

THE VANCOUVER DECLARATION
**“Science and Culture for the 21st Century:
A survival program”**
1989

Vancouver, September 15, 1989

The survival of the planet became a great and immediate concern. The current situation demands that urgent measures be taken from all sectors -scientific, cultural, economic and political- and that all humanity be made aware. *We must close ranks with all the peoples of the earth against a common enemy*, namely, everything that threatens the balance of our environment or reduces the heritage that we will leave to future generations. This is the objective that today constitutes the Vancouver Declaration, established in the following.

1. Humanity, faced with the problem of survival

Our planet is unstable: it is a heat engine that constantly changes regime. Life, which appeared on its surface approximately four billion years ago, developed in balance with an environment where sudden and unpredictable change is the norm. The discovery, more than two hundred years ago, of free energy in fossil fuels gave humanity the power to dominate the entire surface of the planet. In an incredibly short period of time, inadvertently and without forethought, our species has become by far the most important factor in changing our planet.

The consequences were radical and unprecedented in the history of our species:
- the acceleration of population growth in the course of the last hundred and fifty years has caused the world population to rise from one to five billion, a figure that doubles every thirty or forty years;



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- the use of fossil fuels has increased at a comparable rate, causing global pollution, as well as changes in climate and sea levels;
- the accelerated destruction of the habitat of living species, which leads to a huge and irreversible episode of mass extinction within the biosphere, the base of the terrestrial ecosystem;
- we dedicate unimaginable funds in resources and human ingenuity to war and war preparation.

All of this is based on the belief that the planet's resources are inexhaustible, a belief conveyed by political and economic systems that aim for short-term profit advantages, without taking into account the real cost of production.

Humanity is facing a situation in which the entire balance between our species and the rest of planetary life is at risk of being wrecked . Paradoxically, at the moment when we reach the threshold of the degeneration of ecosystems and the degradation of the quality of human life, knowledge and science can now provide, at the same time, the human creativity and technology necessary for the measures that will make it possible to remedy the situation and restore harmony between nature and humanity. The only thing missing is the political and social will .

1. The origins of the problem

Our current difficulties have as their fundamental origin certain scientific progress that, in fact, was already present at the beginning of the century. These developments, which are mathematically encoded in a classical mechanistic representation of the universe, have given human beings a power over nature that, until recently, has produced an ever-increasing and seemingly limitless mass of material goods. Intoxicated by the exploration of this power, humanity has shown a tendency to bend its values to the benefit of whatever favors the maximum



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exploration of the material possibilities offered by this new power. At the same time, the values associated with the dimensions of human potential that had been underlying previous cultures were abandoned. The impoverishment of the conception of man, due to this omission of other human dimensions, corresponds precisely to the *"scientific" conception of the universe that turns it into a machine where man is nothing more than a simple complement.*

It is the vision that man has of himself that mainly determines his values; it fixes the conception of the "I" in the appreciation of personal interest. The ideological impoverishment linked to this vision of man as a piece of machinery leads to the narrowing of values. However, the scientific progress of this century showed that *this mechanistic conception of the universe was indefensible from a strictly scientific point of view. Thus, the rational basis of the mechanistic conception of man is invalidated.*

2. Ideas about change

In contemporary science, the old rigid and mechanistic model of the universe is replaced by concepts that offer the image of a universe formed by a continuous creative input that is not rigidly limited by any mechanical law. Man himself becomes an aspect of this created "drive" and is linked to the entire universe so integrally that, from the old mechanistic scheme, it is difficult to understand. *The "I" ceases to be a piece of gear subjected to the determinism of a giant machine, to become an aspect of the creative and free "impulse", intrinsic and immediately connected to the entire universe.*

In this new scientific vision, human values are expanded to conform to those that prevailed in past cultures. It is in the context of the converging images of man



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proposed by recent advances in science and culture that we look for models of a future that allow man to survive with dignity and in harmony with his environment.

The human species reached the limits in its use of the outside world and also the limits in its ability to live in a changing cultural and social environment. The expansion of scientific concepts leads us to think that man could find beliefs and forms of spiritual experiences that he had lost. The critical situation in which humanity currently finds itself on the planet demands new visions that, rooted in various cultures, open up about the future:

- The perception of an organic macrocosm that rediscovers the rhythms of life could allow man to reintegrate into the natural environment and understand the spatio-temporal relationship with all life and the physical world;
- Recognizing that the human being is an aspect of the creative process that shapes the universe broadens the image that man has of himself and allows him to transcend the egoism that is the main cause of the lack of harmony between him and his fellow men, as between humanity and nature;
- Overcoming the fragmentation of the body-spirit-soul unity, a consequence of the excessive primacy given to any of these elements to the detriment of the others, *man will be able to discover in himself the reflection of the cosmos and its supreme unifying principle.*

These ideas modify the conception of man's place in nature and demand a radical transformation in our models of development: the elimination of poverty, ignorance and misery; the end of the arms race; the adoption of new ways of learning, new educational systems and new mental attitudes; application of improved forms of redistribution aimed at guaranteeing social justice; a new conception of ways of life,





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based on the reduction of waste; respect for diversity, be it biological, socioeconomic or cultural, that transcends obsolete concepts of sovereignty.

Science and technology are indispensable to achieve these objectives, but they will only achieve it through the integration of science and culture that offer a reason for life and through an integrated approach aimed at overcoming the fragmentation that caused the destruction of cultural communication.

If we do not manage to reorient science and technology towards the satisfaction of basic needs, the progress of informatics (accumulation of knowledge), of biotechnology (deposit of "patents" for life forms) and of genetic engineering (mapping of the human genome) will have irreversible consequences that are detrimental to the future of human life.

We do not have much time left: any delay in establishing an eco-cultural world peace will only serve to increase the cost of survival.

We must recognize the reality of a multi-religious world and the need for a tolerance that allows religions, regardless of their differences, to cooperate with each other. This would contribute to meeting the *demands of humanity's survival and the maintenance of shared fundamental values of human solidarity. It is there where we have a common human heritage, arising from our perception of the transcendent meaning of human existence and from a new planetary consciousness.*

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