

Our Mission and the Environment

*"Consumerism, a lifestyle of affluence and exploitation of the earth and its resources are intrinsically linked to the social, economic and political injustices of the world and are a wound inflicted on the body of Christ."
(Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ)¹*

Postulata

A lot of postulata arrived on ecological issues, highlighting resource challenges and global warming. They all agree on and stress some link between justice and ecology. According to the postulata, ecology:

- is or should be "a constitutive dimension of our faith, life and mission"
- is "part of our understanding of justice"
- must be "an essential element of our mission today" (along with faith, justice, culture, dialogue)
- "an important dimension of our service of faith and justice"
- to be declared "an apostolic priority"

In other words, on the continuum from "essential to our mission" to "somehow related to our mission", there is a lot of variety of opinion. In an attempt to group options for including ecology as part of the Jesuit mission, the following four came up as the main ones:

1. As a fourth dimension of Jesuit mission, affecting both faith and justice

Decrees 3, 4 and 5 of GC 34 distinguished the social, cultural and interreligious dimensions of the faith-justice mission. This option would identify ecology as a fourth dimension of mission and would give ecology a place at the heart of the Society. This would have the greatest effect since it would be incorporated in all apostolates "by definition".

2. As a transversal dimension of Jesuit mission (cf. GC34 D.14)

The dedication of a Decree to ecology (similar to "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society") would draw a high level of attention to the issue and give room to express general and specific recommendations.

3. As an apostolic priority

Ecology as an apostolic priority would mean that the issue will get quite a central role for a certain period of time, after which the response can be evaluated. This would give time for serious consideration of future actions.

4. As an expansion of our notion of justice²

¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ, "Our Mission Today and Tomorrow," Faith Doing Justice: Promoting Solidarity in Jesuit Ministries, Detroit, 1991, p. 52.

² "This expands our commitment to faith-justice by expanding our understanding of justice, just as culture and inter-religious dialogue, gender issues and ecology expanded the understanding of justice in GC 34. It expands the notion of social to how our effects on the natural

A re-definition of what justice means (i.e. justice includes environmental justice) within the documents coming out of GC35 could be the option that most would agree with.

Suggestions

➤ Justice, peace, environmental sustainability and access to energy resources

Certain ecological phenomena like climate change are already affecting and threatening the livelihoods of people. Simultaneously, an energy crisis is looming as the availability of traditional easy sources of energy is peaking and will decline amidst growing energy demand.

1. The poor are more affected than other groups

The poorer and weaker people are, the fewer options they have for avoiding, adapting to, protecting and insuring themselves against the consequences of climate change or redressing reversible damage.³ Also, poor people and poor countries contribute much less to environmental degradation than rich countries. Many developing countries are rich in energy resources but the local populations scarcely have any advantage from it.

Through our own organisations (e.g. JRS), we have a knowledge of disaster resilience, i.e. how to be with the most vulnerable when their livelihoods are taken away by forces beyond their control. By being with the poor in times of turmoil, we fulfil our mission of a faith that does justice.



world in turn affect people. It also extends the notion of reconciliation to reconciliation with nature." (Peter Bisson, submission to IEN, June 2007)

³ Current and possible future impacts on the poor and those who will become poor through future changes in the environment are: "The premature death of large numbers of people, [...] the impairment of physical and mental health, food insecurity, famine and malnutrition, shortages of drinking water plus conflicts for resources, flight, all associated with the loss of home, safety and security, the loss of quality of life, [...] unevenly distributed effects (inversely proportionate to the causes) plus ever-increasing problems of injustice like hunger, poverty and suppression and their interaction." (The German Bishops: Climate Change - A Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice, Published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference. 2nd, updated edition, Bonn 2007, p. 35).

2. Inter-generational Justice

Environmental degradation spans the generations – people living in developed countries are currently borrowing heavily from what future generations have a right to enjoy, too, e.g. clean air and water. The same applies to energy resources.

The capacity of the Society of Jesus to discern long-term solutions needs to be put at the service of the church and society to ensure future generations can live.

3. Interconnectedness

The environment and the planet's energy resources are classical cases of 'the common good'⁴. All benefit from their protection and wise usage but each individual can draw short-term advantage from disregarding measures that would sustain them in the long run. There is a lack of incentives to act in an environmentally conscious and resource-preserving way, while human laziness and egoism mean that people will not change their (damaging) habits as long as they themselves are okay.

The common good describes one way in which human beings are connected. Interconnectedness also exists between:

- human beings and creation
- human beings and God
- God and creation

Because of the interconnectedness of all human beings with all of creation, "the world's present and future depend on the safeguarding of creation"⁵. The universal scope of the Jesuit mission addresses the challenges of interconnectedness in a holistic view on creation.

All of creation is God's, giving glory to him,⁶ therefore "our primary duty is to respect it rather than just take proper care of it. Sometimes we need to leave it alone, sometimes to live in harmony with it."⁷ This attitude of respect needs to come from a conversion of the heart rather than a conviction of the mind.⁸

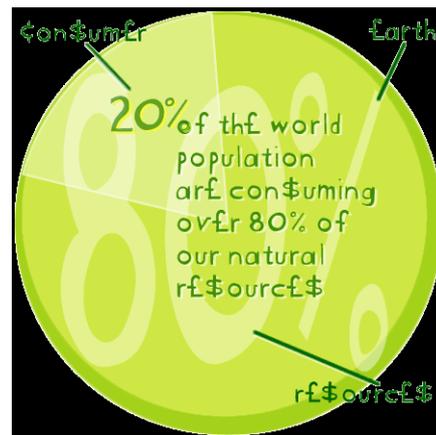
4. Scarcity of resources and peace

The world's global energy consumption balance has become unsustainable as ever more countries and regions aspire at reaching the unjust and unacceptable consumption levels of the so-called first world which refuses to scale down its lifestyles. Existing injustices and

growing scarcity invite to a new sense of sharing and common responsibility for the world's resources, if we want to avoid resource wars.⁹

In order to address these injustices which often result from incomprehension in the first world and a blindness towards global environmental issues in some other parts of the world, encounters between cultures, religions and poor and rich people need to be fostered.¹⁰

Catholic Social Teaching and Ignatian spirituality with their perspective on the Kingdom of God as dignified and sustainable life together, offer visions that may be helpful.¹¹



➤ Possible lines of action

The question is: how do we creatively and commonly discern what would be good practices for the Society of Jesus at the service of the poor in a spirit of justice (social justice for all in an interconnected world) and faith (the vision for a healed world that sustains our efforts here and now in a broken world)? Practical and immediately effective action can be taken on different levels:

- lifestyle (personal and communal),
- vowed life with an accent on poverty as a symbol and expression of social justice
- the universal (global) service of good jesuit governance

1. Our lifestyle

We can start changing our lifestyle starting from today, with small steps and careful discernment. The following list tries to find a balance between what people in developed and in developing countries will be able do:

⁴ The Compendium for the Social Doctrine of the Church states:

"Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles, 'in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common good are the factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments'" (no. 486).

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

⁵ John Paul II, "Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace," Message for the World Day of Peace, 1999, § 10.

⁶ Psalm 148, 5-6: Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he gave the command and they came into existence. He established them so they would endure; he issued a decree that will not be revoked.

⁷ Paul Fyfe SJ, ASL, submission to IEN, May 2007.

⁸ "In any case we must change ourselves; otherwise our effort to struggle against environmental degradation will eventually lose its force and become empty." (Hyun-Chul Cho SJ, KOR, submission to IEN, July 2007)

⁹ "It is impossible to denounce the destruction of natural resources in the Congo without at the same time lamenting over the more than four million lives lost [through war over those resources]." (Daniel Syauswa Musondoli SJ: The Ecological Dimensions of Peace and the Church Mission. Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley 2007).

¹⁰ "Our commitment to justice and peace, human rights and the protection of the environment has to be made in collaboration with believers of other religions." (D.5, n. 8).

¹¹ "The work of ecology benefits from a spirit and style of dialogue wherein, learning from others, we make available our resources such as Catholic Social Teaching, Ignatian spirituality and the thinking of the General Congregations." (Broken World, p.43).

- Stop using plastic wrapping material, plastic bags and plastic bottles
- Plant at least one tree per year as a goal or raise money to plant trees in another part of the world;
- Keep food, water, energy, wood etc. waste to a minimum;
- Eat meat only once a week;
- Buy second hand, re-use, borrow, rent, repair;
- Meet, learn from and work with a local indigenous group;
- Use environmentally friendly fertilizers;
- Grow a garden;
- Switch to a renewable energy source;
- Raise people's awareness through education and community campaigns;
- Buy locally produced agricultural products;
- Commit to walking or taking public transportation (rather than driving) to places nearby;
- Promote a better public transportation system in your city or town.¹²

Each community should be able to name a few examples of what choices they make in favour of the environment. "Any particular choice may be small, a practically insignificant gesture, but it has value as a sign of ethical sensitivity to the rights of others, especially the poor and the future generations, and of spiritual respect for God our Creator."¹³

2. Our vow of poverty

If we choose to interpret our vow of poverty as a "call to live simply, to consume and waste less, to be less of an ecological burden"¹⁴, it can become a powerful symbol of our concern for nature and influence others who are caught up in a world of consumerism and materialism.¹⁵ Depending on the local conditions, the expression of this vow will vary from province to province. GC34 asked each community to "make a common plan that reflects its desire to live simply and in solidarity, a plan which can be easily evaluated at regular intervals."¹⁶

3. Jesuit governance

While individual and local community action is important, institutional change can potentially have a much bigger impact. The Jesuits are present in many places in the world, in the field, in institutions of research and learning, in contact with political and ecclesial decision makers. They are in a unique position to address worldwide challenges. Global tools for the Society could include an international task force, leadership practices that reflect a globalised world, reliable communication structures, improved networking and the implementation of fast and efficient global decision making processes.

Through its various ministries, coordinated at the Curia, the Society is in a position to contribute significantly to

God's action as redeemer of creation and humankind. Much needed information on the ecological crisis and possible solutions could be gathered and distributed in developing countries by the intellectual apostolate¹⁷. In all our schools and higher education institutions, the curriculum could include awareness raising and practical action, as is already happening in some.

Retreats could be designed to bring together environmental groups and empower them with Ignatian discernment techniques. This could be linked with intercultural and inter-religious dialogue activities. The annual Ecology Retreat run by the Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph, Canada, is a shining example in this direction. The formation of Jesuits could include awareness raising and how to build sustainable, life-giving communities. The social apostolate could have many different roles, e.g. as coordinator and animator of activities worldwide.

Our ministry with Native or Indigenous peoples could show new ways of relating to creation. "They have much to teach us"¹⁸. Advocacy and lobbying through our links with decision-makers (e.g. alumni of our universities) and in close cooperation with religious and non-religious institutions has great potential to bring about change regarding environmental challenges as well as the energy question. This has been proven by a successful Jesuit organisation that has been running for almost 20 years and has consultative status with the United Nations: the student movement Tarumitra ("Friends of Trees") in Patna, India, initiated by Robert Athickal SJ¹⁹.

Given the specific charism and the institutional reach of the Society, not acting on the global stage, with the opportunities we have, may ultimately be seen as a sin of omission.

About this document

This document was written by a group of 18 Jesuits from ACE, ASL, BET, BSE, CSU, GER, GUJ, HAZ, IDO, KHM, KOR, MAL, MDU, PAT, PHI, TAR and ZAM who are members of the Ignatian Ecology Network (IEN). The network was founded within the Social Justice Secretariat at the Curia in Rome in order to support the electors of GC35 in their work towards and at the General Congregation.

Please consider reading this document online rather than printing it off.

¹⁷ "It is time for 'Our Societatis Minima' to help the voiceless countries to tell the truth about environmental issues. To do that it is important to pursue the correct information at first hand. Research in the relevant environmental issues is imperative, especially in the underdeveloped and developing countries." (Sunu Hardiyanta, IDO, submission to IEN, July 2007)

¹⁸ "The cultural survival of Native or Indigenous peoples is often linked with the land and nature; their original religions "play an important role in creating ecological harmony and human equality." (D.5, n.4). They have much to teach us. Our ministry with them helps them to recover their heritage, resist assimilation, and create responses, e.g., alternative agriculture, popular education, local ecology." (Broken World, p. 41)

¹⁹ "Tarumitra is a student movement to protect and promote a healthy environment on Earth. Started by students in Patna, India in 1988, the movement has spread into hundreds of high schools and colleges all over India. It has over 200,000 members in over 1000 high schools and colleges." (www.tarumitra.org)

¹² Adapted from: Franciscans International:
<http://www.franciscansinternational.org/issues/env.php>

¹³ Broken World, p. 45

¹⁴ idem.

¹⁵ Hyun-Chul Cho SJ, KOR, submission to IEN, July 2007

¹⁶ D.9, n.12