



## The California Experience: Combating Climate Change and Protecting the Vulnerable Now!

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*#MayorsCare Summit on*

*Modern Slavery and Climate Change: The Commitment of the Cities*

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I think I will take as my text, if I may, some words of St Paul to the Galatians: *God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*[1] And what St Paul said in reference to God, we can also say about God's Creation. We have heard what we are doing to that Creation; what a trillion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases will do and that text that God is not mocked is not susceptible to compromise, to regrets. It is inexorable, it is absolutist. We have to respond, and if we do not, the world will suffer. We will all suffer. In fact, many people, millions are suffering already.

Now, to change the world from a fossil fuel-based culture is not easy, but there are plenty of examples where it is happening. So I can bring you the example of California, which for many years has been taking on serious environmental challenges. California is now deriving 25% of its electricity from renewable sources, and in those sources we do not count nuclear or hydro. Secondly, we have the most efficient buildings, because of our building regulations, in the entire country, and as a result California citizens have saved tens of billions of dollars in energy bills. The same is true for our appliance standards, the most efficient in the country. For as far as automobile pollution we have very strict tailpipe emissions standards and as a result, and because of some changes in Washington, those standards are now adopted as the national standards of America. And that source of pollution is going down; not fast enough, but steadily. We also have 40% of the electric cars in the United States.

But we are not stopping here. We also have a commitment. And my commitment is to increase the renewable portfolio to 50% of the electricity consumed, 50%, and at the same time reduce petroleum in cars and trucks by 50% in the next 15 years. That is quite a challenge, but it can be done. The California economy has steadily reduced its greenhouse gas emissions, particularly on a per capita basis, but its economy is growing over the last decade faster than the economy of the United States as a whole. So there are ways that we can not mock creation or the laws of nature but live within them. We have to get on the side of nature and not abuse it, or go against it. Pope Francis spoke about the abuse of goods, and what our modern world has seen and has enjoyed is the good of petroleum. We are a petroleum culture. We have got here by the means of petroleum – aeroplanes, and cars, our clothes, food deliveries – it is all based on petroleum. So it is not a bad, it is a good. But it becomes a bad when it is used to the point that 7 billion people now have over 1 billion cars, with the coal plants, the oil and the gas. So we have to make a transition, because goods become bads when they are abused and go beyond a certain threshold. We know the problem, but we do not even know how far we have gone, or if we have gone over the edge. There are tipping points, feedback loops, this is not some linear set of problems that we can predict; we have to take measures against an uncertain future, which may well be something no one never wants. We are talking about extinction, we are talking about climate regimes that have not been seen for tens of millions of years. We are not there yet, but we are on our way. And there is an element of irreversibility that requires that we imagine down the road in the future and then we react. But right in the middle of this problem we have fierce opposition and blind inertia. And that opposition is well financed: hundreds of millions of dollars going into propaganda, in falsifying the scientific record, bamboozling people of every country: television stations, political parties, think-tanks, PhDs, university personnel – they form a group of people that is attempting to put a cloud of doubt and uncertainty over the clear science that you heard earlier this morning. So we have to fight that propaganda, and overcome the inertia and the tremendous opposition.

Now, how are we going to do that? First of all, we are going to have to set a clear goal. And that goal is almost unimaginable. One third of the oil that we know exists as reserves, can never be taken out of the ground. 50% of the gas can never be used, and over 90% of the coal. Now that is a revolution. That is going to take a call to arms. And if you look at our national leaders, we are not going to get there. Mayors, you are at the bottom of this power chain and you have to light a fire – if I may use that metaphor in terms of climate change it is probably the wrong one – but we have to join together, it is not going to happen! We are not on the road to avoiding the catastrophes that climate change entails, so we have to make a change! This is a real conversion. Using the word “transformation” – that is a big word, I do not like to use it. It is very hard to transform. I once

heard at the Jesuit Seminary that the goal was to become perfect – a life of perfection. I can tell you, it is very hard! You do not get perfect, and at the end of the day you do not feel very transformed. But in this case, we may not transform our being, but we are going to have to transform our use of the goods of the world, namely petroleum. And we can do it. And I ask you to join with California and 19 other states and provinces to make a commitment to live within the no more than 2°C. We can do that. By the way, the United States is over 20 tons per person. In California, we are at 12, so we are a little better. But that is because we have a lot of sun and we have a very benign climate. But we are suffering in the southwest from drought and the ravages of climate change already. But that keeping it under 2°C is the goal. In Vietnam they only use 1,5 tons per person. India is maybe 2. So the developed world has put in most of the carbon and we are going to have take most of it out. It is a big challenge. It is not politics as usual. It is not going to happen unless major changes happen. And for the Holy Father to issue that Encyclical, that is a change. The role of nature, the interconnectedness of all beings, these are ideas that, while implicit, had never been so clear as they have been made in this Encyclical. So let's take some inspiration from the Holy Father, let's take inspiration from ourselves, but let's not be in any way be confident or complacent. We have a big mountain to climb, we have very powerful opposition that at least in my country spends billions on trying to keep from office people such as yourselves and elect troglodytes and other deniers of the obvious science.

Anyway, that is what I have got to say. When I look at it, I could quote an Italian, by the way, who said that (I should not quote him, by the way, because he is the founder of the Italian Communist Party) but he said: "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will",[2] and if we really sense our collective power, we can exercise the political will to reverse the trends we are on and to turn a new chapter in human history and live in compatible ways with other beings, with ourselves, and protect the most vulnerable and do the right thing. By the way, the Church is not trying to become a scientist, the Pope is not a scientist, but he has got scientists, and the Pontifical Academies have laid it out real clear. So it is up to us to make it happen. The Mayors, and the Governors, but I am not counting on the Presidents, I am not counting on the Republican Congress in Washington. So it is up to you guys and you ladies. Thank you very much.

[1] Galatians 6:7.

[2] Antonio Gramsci, 1929.