern of anthropocentric civilizations. So is the human inability to recognize and admit ecological folly, much less do anything to avert the accelerating slide.

Consider too that civilizational collapse is not even close to the same scale of loss and trauma that nearly every Indigenous culture on Earth experienced within the past half millennium, or earlier. Intentional genocide of one set of humans by another is altogether different from the ecological calamities and resource depletion that a civilization naively brings upon itself.

This time around, the ecological devastation and resource exhaustion are so widespread and amplified that even the climate has joined the fray.

From a secular standpoint, the truncated jet stream is not an angry god. Nor is an absent monsoon, an atmospheric river, a crushing heat dome, or raging wildfire. Progressive religious faith, too, is secularized in this way. On the other hand, tradition offers emotional and spiritual relief: acknowledgment of wrongdoing, expression of repentance, followed by redemptive love-in-action.

I therefore propose rehabilitating the word God for the real end times, as G🌍D. This edifies our biophysical creator, sustainer, and end as a “Thou” to be honored, not an “it” to be exploited. Sustainable means faithful to G🌍D. Unsustainable means unfaithful to G🌍D. Anthropocentrism is idolatry. Our predicament today therefore points to the outright failure of religion.

This focus on religious failure is central to my 2021 ProgressingSpirit essay, “[My G🌍D, What Have We Done?](#)” It is also a foundation of my teaching videos: “[G🌍D: Owing Our Error, Accepting Our Fate](#)” and “[Sustainability 101: Indigenuity Is Not Optional.](#)”

So, yes, our civilization is dead on course for what colloquially is portrayed as doom. But doom need not become our *emotional* endpoint. Inner resurrection is possible. This is what I call *post-doom*.

Those of us in the “post-doom” community have found it helpful to create and reflect on a set of definitions drawn from our own experiences in transiting into and beyond the tunnel of doom:

Doom (*definition*)

1. A normal feeling of disgust or dread upon realizing that technological progress and economic growth and development are the root of our predicament, not our way out.
2. A name for the anxiety and fear called forth when living in a corrupt and dysfunctional civilization causing a mass extinction.
3. The mid-point between denial and regeneration...with or without us.

Post-doom (*definition*)

1. What opens up when we remember who we are and how we got here, accept the inevitable, honor our grief, and prioritize what is pro-future and soul-nourishing.
2. A fierce and fearless reverence for life and expansive gratitude — even in the midst of abrupt climate mayhem and the runaway collapse of societal harmony, the health of the biosphere, and business as usual.
3. Living meaningfully, compassionately, and courageously no matter what.

Farther down the path, many of us have found that when we relinquish hope in a magical savior, theological or technological, and acknowledge the intractable reality of our predicament, we can begin to access and to cultivate emotional, relational, and spiritual benefits that were previously unavailable. My colleague Karen Perry has catalogued 15 such benefits, and she offers a concise term and tagline for each. Do pause line by line to consider whether you, too, may already have experienced that benefit — and how you might prioritize ways to experience it more. She offers this list in an easy copy-and-paste style.

15 Benefits of Collapse Acceptance

by Karen Perry

*Note: These Benefits are unique seeds, not a recipe.
How they grow and manifest in one's life is entirely up to the individual.*

1. Freedom - the move away from shoulds to the open doors of coulds
2. Urgency - “no time like the present” has never meant more
3. Parameters - playing the game with a different framework and lens
4. Presence - focus on today with heightened awareness of being here now
5. Gratitude - impossible to ignore all we've been given (and taken)
6. Calm Grounding - not disrupted by catastrophic information
7. Community Localism - increased attention to what's in close proximity
8. Super Hero Release - good riddance to guilt, purity test, and pressure to solve/fix

9. Universalism - heightened connection to the Oneness of everything
10. Empathy - towards self and all others, human and non
11. Privilege Perspective - ability to view it and use it in a radical way
12. Amends - finding forgiveness and completeness in all relationships, including with self
13. Death Comfort - forces the conversation and preparation
14. Letting Go - of control, worry, fear, blame, shame, legacy, false promises, expectations
15. Enjoyment - global hospice time to have fun with the bucket list

I concur. I have experienced them all, and live most of them on a regular basis.

For progressive Christians, I draw attention to Benefit 11: *Privilege perspective*. Accordingly, the values and action priorities of this recent path of Christianity clearly can continue. The arena and ambitions will, however, find focus at a smaller scale, individualized, localized (Benefits 7 and 8). Results, in turn, will be more immediate and direct (Benefit 8).

Gone is my own ambition to travel the nation as "America's evolutionary evangelist," as I had been doing with my wife, Connie Barlow, for 19 years. Yes, I am still the author of the 2007 book, *Thank God for Evolution* — but I don't recommend it anymore. My identity has shifted. I am now a post-doom pastor, a compost theologian, finding ways to support an as-yet small, widely dispersed community of individuals emerging in shock and disarray from the tunnel of doom.

It is not my task to invite or push anyone into that tunnel. The onslaught of deteriorating conditions, the events themselves, are doing the job.

Rather, my role is to translate the ecological sciences and historical scholarship such that I can assist fellow pilgrims in gaining clarity over confusion and compassion instead of blame, all the while cultivating awareness and motivation for engaging in, what I like to call, calm and courageous love-in-action.

Along those lines, I offer Postdoom.com Tagline: Regenerative conversations, connections, and resources for moving beyond doom.

Q&A -- What is the role of religion in the climate crisis?

Any and all religions, including Christianity, have a foundational role to play in both averting and responding to the crises of their time. I actually highlighted this point in my 2022 Progressing Spirit essay and video, "[My G🌍D: What Have We Done?](#)", and I am grateful to go a step further here.

Although I never met the man, Edward (Teddy) Goldsmith has almost single-handedly shaped my thinking on this topic. He was the founder and editor of *The Ecologist* magazine for nearly 40 years, and nobody has done more to further our understanding of the leading role that religion (or "lifeways" in Indigenous cultures) plays in shaping and maintaining sustainable cultures. His inventory of anthropological research securely establishes this as fact. Here is how I summarize his conclusions, replacing his use of "the biosphere" with "G🌍D":

Virtually every sustainable culture that we know of held three things in common: (1) they related to the local, living presence of G🌍D (what we dismissively call "the environment") in a humble, reverential, I-Thou way; (2) this incarnational presence of the divine was honored as the source of all benefits and all real wealth for the community; and (3) preservation of the health and wellbeing of the body of life (i.e., fidelity to G🌍D) was the culture's sacred responsibility.

Human wellbeing is thus a consequence of right relationship to reality — not the focal point for decision-making. Sustainable societies therefore have values deeper and broader than those that attend merely to the human.

Similarly, there is a more foundational cause of the "climate crisis" than the abrupt rise in atmospheric carbon-dioxide attributable to our industrial and globalized civilization. Climate destabilization is a symptom of a much deeper ecological infraction this civilization (and all previous anthropocentric civilizations) has perpetrated. That root cause goes by the name "ecological overshoot". Our species has overshoot the carrying capacity of Earth in far more ways than our destabilization of planetary climate.

The damage has been done. There are anthropological scholars who conclude that it could not have been otherwise. Regardless, once civilizational collapse is underway — and doubtless ours is — it cannot be slowed, stopped, or reversed. As repulsive as this is to accept, it is nevertheless true. Still there is a substantial role that religion can play. It cannot turn an unsustainable culture and ethos into a sustainable one, especially as living conditions deteriorate not only for the human but for other living beings. Rather, it is time for religion to step into creating meaning in a time of upset, encouraging community solidarity, and overall reducing suffering for *all* our fellow G🌍Dlings, human included.

Here, Christianity can step forward and excel. Progressive Christians could participate in *being* the calm in the storm, in *being* redemptive love-in-action in a world deteriorating from bad to worse. Standing in an ecological understanding, grounded in awareness of the repetitive history of rise and fall, boom and bust, we can indeed follow "in the footsteps of Jesus."

Anything and everything that we can do, individually and collectively, to promote ecological integrity (fidelity to G🌍D), social coherence, and personal wholeness is holy work. And that certainly includes doing everything we can to ensure as little suffering as possible — human and nonhuman — in the context of the global hospice time increasingly making itself known.

Rev. Michael Dowd is a bestselling eco-theologian and "[post doom](#)" advocate whose book, *Thank God for Evolution*, was endorsed by [6 Nobel Prize-winning scientists](#), [noted skeptics](#), and by [religious leaders across the spectrum](#). He has delivered two TEDx talks, a program at the United Nations, and he and his wife, [Connie Barlow](#), a science writer and evolutionary educator, have addressed some [3,000 religious and secular groups](#) throughout North America since 2002.

Having settled in Ypsilanti, Michigan in 2020, Michael is known today for his leadership in the realm of "**post-doom**," which [his website](#) defines as: "**A fierce and fearless reverence for life and expansive gratitude — even in the midst of abrupt climate mayhem and the runaway collapse of societal harmony, the health of the biosphere, & business as usual.**"

Michael's passion these days is helping people of all ages and backgrounds understand our predicament in ways that offer clarity over confusion, compassion over blame, and calm, courageous love-in-action over fearful, desperate activism. His [90 post-doom conversations](#) and a variety of [educational](#) materials and more [pastoral offerings and discussion forums](#) can be found at [postdoom.com](#).