

WHEN COLLAPSE IS NO LONGER SCIENCE FICTION: CHOOSING HOSPICE WORK INSTEAD OF HOPE , By Carolyn Baker

Monday, 06 August 2007

**By owning the truth and all of its distressing emotions, we empower ourselves beyond our wildest dreams.**

Within the past month, America has witnessed two dramatic events which have illumined the devastating demise of its infrastructure—the [New York City steam explosion](#) in mid-July and the collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis, on August 1. And in the same span of one month, a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court "collapses" with a seizure. Now, in neon lights, we have the word "collapse" writ large across empire even as the overwhelming majority of Americans refuse to face the collapse of every institution in the nation: the economy, healthcare, education, religion, transportation, energy, political systems, and so much more. In fact, the word "collapse" is now being used in American journalism with increasing frequency to describe the ubiquitous crumbling of nearly all facets of our society. Yet as most progressives with the exception of Oprah, along with middle America, avoid talking about the ghastly plot of the recent novel "[The Road](#)" or steer clear of discussing information such as that contained in the documentary "[What A Way To Go: Life At The End Of Empire](#)", they have only to turn on CNN and see that collapse is no longer something imagined by Stephen King or wild-eyed, doom-and-gloom "conspiracy theorists". Collapse is here, it's now, and it's going to exacerbate, and Minneapolis is a metaphor as well as another gruesome literal example of civilization's grotesque self-annihilation.

One of my favorite characters in ancient history is Socrates, the Greek philosopher whom that society could not tolerate and who courageously drank the poisonous hemlock rather than compromise his convictions. Socrates drove his countrymen to distraction with questions—in fact he rarely provided answers and instead engaged listeners in inveterate interrogation. It was through those questions, he insisted, that people actually learn—that their eyes open and light breaks into sealed and darkened places. Although he was popular for a time, Socrates never sought to create a mass movement. He appeared on the scene at a [pivotal time](#) in Greek history but had no illusions about inciting mass consciousness. If his listeners heeded his message, he was content; if they didn't, he was also content. He almost never offered "solutions" but perpetually needled his listeners with provocative questions. In other words, he refused to tell people how to help themselves but rather challenged them to go within themselves and critically think about how the solutions lay within each individual.

Not surprisingly, many individuals who label themselves progressive and read my website and books tell me that I should be doing more to spread the word and inspire mass consciousness. I'm not unlike some of my colleagues who also receive the same lament: "You should find ways to spread your message far and wide. If you don't, you're just preaching to the choir." When I respond that I don't give a rat's ass about mass consciousness, these folks are aghast, shake their heads, and comfort themselves by reading Michael Moore's website. Now there's someone who's inciting mass consciousness! Or is he? The big question is: Where does so-called mass consciousness go—if anywhere? Has anything in the past seven years in America significantly changed because of "mass consciousness"? What could be a better example of this fallacy than public opinion about the Iraq War? The reality is that the ruling elite have become even more intransigent in spite of mass opposition to the war and have cunningly and very successfully shredded the Constitution and our civil liberties in order to [render any meaningful protest virtually impossible](#). In a fascist empire—and yes Virginia, [we are living in one](#)—mass consciousness is about as effectual in the face of tyranny as meditating on Goldilocks and the three bears.

I repeat: I'm not worried about preaching to the choir **because there is no choir**. Furthermore, individuals are either awake, in a process of awakening, or comatose and unwilling to wake up. My work is directed toward the first two groups.

Therefore, in sympathy with Socrates, my role as I see it, is to ask the right questions-evoke discomfort among the comfortable, announce the elephant in the room to everyone's embarrassment including mine, and connect the dots to see what shapes appear. My audience is not the neocons but people who call themselves progressive and libertarian. So why can't I just tell them what they want to hear and make them happy?

Well, because I care little about mass movements and mass consciousness which are manifestations of the capitalist, consumeristic paradigm of narcissistic privilege and entitlement. It is a theme touted by people who are still running around manically and frantically driven by the soporific of hope and who are sometimes frequent fliers to conferences on energy conservation, technofixes and global warming in search of solutions that will require no changes whatsoever in their lifestyles. Just get your new idea into mass media-get Susan Sarandon or Leonardo DiCaprio to endorse your gig, and everything will change-except the nuts and bolts of the paradigm that created Western civilization.

A plethora of ideas abound about where civilization is headed and how we arrived at where we are. My ideas are generally rejected as "conspiratorial", "angry", and "depressing" by the so-called "choir" that people assume agrees with me. Yet I empathize with those individuals and their perceptions of me. Who would prefer embracing the notion that the world as we have known it is ending and that humans are likely to annihilate every life form on earth within the course of the twenty-first century and perhaps within the next decade or two? As a corporately-owned presidential candidate whose message is "The Audacity Of Hope" dazzles the progressive community with possibilities that do not exist, why would anyone choose to go down the opposite road into the despair of a very dark and daunting future? Why would anyone want to turn over rocks, dive deeper into the sea of incontrovertible evidence of humanity's and the planet's demise, and risk being sucked under by the appalling vacuousness of all "solutions" thus far proposed? It's enough to send one screaming into the night-unless one has totally rejected the dominant paradigm.

And then there are those like Thomas Homer-Dixon in [\*The Upside Of Down\*](#) who insist that:

The good news -- and there is some -- is that the collapse doesn't need to be total and catastrophic. We needn't follow Rome into the dustbin. Rather, once the crisis is recognized, a new cycle can begin, if we're willing to go back to the drawing board. The Fire of 1906 led to a better, more resilient banking system in the U.S. -- not to mention better fire protection in San Francisco! -- and the Great Depression led to a more resilient economy in the U.S. The problems of the 21st century can be faced in one of two ways: we can keep trying to add complexity until the world is one giant, possibly horribly Orwellian, system of command and control (and still too brittle to cope with the problems of the 22nd century!), or we can recognize the crisis for what it is and start from scratch.

What planet is Homer-Dixon living on? Certainly not this one. When more than 90% of Americans are clueless about collapse even in the face of global warming, a plummeting Dow, their own catastrophic financial plight, and the gargantuan loss of their civil liberties-when the majority of passengers on the Titanic have no idea that it's sinking, how can any rational human being expect that they will "recognize the crisis for what it is and start from scratch"?

So now we enter new territory because the moment I demand confronting one's hopelessness, I am also inviting us into deeper layers of the psyche which is the Greek word for *soul*. At that point we are under the radar of theories, facts, and even paradigms. We are brushing against our deepest terror, our most excruciating grief, and our billowing, frothing, fulminating rage. Suddenly, we are confronting our human limits, and in fact, our very own death. Yet until we can affirm that the planet is in a death struggle both literally and metaphorically, and until we can adopt the attitude that we are doing nothing less than inhabiting our days and hours in a funeral procession, we will kick and scream for hopeful solutions.

But the question remains, why would anyone choose to do this? Certainly not because they want to but only because it is the truest truth and because **by owning the truth and all of its agonizing emotions, we empower ourselves beyond our wildest dreams.** All of the energy required for our denial, positive thinking, making nice, appearing rational and therefore behaving like good little [Stepford Citizens](#) of empire, is now freed up to, as Andre Gide said, "[let go of the shore](#)" and swim into new waters of falling in love with the earth all over again-or perhaps for the first time, preparing ourselves for collapse, and doing so with the community and support of other earthlings who have let go of the shore and are swimming or sailing in lifeboats with us. Suddenly, options appear that could not have otherwise penetrated our addiction to optimism. Every moment, every plant, tree, animal, bite of food, drink of clean water-every star-filled night, every soaking rain, every sunset becomes precious because we have it now, and someday we won't.

This is conscious preparation for death, and I and all those who are willing to embrace the reality of collapse are hospice workers for ourselves and the world. There isn't much time left, and every moment is a gift to be savored, smelled, tasted, touched, and caressed. Why then would I worry about preaching to the choir? There is no choir-- only those who are passionately committed to truth-telling and those who aren't.

Someone has said that death is a place in the middle between birth and rebirth. In terms of literal death in this lifetime, we only experience it once, and whether it is our own death or the death of planet earth, it is as sacred as the moment of our birth. It is everyone's right and privilege to defend against death and in so doing, opt for disempowerment. But I choose to continue savoring the empowerment that I have personally experienced in opening to utter hopelessness, and I'd like it very much if you would join me. Together we can let go of the shore and discover our deepest layers of humanity in life or in death.

Source: <http://www.carolynbaker.net/>