

ECOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Concept of the Individual as the Starting Point

According to our Program, the guiding principles for the objectives and activities of the Kolping Society are Jesus Christ and His message, the Catholic Social Teachings, and the will and actions of Fr. Adolph Kolping. The foundation of the Catholic Social Teachings is the concept of the individual. While human nature was formerly understood to be two-dimensional, individual and social, this concept has been expanded through the Church's social proclamations to become three-dimensional, i.e. an individual, a social, and a natural level.

1.2 The Three-Dimensional Concept of the Individual

While individuality signifies the unique, unrepeatable human being, sociality covers the fact that we are dependent on and responsible for one another. Our nature reminds us that we are part of the environment and must bear responsibility for it.

1.3 The Tasks of the Kolping Society

As a Catholic social movement, the Kolping Society considers making its members more aware of their environmental responsibility which arises from man's nature one of its tasks. At the same time, the Kolping Society is called upon to develop pilot activities and initiatives which serve the responsible preservation and management of the environment, and to introduce ecological initiatives into the political sphere.

2.0 The Initial Situation

2.1 Climate Change

The extremely rapid and in part people-generated climate change is one of the most universal threats to those living today and for coming generations. Through their behaviour, people contribute to a considerable degree to the concentration of green-house gases. The main reasons for the increase caused by human beings are the burning of fossil fuels, such as oil, natural gas, or coal; the strong rise of motorized and air traffic; the clearing of forests by deliberately set fires, as well as the use of chlorofluorocarbon in homes and in industry. All these factors contribute to the global warming of land surfaces and oceans.

2.2 The Decrease of Biological Diversity

Over the course of the earth's history, there have always been events that led to a decrease in the diversity of species, for instance, volcanic eruptions, the crashing of meteorites, or ice ages. However, the current decline of biological diversity is due to a large number of species becoming extinct in ways and to an extent that have been unknown until now. Causes for this development are e.g. the man-generated climate change, the massive clearing of virgin forests, monoculture and/or tight crop rotation, combined with high use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers in the intensive industrial agriculture, the decrease in water quality in rivers, lakes, and oceans, as well as the low numbers of nature reserves. The decline of biodiversity is connected to the decrease of genetic diversity. Biological and genetic diversity are, however, the foundation of human well-being, because not only the food provisions for humankind, but also the possibilities for medical advancement and the diversity of raw materials depend on them.

2.3 Introduced Species Disturb the Balance

Through the flow of goods and people, which comes with globalization and world-wide tourism, both plants and animals are introduced into regions where they are in competition with the native fauna and flora. The introduction of such new species often results in displacing locally established species and in disturbing the balance of the species.

2.4 The Loss of Resources

In our times, progress and development is equated to a large extent with economic growth. Economic growth, however, is part of rising industrial production. This again leads to an ever-increasing use of resources and energy, as well as the accumulation of more and more waste that pollutes the environment. However, since the resources are limited world-wide, the reckless use of resources threatens the possibilities of development for future generations.

2.5 Bio-Energy is a Limited Resource

The negative consequences of the use of fossil fuels in the production of energy are leading to an ever-increasing utilization of bio-energy. The production of bio-mass can, on the one hand, open up new income possibilities for the farmers but, through the large-scale cultivation of bio plants, it also leads to the loss of tropical forests, savannahs, and peat bogs with the corresponding CO₂ emissions, which are harmful to the atmosphere, as well as to depletion of the world of plants and animals. The advantages of the use of bio-mass for energy production with respect to its climate neutrality are countered by the disadvantages where bio-diversity, quality of the environment, water balance, and soil quality are concerned. In addition, the cultivation of biomass for energy production competes with the cultivation of food items, which leads to rising food costs affecting particularly the poor. Land disputes and violations of human rights often accompany the cultivation of large-scale biomass plantation in developing countries.

2.6 Further Energy Sources with Risk Factors

Nuclear energy is an unobjectionable energy source with regard to the pollution of the environment. At the same time, however, the use of nuclear energy for energy production carries high risks, because one reactor accident can cause unforeseeable and long-lasting

damages, and the permanent disposal of the used material is also not reliably secured world-wide. Every permanent disposal of waste products according to the existing knowledge is tied to a thousand years of higher radioactivity and is not secured anywhere in the world. Furthermore, already during the mining of the uranium, the resident population and the miners are exposed to high radioactive contamination which leads to cancer and to genetic deviations.

2.7 Threats to Human Dignity

On the one hand, the progressive discovery of the genetic code and the corresponding increase in knowledge of the bio-sciences open many expectations and hopes but, on the other hand, they are a threat to human dignity. While on one side, the rise in discoveries leads to opportunities to cure diseases and restore human dignity to the life of the sick, there is, on the other side, a growing threat that the individual becomes the victim of experiments in the various periods of his or her life, and that life might be destroyed. The possibilities of cloning, the genetically engineered changes of the human germ lines, the forming of chimeras through mixing human and animal embryos constitute a very real threat to human dignity and personhood.

3.0 New Attitudes Are Required

3.1 Nature as Part of our World

The primary prerequisite for overcoming the ecological crises is a new attitude towards nature and the environment. We must realize that the fate of mankind is closely connected to the fate of nature. We therefore must recognize our special responsibility for the environment as a whole and then act accordingly. We must let go of the attitude that relegates the environment to an object and, instead, develop an outlook which shows respect for nature. In future, nature must be understood more as coexisting with us, rather than merely providing us with our own living space.

3.2 A New Lifestyle

Saving the environment is not the responsibility of politicians, scientists, or economists alone. By our conduct, every one of us contributes to the saving or the destruction of the environment. The deciding factor will be the lifestyle of every single individual, his or her attitude towards nature and his or her sense of responsibility for it. The lifestyle prevalent in the industrialized nations, with its orientation towards comfort and convenience, consumption and high mobility, leads not only to a high use of resources but is, through its demands, also partly responsible for the destruction of the environment, particularly in parts of the world where many people already live in absolute poverty now. However, the environmental destructions in those countries lead to even more poverty among the inhabitants with the consequence of increased migration.

Therefore, the call is for a lifestyle that is determined by respect for the intrinsic value of nature, the renouncing of all unnecessary consumption of resources, as well the spirit of solidarity with mankind as a whole, and consideration for the chances of the lives of future generations.

3.3 Ecological Sensitivity

Individuals will adopt a new lifestyle which is environmentally responsible only when they realize how much their own actions affect the living conditions of the whole creation. Every single individual must therefore strive to better comprehend our ecological dependence and out of this awareness develop an ecologically sound conduct. A lifestyle that concentrates more on human fellowship, social contacts, and cultural commitment can not only decrease the use of resources but can also lead to a better quality of life.

3.4 A New Concept of Work

Behaving in a conscientious, ecologically responsible manner is not only required in private life but also in the world of work. Starting from a concept that work contributes to the personal development of the individual, is a service to the community, and shapes the environment, the impact of work on the environment must be given greater consideration. It is an ethical necessity that industrial processes be devised in ways that minimize energy consumption and assure the economical use of resources. Everyone who participates in the work process also carries a responsibility for the economical utilization of resources and the avoidance of defective products and waste.

3.5 Ecological Compatibility of the Economy

The environment is affected not only by work processes and the behaviour of individuals in the work force, but also by the way in which economic systems are set up. The economy and technology are meant to serve the development of human beings. But since man is part of the ecological inter-connections, these must be given more consideration by the economy. By providing the necessary legal framework, legislation must ensure a socio-economic market system that incorporates more ecological objectives. Here, particularly an ecologically oriented market economy can also contribute to the creation of new and urgently needed jobs.

3.6 Ecological Awareness Includes Leisure Time

Increasing amounts of spare time and the resulting leisure industry also contribute more and more to the destruction of the environment. Therefore, it becomes necessary to also change our approach to leisure time activities. We must return to spending our time to develop our creativity, for social contacts, to regenerate ourselves. The leisure industry must also take ecological circumstances into account. This requires the individual to rely on regional recreational opportunities to avoid additional burden on the environment.

4.0 Initiatives for Action

4.1 Impulses from the Mandate for Creation

The threat to nature and the environment is obvious today; few people dispute the fact that protection and remedial measures are necessary. Human beings have various reasons for their actions. For Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the commitment to the environment

becomes even more important because of their belief that God created Heaven and Earth in harmony, according to His plan and creative divine will. The individual, created in God's image, has been given the mandate to uphold God's will and bring it to fruition. As God's creature, the individual is responsible to God for the creation entrusted to him or her. The basis of Christian commitment to a future, in which people can live in human dignity on an inhabited earth, is the biblical faith that the world is God's creation, that He redeemed it and wants to bring it to completion. Therefore, mankind has to care for, work with, and protect what God has created.

4.2 The Individual's Own Interest

Even in our own interest, we have to take care of our environment. In the long term, the destruction of the environment deprives us of life's basic foundation; in the short term, there will be damage to our health and loss of nature as means of recreation. Therefore, we must not only look at our immediate surroundings but also feel obligated in solidarity to consider the consequences of our actions. We must use ethical considerations in choosing between short-term self-interest and solidarity-based responsibility for our fellow men and women, including future generations, taking into consideration the principle of lasting effects.

5.0 The Special Status of the Human Being

5.1 The Human Being as the Centre

Respect for all forms of life is the foundation of a new ecological approach. However, among all living creatures, human beings alone have a special status which obliges them to bear a distinct responsibility. In God's plan, every creature has its own significance and, as such, is the object of man's ethical responsibility. In addition, man is responsible to God for preserving the creation. In this context, we have to remain aware of the fact that humanity can be developed only from nature. Man plays a decisive role in determining the survival of life in nature.

5.2 Protection of Human Life in all Stages

Man's special status in the order of creation demands complete protection of human life in all stages; this is partially covered in the Catalogue of Human Rights. Every human being has a right to life; the unborn, the disabled, the old, and the terminally ill.

5.3 Safeguarding Human Dignity in Reproductive Medicine

Due to the development of medicine and technology in the area of reproduction, human life can now be manipulated. In the context of the wish to have children, which in itself is something to be supported, one must take into consideration that this wish for a child must not be valued higher than human dignity. A test-tube fertilization is to be rejected.

5.4 The Dangers of Gene-Technology

The new discoveries that were made on the genetic base within the context of regenerative and disease-related therapies show a great variety of new treatment options. The treatment measures that were developed on the basis of stem cells have proved to be most successful and are worthy of support. However, the surgical procedures done within the context of the germ-line therapy affect not only the person involved but also possible descendants and thereby the unique and unrepeatable personhood of the human being and can therefore not be justified by anything. This also applies to reproductive cloning. The individual human identity must have complete protection.

6.0 Protection of the Diversity of Species of Plants and Animals

6.1 The Threatening of Life Cycles

The prospects and the quality of life of human beings also depend to a large degree on the diversity of the plants and animals which surround them. The diversity in creation is not only a reflection of divine magnificence but also the basis of an on-going functioning of life cycles. However, today many species of plants and animals are threatened by increasing environmental pollution or have been destroyed already.

6.2 The Preservation of the Diversity of Plants and Animals

Human beings must give special protection to the many varieties of plant and animal species. It is therefore very urgent to increase nature and wildlife reserves; to promote ecologically acceptable farming; and to avoid damage to soil, rivers, lakes, and oceans, as well as the air. Every individual can promote the protection of species and animals by practicing good stewardship of what he/she is responsible for (livestock, fields, gardens, etc.), and - as a hiker or tourist – by avoiding intentional or unintentional destruction of plants and animals. The expansion of the traffic structure for private vehicles, such as roads and express ways, also contributes to a further loss of natural biotope areas as well as species. By switching to public transportation, people can therefore make a contribution to the prevention of carving up more and more species-rich country sides.

6.3 No Patent on Life

In addition to efforts being made to create a proper framework for the steadily growing globalized economy, there are endeavours under way to grant patent protection to plants and animals that are created by macro-biological and non-biological processes. However, these endeavours are in conflict with the traditional rights of the farmers and the established human right to nature. The plants and animal that have patent protection threaten particularly indigenous communities and the people who practice traditional farming, because the newly developed and bred plants and animals are often created from the genetic information of the animals and plants that constitute their basis of life. A patent protection on life is generally not acceptable.

6.4 The Protection of Animals

Inexcusable cruelty is often inflicted upon animals during experiments or by inappropriate keeping. For that reason animal experimentation must be reduced to the minimum that is required for medical research. Crowding large numbers of animals together causes the animals great suffering and does not suit the species. People should therefore choose appropriate and, if at all possible, animal products from their own region.

7.0 The Use of Resources

7.1 Energy

Wasteful use of energy threatens the environment. The unrestricted growth of energy consumption not only affects pollution of soil, air, and water, it also leads to climatic changes due to global warming. The use of non-renewable fossil fuels, (coal, oil, gas) must be urgently reduced, not only in consideration of future generations but also for the protection of the environment. The nuclear energy production poses a high security risk and is therefore only conditionally suitable to replace the loss of energy production from fossil fuels. The use of renewable energy from sun, water, wind and biomass also generates environmental problems and, what is more, it cannot fill the energy requirements. In addition to reducing energy consumption, the future utilization of hydrogen and solar energy, as well as energy from nuclear fission, are other alternatives. Energy reduction can be achieved through technological advances, through reorganization of industrial processes, and also by changes in people's personal lifestyles. Required are a massive expansion of renewable energies, investments in improvements of efficiency, and economising.

7.2 Waste and Garbage

The ever-growing mountains of garbage and the resulting pollution of soil, air, and water cannot be ignored. The difficulties of waste disposal are increasing constantly. It is therefore imperative that we find ways to avoid, reduce, or recycle more effectively the waste that we produce. Solving the waste disposal problem by shipping the garbage to countries of the Third World is yet another way in which our conduct violates the necessary orientation on the international common good.

7.3 Mobility and Transportation

Compared to the past, the costs of transportation and travel are low and this allows people an ever-increasing mobility. However, this rise in mobility goes hand in hand with larger energy consumption and pollution of the environment. In view of the preservation of creation and with regards to the risks of climate change, people must utilize the opportunities of mobility responsibly; they should, if at all possible, fall back on travel possibilities that spare the environment, and when shopping - food items in particular - choose regional products.

8.0 Areas of Involvement for the Kolping Society

8.1 Education and Motivation

A first important and essential step for protecting the creation is the awareness of nature in its intrinsic value. Today, it is increasingly exposed to destruction and endangering through the actions of people. Particularly in a world that is becoming more urbanized, the sensitization for the beauty and diversity of nature is of great importance, in order to lead the individual to a deepening of his/her affinity to nature as creation and as a gift of God. In this context, it will be necessary to talk about the respect for nature's intrinsic value but also about the necessary yet to be limited economic utilization and to point out the consequences of a destruction of ecologically functioning systems.

Along with the passing on of insights into the causes and the consequences of environmental destruction, the educational work must also impart very concrete information as to how and with what personal and societal initiatives the environment can be protected successfully. In this context, the areas of action must be prioritized utilizing new scientific discoveries, the linking of questions regarding the protection of the environment, economic development, and world-wide social justice. This corresponds to the concept of a lastingly effective development.

For the different areas of action, concrete proposals and models must be worked out as to how the individual can make his/her contribution to the preservation of the creation through changing his/her lifestyle and through behaviour patterns that conserve resources. The community of the Kolping Society gives the individual support and orientation with regards to the acquisition of new behaviour patterns and takes initiatives which can be implemented only through common efforts, such as the running of seminars, the publishing of brochures and papers, and the organization of events on a given subject.

8.2 Campaigns

Along with changes in the lifestyles of every individual, society needs practice fields for feasible ways of environment-conscious conduct and exemplary initiatives of communities. By means of measures that protect the countryside and nature, Kolping Families and Kolping Societies can set visible signs for society, such as: Kolping Families participating in garbage and waste removal and the recycling of raw materials; removing garbage from the countryside; starting re-forestation programs which also include locally traditional species of trees; taking up measures against erosion or using agricultural methods that preserve nature, for instance organic farming. Exemplary is also the support of and participation in initiatives towards the development and promotion of cycles of regional economies, which include regionally available raw materials and products and thereby create not only jobs in the sense of a development that is viable on a long-term basis, but also avoid means of transportation that use up resources.

8.3 Socio-Political Commitment

Whereas the behaviour of the individual and of ecologically interested groups is of great importance, the global problems can be solved only if and when they are accompanied by appropriate measures taken in the economic and socio-political arena. The Kolping Society considers it its task to become sufficiently competent in global matters, as well as in various areas of special interest, to be able to participate in ecology-political discussions and thereby become part of the political decision-making process. In cooperation with other groups within the civic society, the Kolping Society endeavours to gain influence on political decisions with regard to the objective of a lastingly viable development. Here, the solution lies not in the general condemnation of progress, but what is required is the development of an ethic of progress which meets the challenges of the environment, considers future generations, and is guided by the principles of a world-wide social justice.

Summary

We recognize the special position and responsibility of the individual in the Order of Creation and his/her responsibility for nature as the common environment.

We commit ourselves to the protection of human life in all its phases and to the safeguarding of human dignity.

We support measures for the preservation of the diversity of species of plants and animals.

We promote a responsible use of energy and the expansion of renewable energies.

We speak out against a patent on life.

By means of our educational work, we contribute to making people sensitive towards a gentle handling of nature and to pointing out specific measures against the destruction of the environment.

We initiate specific campaigns aimed at environmental protection and at the preservation of biodiversity.

We motivate people to lead a sustainable and environmentally compatible lifestyle.

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