



Charter for Ecological Civilization

The scientific consensus is overwhelming: human activity is transforming the global climate. Carbon and methane in the atmosphere are functioning as a warm blanket over the planet, affecting oceans and land, air and drinking water, flooding parts of the world and bringing crippling droughts to others. Like a landslide, once started these cycles of change cannot be stopped. Global leaders and global citizens know what steps are required to keep our climate from spinning out of control. But all indications are that the nations of the world will not respond in time.

Some deny that human activities are responsible for any of the changes; others know the truth but take no action. Of those who are being galvanized into action, most pour their efforts into the immediate crises, seeking to propel societies and governments into action. We applaud their courage and resolve, without which the global situation would be far worse.

No one knows whether the climate catastrophe will cause an international collapse of economic, social, and government systems. With or without collapse, humans must learn to live on this planet in a different way. Modern civilization has been based on nationalism, militarism, materialism, political and economic colonialism, and an increasing focus on the individual as consumer. These behaviors, combined with the population explosion, have driven the planet to its very limit, and beyond. The societies of the future now have no choice but to find a radically different way of living with nature and with each other. Nothing less than civilizational change will suffice.

Ecology is the science that has taught us the interdependence of all life on Earth. The survival of each organism and species depends on the thriving of others. We exist as members of ecosystems. The more diverse and healthy each local ecosystem is, the more the continued existence of all of its inhabitants, including its human inhabitants, is assured. A civilization that is based on these insights is an ecological civilization. Given the laws of nature and the limits of our planet, we now know that only this kind of civilization is sustainable.

The study of ecological civilization is not utopian; it is built upon well-understood scientific principles. We also know that a society can be sustained only if its economic, social, and environmental practices are sustainable. Like ecosystems in biology, societies require both the health of all their parts and a harmony between them. To envision and then to build such societies is well within human capabilities. Should we experience a collapse of civilization as we know it, the survivors will have no alternative but to find a way to live sustainably on the land and with each other. Should humanity manage to avoid such a collapse, it will only be by beginning the transition toward an ecological civilization in this generation.

Imagining a future ecotopia, though a valuable exercise, will not be sufficient to actually accomplish the transition. Nor will a piecemeal approach suffice, one that tries to fix a practice or policy here or there. To succeed, national and international policies must be guided by the

goal we need to reach; and that goal must be rendered concrete in light of the specific reforms of specific practices that we now recognize as necessary. Anything less is too little.

Fortunately, this process lies within our reach. Each of the major sectors of society can be rethought from the perspective of long-term sustainability. With that goal clearly in mind, the steps from here to there can be specified, at least in preliminary form. As communities begin to implement the necessary changes, sector by sector, at the local, regional and national levels, the specific reforms will need to be coordinated with each other. To initiate this process is to be on the path toward ecological civilization.

If there were an alternative, one might be skeptical; can humanity really leave behind the assumptions and practices of the last two centuries? Can we alter our present ways of living and doing business? But there *is* no alternative. Societies will change of their own free will, or they will of necessity collapse as they hit the limits of what the planet can sustain. Recognizing the work that lies ahead of us, should we not begin now?

We call upon the governments of the world, the multinational corporations, and the rich and powerful to take leadership in the transition toward an ecological civilization. We call upon the citizens of the wealthy nations to reconsider their lifestyles, exercise their political muscle, and begin to take the steps toward change in whatever sectors of society they live and work. We call upon all men and women to use the power and resources they possess in order to set in motion the required societal changes.

Human history has frequently witnessed the collapse of one civilization and the birth of a new one. The rise and fall of civilizations is the natural rhythm of human life on this planet. We live in such an era of civilizational change. The end of the modern era is now a matter of scientific certainty. With eyes wide open to the process that is even now beginning around us, with courage and resolve, let us begin to take the bold steps that will usher in a new way of being on this planet. More than any generation before us, we now understand what is required for humans to live in a sustainable way with nature and with each other. Let us therefore join together to speak the truth, to challenge the powerful deniers, and to inaugurate the reforms that will lead us toward ecological civilization.