

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

LA PAIX, POURQUOI PAS?

Give Peace a Chance

With an apt sense of timing since the United Nations has declared 1986 to be the International Year of Peace, three people from very different professional backgrounds (international relations, psychosociology and philosophy) but very closely connected through their work within the French Red Cross, have recently published a book entitled "La Paix, pourquoi pas?" (*Give Peace a Chance*)*.

The purpose of this book is to present a new and pragmatic approach to peace, by trying to generate and foster a spirit of peace among young people and help them translate their ideal into practice; it gives an account of original experiments carried out on the theme of peace for and among young people in several cities throughout France.

Educating the young in a spirit of peace and friendship between peoples of the world is a major concern of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement¹. What this book in fact attempts to demonstrate is what "spirit of peace" actually means, and it seeks to propose suitable ways and means of inspiring young people with this spirit today.

Asked what the word "peace" means in 1986, many young people reply that it is joy, love, freedom, well-being, justice and solidarity; they also,

* *La Paix, pourquoi pas?* by Jean-Daniel Remond, a psychosociologist in charge of development in the social and health fields at the French Red Cross, François de Rose, French Ambassador and Chairman of the French Red Cross Commission on International Affairs and Chantal Ruiz-Barthélémy, a philosophy teacher in charge of Junior Red Cross activities at the French Red Cross. Published by Hachette, Paris, 1986, 158 pp., 50 FF. (Foreword by Mr. Louis Dauge, French Ambassador and President of the French Red Cross.)

¹ *Youth education for peace*: The components of the Movement should pay great attention to educating young volunteers in the spirit of peace and friendship among peoples. They should actively encourage the development of Red Cross programmes for strengthening mutual understanding and solidarity among youth, together with the exchange of information of different countries. In particular, the Red Cross must fight all attempts to imbue children with contempt or hatred for other peoples. (Extract from *What the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement does and wants to do for peace—Fundamental Guidelines for the contribution of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to a true peace in the world*, adopted by the Second World Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on Peace, Aaland-Stockholm, 2-7 September 1984.)

however, see peace as a total absence of tension, as plenitude, serenity, and absolute stillness, "as in death"! The authors of this book in fact show that the concepts of peace, freedom and love have become rather imprecise components of an overall ideal and embody people's hopes and fantasies. Peace is idealized to the extent that everyone can read into it whatever he pleases and, as the concept gradually loses its original meaning, it acquires a new series of connotations. When the word peace is banalized around and used to mean anything a speaker wishes it to mean, it can become a highly dangerous weapon in the hands of those who know how to wield it.

Everyone wants peace, but the question is how to work towards it in concrete terms and in everyday life, where the media overwhelm the public with a vast amount of information, which is a jumble not only of war and peace, conflicts and negotiations, cold war and dissuasion, hostage-taking, arms sales and terrorism, but also includes the will to achieve peace, strategies of fear, efforts to conciliate opposing parties and processes of mediation.

The average person may thus lose all sense of independent judgement and be thrown into what the authors of the book call a "state of non-war", imposed on the general public by forces against which it feels increasingly powerless to react.

This is why the authors prefer to speak of the "spirit of peace", which must be built up and developed so as to form an integral part of everyday life. It is perhaps the only way of restoring the true meaning and scope of the word "peace" and ensuring that the word is used with some degree of precision. This is first and foremost a matter of education.

It is true that today's world is one of violence where aggressiveness and conquest are the name of the game, both reflecting a constructive form of dynamism, but at the same time creating tensions and emphasizing differences. The challenge now is to channel such energy into creative efforts to develop the "spirit of peace". The authors feel that the use of modern technology and a world-wide information network can be of crucial importance in bringing about a change in cultural outlook and a constructive attitude towards peace. For instance, team work and consultation procedures in firms nowadays are forerunners of this change of attitude, leading to a wider recourse to negotiation and mediation.

According to the authors of the book, international aid, as a powerful means of adjusting and reinstating balance on a global scale and with its capacity to generate solidarity, offers a unique opportunity of fostering a spirit of peace.

Great care must be taken, however, to ensure that those involved in providing such assistance are properly warned against the increasing manipulation of international aid and the risk of falling prey to "charity-mongering" or political interests.

Hence the importance of respecting the principles of neutrality and independence to ensure a wholesome distribution of international aid. And

who embodies those principles more completely than does the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, by its pacific ideal, its pacifying influence throughout the world, and by its very acts?

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In an attempt to assess the aptitude of young people to promote peace, the French Red Cross carried out an experiment at a secondary school in a large French city and spent two days discussing peace with a group of about thirty adolescents. By using the simple method of group discussion, the French Red Cross noted how these young people's attitudes towards peace evolved over the two days they spent together: initial aggressiveness, scepticism and irony gradually turned into a general feeling of curiosity and interest; at the end of the two days, the French Red Cross noted a considerable motivation and sense of responsibility among the members of the group, who hoped that it would be possible to organize education for peace and to find means of communicating the "will to achieve peace".

The next step will be to make the general population aware of the need to foster the spirit of peace, through a series of training programmes involving not only young people, but also the local press and radio and the local authorities.

The book also describes other experiments carried out in various French cities among schoolchildren and adults and offers a number of suggestions for activities on the theme of peace (e.g. attempting to reduce the urge to commit acts of violence, developing solidarity on an international scale, seeking out young people from foreign countries living in one's home city, etc.). Readers too are invited to evaluate their aptitude to promote peace by filling in a questionnaire.

In conclusion, this book makes extremely worthwhile reading for several reasons: the major importance of the topic, first of all, the authors' in-depth analysis of the concept of peace, the measured message of hope it conveys and the variety and originality of the experiments conducted among young people.

As Mr. Dauge emphasizes in his Foreword, great benefit may be derived from this book not only by readers whose attitudes to peace may be cynical or disheartened, apprehensive or perhaps even simply indifferent, but also by parents, teachers and staff in charge of dissemination within the National Societies, all of whom are anxious to help young people integrate the spirit of peace into the context of everyday life, within the family, at work, and as citizens of their country.

Jacques Meurant