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## Where in the Heavens are our Earthly Leaders?

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# Where in the Heavens are our Earthly Leaders?

Ritch Eich, Member of the *JVBL* International Editorial Board

## Who will save our planet?

Does this sound silly or over-dramatic, like the ruminations of a small child crying over a dead bug?

The question is anything but silly. Environmental sustainability is a growing social and business concern today. From cleaning up dirty air and contaminated water to reducing wastefulness and creating new, clean energy and water sources, people are paying more attention and raising their expectations from business and government leaders.

Committed leaders must keep the pro-environment momentum going. Who are those leaders?

On June 18, 2015, Pope Francis became one of those leaders when he said, "Very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system," and that things were at a tipping point. The Pope said greenhouse gases are, "released mainly as a result of human activity." Humanity, Pope Francis said, "is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption."

Critics questioned why Pope Francis was delving into politics and science, but he was correct to do it. Climate change and global warming will impact how future generations will live and adapt to the negative effects, while the population continues to grow and strain environmental resources. Human actions — from rapid industrialization to deforestation to the pursuit and use of fossil fuels



*"All of us –  
bright atheists and  
committed religionists–  
need to wake now and  
hear the earth call... .  
We need to give and  
receive as love shows us  
how,  
join with each pilgrim who  
quests for the true,  
give heed to the voices of  
the suffering,  
awaken our consciences  
with justice as our guide,  
and work toward a planet  
transformed by our care."*

— *Scotty McLennan*

*(former dean of chapel  
at Stanford University)*

*from*

*Jesus Was a Liberal: Reclaiming  
Christianity for All*

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## ***Environmental Leaders: Sidebar***

*California and Gov. Jerry Brown have emerged as major leaders worldwide in raising awareness – and solutions – to environmental issues like energy sustainability and climate change. California has always been a trendsetter when it comes to enacting laws or beefing up rules to clean up the environment, increase recycling or promote cleaner energy. But, having a vocal and committed leader at the forefront of the climate change issue at a time when most Americans acknowledge that the planet is getting warmer is more than good timing, it's necessary to make real progress.*

*Consider:*

- A bill is pending by Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León, D-Los Angeles, that would require California to generate half its electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind power, halve the amount of petroleum used by vehicles, and double energy efficiency of buildings by 2030. Oil companies and some utilities are not on board but Brown would likely sign it if passed by the Legislature.*
  - In April 2015, Brown issued an executive order calling for reduction of pollutants in California to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2040 and to 80 percent below these levels by 2050, matching the standards of the European Union. Brown spoke in July 2015 at a two-day summit of mayors worldwide, held in Vatican City and organized by the Pope, about global warming and its effects on poor populations. Brown and dozens of mayors signed a declaration stating, "human-induced climate change is a scientific reality, and its effective control is a moral imperative for humanity."*
  - Brown has been prodding other states, governments and world leaders to join California in a non-binding pact to limit the increase in global temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius, in an effort to limit major environmental disruption, a move supported by the scientific community.*
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and harmful agricultural practices — have contributed to climate change and other forms of environmental damage. All of these activities plus others will stretch increasingly limited resources and especially hurt the poor in the developing world.

The Pope's message in his encyclical is that all people worldwide have a shared responsibility for taking action – using less and re-using more.

To make this happen, those with the means to enact environmental protection measures and increase sustainability in their business practices will have to show enlightened, vigorous leadership. Leaders in government, the military, industry and business need to step it up. Celebrities and faith leaders can help too because they influence scores of people. Executives and board members from industries like oil, energy and manufacturing – which have traditionally fought stricter environmental regulations – will have to abandon the tired, old mindset that they should avoid or fight any moves that would compromise profits. That sort of outdated thinking will alienate customers who increasingly support eco-friendly businesses and shun those with bad environmental records.

Sustainability has become a bigger focus in business and government in some nations today. Governments are developing domestic climate change plans. The words "eco-friendly," "high-energy efficiency," and "sustainable" are ubiquitous in product advertising. It was recently reported that 72 percent of Fortune 100 companies do

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• Earlier in July 2015 Brown spoke at a climate change conference in Toronto and emerged with new partnerships and supporters in North America to fight global warming. He encouraged states and provinces not to wait for national leaders to take action but to take action now locally.

• Assembly Bill 32, passed in 2006, established a goal of cutting California's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. To meet that goal, emissions must fall by six percent between 2013 (the latest year for which figures are available) and 2020.

• On the recycling front, California also is a leader. Assembly Bill 341, which took effect in 2012, requires cities and counties in California to reach a 75 percent waste diversion rate by 2020, reducing trash taken to landfills. This effort also helps fight global warming. The commercial sector generates nearly three fourths of the solid waste in California, and much of the commercial waste disposed in landfills is readily recyclable. Increasing the recovery of recyclable materials will directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, according to CalRecycle.

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not want governments to pass earth-saving measures but have set their own parameters for lowering fuel usage and unnecessary packaging, for instance. Many American cities have sustainability departments to help residents recycle, get free water-saving devices and other eco-friendly measures. Trash companies are increasing their fleets of cleaner-energy trucks and ramping up recycling technology to meet more stringent government mandates. Business schools are bending over backwards to offer degrees and/or certificates in this field.

Some business leaders have already demonstrated early leadership in incorporating more sustainable business practices. Among them is Ray C. Anderson, whose carpet company, Interface, was the first company to achieve 100 percent sustainability. Anderson argued and proved that sustainability made sense business-wise. Interface developed processes for recycling old carpets, invented a leased carpet program, used the work of

indigenous peoples, switched to solar and other alternative energy sources, reduced water use and contamination, and, in 2007, achieved negative net greenhouse gas emissions. Interface achieved their results on an international level, not just domestically, and all the while, growing profits.

Other companies known for their success in sustainability include Unilever, Patagonia, Nestlé, Marks & Spencer, Nike, GE, IKEA, and Puma. Unilever made news worldwide when it created a Sustainable Living Plan. The company has reduced energy use, reduced waste with recycling and efficiency drives, and lowered carbon emissions in its manufacturing operations by one-third by using cleaner technologies and greater efficiency. Toy company Lego jumped on the bandwagon this year too and announced it will invest \$150 million over the next 15 years to make its plastic building blocks more sustainable.

Unilever CEO Paul Polman, the current driver in this effort, told a group of sustainability specialists from NGOs, government, academia, and business gathered at Unilever's London headquarters in 2015, "In a volatile world of growing social inequality, rising population,

development challenges and climate change, the need for businesses to adapt is clear, as are the benefits and opportunities. This calls for a transformational approach across the whole value chain if we are to continue to grow. Consumers are recognizing this too, increasingly demanding responsible business and responsible brands. Our experience is that brands whose purpose and products respond to that demand – ‘sustainable living brands’ – are delivering stronger and faster growth.”

As the Pope might say, “Amen to that.”