

The Role and Function of the Protector in the Kolping Society

The Self-Image of the Kolping Society as a Catholic Lay Organization on the Basis of Canon Law

“The Kolping Society is a free association of Catholics; on the basis of their Baptism and Confirmation, they feel called upon to participate in the Church’s mission of salvation. The members practice their collective apostolic activities in and through the organization in self-determined areas of life, occupation, and other fields of interest. The joining together by the members is the practice of freedom of association and coalition (Lay Decree # 15, 18, and 19, and CIC cc 215, 299, 321-320).”

The Kolping Society is therefore clearly a private organization without the status of a legal person in the sense of the CIC. Since neither the objectives nor the working methods of the Kolping Society contravene the teachings of the Church, her principles, or the integrity of ethics and morals, the Kolping Society can act autonomously within the framework of its objectives and is subject only to the direction of its democratically elected bodies.

Structures of the Church and the Kolping Society

In spite of the autonomy, the Kolping Society, however, defines on its own initiative a closeness to the structures of the Church. Even within the leadership bodies on all levels of the organization, the Kolping Society has deliberately established the connection to the clerical office by the fact that, in the executive boards on every level, the presence of a Praeses is intended. According to the Basic Documents of the International Kolping Society, the Praeses position is to be filled with an ordained person if at all possible. Through incorporating an ordained person into the executive boards on all levels, the Kolping Society deliberately gives a visible signal of its connection to the Church.

The Office of the Episcopal Protector

In addition to these structures, the Kolping Society has instituted the office of an Episcopal Protector on the national and the international level. The Episcopal Protector is the first contact the Kolping Society has for issues of cooperation between the Kolping Society and the national Bishops’ Conference, and he represents the Kolping Society when questions arise from among the bishops with regard to the work done by the Kolping Society. The Episcopal Protector should be familiar in a special way with the mission and the mandate of lay people and the organized form of the lay apostolate, and he requires comprehensive information on the objectives, the self-image, and the work done by the Kolping Society in the country in question. The respective National Kolping Society, and the National Praeses in particular, has to inform the Episcopal Protector regularly with regard to current development in the Kolping Society, because he can fulfill his protective function, which is already expressed in the name “Protector”, only if he is kept adequately informed about the developments within the Kolping Society.

The office of the Episcopal Protector can be tied to a person, but also to a particular function within the Bishops’ Conference. When tying this function to a position in the Bishops’ Conference, it is advisable to choose above all the bishop responsible for the lay apostolate or one responsible for social-charitable issues. In exceptional circumstances, the office of the Episcopal Protector can also be tied to the Bishop in whose diocese the National Office of the Kolping Society in question is located.

The Protector of the International Kolping Society

For the International Kolping Society, the regulation applies that the Archbishop of Cologne, who is in office at any given time, is the Protector of the International Kolping Society. This has to do with the fact that the Archdiocese of Cologne is linked to the Kolping Society in a very special way, since Blessed Adolph Kolping was a priest of the Archdiocese of Cologne and the rector of the Minorite Church. The election of the International Praeses is therefore confirmed by the Archbishop of Cologne, who then appoints the elected praeses as rector of Fr. Kolping's Memorial Church (Minorite Church).

Ratified by the International Executive Board on April 13, 2000.

Episcopal Protector

- 1) The Episcopal Protector represents the interest of the Kolping Society within the Bishops' Conference. He distinguishes himself by his special closeness to the mission and the mandate of lay people and the organized form of the lay apostolate, as well as to the objectives of the Kolping Society
- 2) The Functions of the Protector include:
 - Informing the Bishops' Conference about the work and objectives of the Kolping Society.
 - Maintaining contacts to national bodies of the Kolping Society and particularly to the National Praeses.
 - Transmitting suggestions from the ranks of the Bishops' Conference to the Kolping Society for taking on certain tasks
 - Mediating in cases of conflict between individual bishops and the Kolping Society.
 - Assisting in the search for candidates for the position of National Praeses.