

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

HENRI COURSIER: "RED CROSS AND PEACE" ¹

The author, who was for many years a legal adviser to the ICRC, has collected a series of texts which, by their very diversity, illustrate the complexity of a subject to which the Red Cross today attaches considerable importance. Whilst it was founded a century ago to protect the victims of war, it subsequently became oriented increasingly towards work for peace. Mr. Coursier's aim was to give an account of this new perspective of its organization and work. After describing the origins of the Red Cross, its international structure, its relief operations in time of war and the significance of the Geneva Conventions, he discusses in turn the ICRC and the League and their respective missions. Outlining the International Committee's contribution to the maintenance of peace, he recounts in a detailed manner the Cuba crisis of autumn 1962 and the appeal to the ICRC by the UN Secretary-General at that time when the outbreak of nuclear war was feared. It is clearly in keeping with the spirit of the many peace promoting statements of the International Conferences of the Red Cross that reliance was placed on Geneva to co-operate in the peaceful settlement of this crisis.

Mr. Coursier also emphasizes that the traditional ICRC action in the event of war is in itself a contributory factor to the restoration of peace. This is carried even further by the Round Table discussions organized by the International Committee on the theme "The Red Cross as a Factor in World Peace" which study that contribution which the Red Cross makes and can continue to make to the spirit of peace, mutual understanding among the nations and thus to the prevention of war. Also important in this field is the work of the League and the National Societies, to which Mr. Coursier devotes a chapter. He defines the role of the National Societies' federation in the Red Cross movement and the main aspects of the humanitarian work carried out in time of peace in the great majority

¹ Spes, Paris, 1968, 128 pp.: Editions ouvrières, 12 avenue Sœur-Rosalie, Paris (13^e).

of the countries of the world, such as the training of medical personnel, medico-social action, welfare assistance, international relief, Red Cross Youth.

He then continues with a brief historical background of ideas on peace, what it represents and what outstanding thinkers have to say about it.

“ Modern law ”, he writes, “ has established the idea of peace on scientific notions independent of theology but not unrelated to the moral aspect which elevates and dignifies it ”. The great American jurist Lieber, the author of the code of laws of war promulgated by Lincoln in 1863, was wont to think of peace in the light of the ancient adage: *pax tranquilla libertas* (peace is peaceful liberty).

This understanding of peace is based on two essential principles: human dignity and respect for life.

For the religious, human dignity resides in God's creation of man in His own image. Respect for one's fellowman is respect for God. All religions agree on this. A protestant pastor travelling in Thibet thanked his hosts for their hospitality and courtesy; they exclaimed that it was quite natural for, they said “ the part of God which is in us respects that which is in you ”.

When the law of nations was established as a discipline distinct from theology, the dignity of the human person remained the chief idea of legal organization, without any reference to the idea of God but, in fact, with the same consequences.

The rule of law is a feature of peace. War permits only what it admits as the law of war to prevail.

Respect for life also is based on the authority of philosophy and religion.

In an article published in the *International Review of the Red Cross* Mr. Demiéville pointed out that “ the principal tenet of the Buddhist moral code is the prohibition to the taking of life ” or as is said in Sanskrit, “ to attack life ”. Hence the refusal to resort to violence, an attitude still characteristic today of certain political leaders in India. “ Thou shalt not kill ” is also a Christian precept.

This precept, like that of human dignity, has spread from theology to the common law of all nations. In our own time, Dr. Schweitzer, of whom somebody wrote “ the life of this dedicated European gives significance to the word peace which has fallen into such disrepute ”, became the apostle of veneration of life. “ Any life is a value of itself ”, used to say this

missionary of Lambarene, and from that he drew noble philosophic conclusions. According to him, good consists of saving, raising and developing life; evil of destroying, abasing or preventing its development.

Respect for life is synonymous with peace. War, on the other hand, abolishes this respect for life except within the limits of the laws of war.

Peace, then, as the affirmation of human dignity and respect for life, is not "peace at any price, but the peace which safeguards the life of people delivered from fear and oppression".

Finally Mr. Coursier shows how this Red Cross vocation for developing the spirit of peace in the world by service in the name of human solidarity is true to the spirit of Henry Dunant. Humanitarian work each day implies a spirit of fraternity among men and also contributes to understanding among the nations.

The author concludes his very useful and topical work with an appendix of various documents relating to the joint mission of the ICRC and the League and he also includes the fundamental principles proclaimed by the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross.

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CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SWISS RED CROSS¹

Professor Hans Haug, President of the Swiss Red Cross has now published under this heading the address he delivered in May 1968 at the 83rd Ordinary Assembly of the National Society delegates. Three years ago in Zurich he recalled the past on the celebration of the centenary of the Swiss Red Cross. He now outlines the future development of the Red Cross in Switzerland, its certain expansion whose services coincide with so many sectors of the community.

First of all he describes the tasks which impose themselves in a world where everything evolves so rapidly and where tensions and difficulties continue to increase. He then mentions the methods

¹ Berne, 1968.