

The International Committee of the Red Cross (III)

by André Durand

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THE SEARCH FOR PRINCIPLES

The founders of the Red Cross did not seek to establish their work on the elements of a doctrine. They referred to a concept of the world which was common to them all and which did not appear to need any explanation. They were impelled by the emotions which Henry Dunant's revelations and proposals had raised in them. Their purpose was to "*take into serious consideration the idea proposed in the conclusions of the book entitled "A Memory of Solférino", namely the foundation of Societies for the Relief of Wounded Soldiers and the addition of a corps of medical volunteers to the belligerent armies*", and their concern was "how" to put that idea into practice rather than "why". It is true that those conclusions contained in embryo a whole set of guiding principles which were not formally stated until much later; but they appeared then as a necessary condition for the application of the initial decisions rather than as their source.

The founders were themselves guided by their religious feeling, which they held to be one of the sources of the brotherhood of man. They felt that the Red Cross had to promote not only the material but also the moral advance of mankind.

But though this religious feeling appeared as a motive force for the founders of the Red Cross movement, it did not have any influence on its practical work, which contained no reference to any theological or metaphysical considerations:

“For a benevolent association born in the heart of Europe in the nineteenth century, one could not go far wrong in assuming that religious feeling was the primary force that urged on the men who were associated in that undertaking...

But it must be recognized that the founders of the Red Cross did not give it the imprint of any particular religion and that in their efforts to make it more widely known they never put forward any arguments which might not have been acceptable to everyone: they only made use of those which all enlightened and noble-hearted persons would have approved and which were compatible with all beliefs. Consequently, although a cross does indeed figure on the flag displayed in 1863, that emblem must be considered to be neutral in religion as well as in politics.”¹

Gustave Moynier, seeking to analyse the reasons for the success of the Red Cross movement, referred to the trend of the ideas of the time which stemmed from Christian charity as much as from the teachings of the eighteenth century philosophers and constituted a fertile soil for the development of the Red Cross, by spreading among peoples the notions of compassion, fraternity and equality.

The founders were working in an epoch in which the general climate of thought heralded the great social and philanthropic movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1862, the same year that saw the publication of *A Memory of Solferino*, Victor Hugo published *Les Misérables* and Dostoievski *The House of the Dead*. These three memorable books exposed and stigmatized three grievous wrongs: War, Want and Penal Servitude.

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This does not mean that the founders of the Red Cross did not make any attempts to clarify certain general principles or certain motivating forces which gave the movement its particular character and impetus. The first was the “*international and sacred principle*” of the neutralization of the army medical services and the protection of the wounded, the corner-stone of the first Convention and, in a wider sense, of the whole of that part of international humanitarian law providing for the protection of persons who do not take part in combat. To this prin-

¹ Gustave MOYNIER, *Les causes du succès de la Croix-Rouge*. Extract from the proceedings of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, Paris, 1888, p. 5.

ciple was added the rule of equality, leading to the dispensation of medical care equally to all the wounded, of whatever nationality they might be.

Nevertheless, Gustave Moynier, during the forty-six years in which he directed the fortunes of the International Committee, did try to enunciate a number of rules which would be valid for all National Societies. It was not so much that he was seeking to invest the movement with moral or spiritual foundations, which he considered were evident enough. It was rather to prevent the dispersion of the National Societies' efforts and, since they were entirely free to govern themselves, to encourage them to seek in their own culture the causes that impelled them to join, and to propose at least a number of standard rules which would preserve the unity of the movement. These rules foreshadowed those principles which today are called the organic principles: centralization, or unity of leadership; foresight, an essential quality of the Red Cross which, as was said at the first Geneva Conference, must prepare in peace-time in order to bring assistance in time of war; reciprocity, which calls for the wounded to be cared for without any distinction of nationality; and solidarity, prompting neutral Societies to offer their services to the National Societies of belligerent countries.

The role of the ICRC in formulating the fundamental principles was confirmed by the mandate it received from the Fourth International Red Cross Conference (Karlsruhe, 1887): to notify the constitution of new National Societies "*after having verified the bases on which they were established*". In order to carry out its mandate, the ICRC enumerated the rules to be followed by the National Societies wishing to gain admission to what was at the time called the "*Universal Alliance of the Red Cross*". One could perceive, in the conditions for recognition listed at that period by the ICRC, some of the principles already expressed, and anticipate those which would be stated later on: unity of the Red Cross in every country; centralization; non-discrimination; auxiliary service; foresight; solidarity between the National Societies.

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After the First World War, the ICRC sought to define more strictly its role in maintaining the fundamental principles and to clarify them. This it did in the statutes it adopted in 1921 and which were confirmed by the International Conference meeting that same year:

“to maintain the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, namely: impartiality, political, religious and economic independence, universality of the Red Cross and equality between National Societies”, and also “to recognize any newly established or reconstituted National Society in conformity with the principles of the Geneva Convention...”

The ICRC had understood the necessity to specify more precisely what were its functions, taking into account those which the newly-created League of Red Cross Societies had decided to assume. It had realized also that attention had to be paid in the immediate post-war period to the problems caused by the re-constitution of certain Red Cross Societies and to the question of their representativeness.

With Max Huber as President, speculation on the Red Cross doctrine took an upward turn, although it is true that that eminent jurist did not dissociate theory from action:

*“The Red Cross was not fashioned out of a beautiful but abstract ethical idea, nor was it first thought out and debated at a congress; it came to life on the battlefield of Solferino, born of an urgent and actual necessity, and the people who created it did so, in its most literal sense, with their own hearts and hands. The Red Cross lives and will live on with the help rendered in such fashion.”*¹

But Max Huber also believed that an action which was not directed by a doctrinal conception of its aims would tend to get dispersed or would disintegrate, and that it was necessary to keep it on the right track by pondering unceasingly on its motivations and objectives. He discussed this theme in several of his books, for example in *The Good Samaritan* and *Principles of action of the International Committee and foundations of the work of the Red Cross*.

In this last study, Max Huber summarizes all the experience he had accumulated during the seventeen years he was President of the ICRC, in particular during the Second World War. As the title suggests, he primarily sets down there the fruit of his considerations on the action of the ICRC; but the conclusions he reaches are of course relevant to the whole of the movement. He underlines the elements which characterize

¹ MAX HUBER, *The Idea of the Red Cross Today*, in *The Red Cross Principles and Problems*, Geneva. First printed in French in the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Geneva, December 1934.

the first Geneva Convention: the principles of *active relief work*, and of *absolute impartiality*, both of which are founded upon the *respect of the human person*. From these general principles stem, according to Max Huber, ICRC impartiality, its role in the maintenance of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, its role in the formation of humanitarian law, the principle of universality, its apolitical character, its straightforwardness in action—which precludes dubious, clandestine or tortuous methods, even were they employed to humanitarian ends, and even were they employed for persons or institutions who would not abide by such methods. These concepts, valid for the ICRC in wartime, are just as valid, in the author's eyes, in all circumstances:

“The safeguard of the principles of humanity in wartime depends, to a very large extent on whether they have taken root in men's conscience already in peacetime”.

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After the Second World War, the Red Cross sought to define more accurately the principles it had taken as its guidelines. It wished to maintain a steady policy towards the ideologies seeking its favours and also to define the specific character of its doctrine and the difference which separate it from other international bodies whose aims also were the defence, well-being and development of the human person.

In 1946, the Board of Governors of the League met at Oxford and issued an important declaration which added to the principles adopted earlier a number of fundamental principles and rules of application. It is these principles which are referred to in the Regulations for the admission of new Societies to the League of Red Cross Societies, while the conditions for the recognition of new Societies — which are submitted to the ICRC for examination — refer to the *“fundamental principles of the Red Cross as formulated by the International Red Cross Conference”*.

These various texts, each in their own way expressing the same ideas, group under a single title abstract principles, rules for action, methods of administration and objectives. Together they represent more a programme of activities than a doctrine.

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In the course of the next few years, after having conducted a thorough analysis of its activity during the Second World War and of the new expansion of international humanitarian law in the *Report of the Inter-*

national Committee of the Red Cross on its activities during the Second World War and in the *Commentary to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, the ICRC sought to elaborate a corpus of principles that at the same time would express the motive force of the Red Cross movement and would serve as a common ethical code.

The writings of Professor Jean Pictet, Vice-President of the ICRC, opened up new aspects of those studies, by subjecting the principles so far selected to constructive analysis and incorporating them in a structured doctrine. In his *Red Cross Principles* Jean Pictet made a major distinction between the *fundamental principles*, which give the Red Cross its essential character and express its *raison d'être*, and the *organic principles*, which concern the structure of the institution and the way it works. He distinguished seven fundamental principles, at the head of which he set the principle of humanity, the essence of the institution, "*its ideal, its motives and its aims*". He defined the abstract notions which together constitute and describe the character of the Red Cross doctrine:

"This doctrine forms a coherent system, the various parts of which are as interdependent as the stones of a building. Similarly, it is acceptable to all men, whatever their outlook and conception of life. Indeed, accepted by the mind as much as by the heart, the Red Cross is not a creed opposed to other creeds, but an ideal which, in the field of mutual aid, inspires practical solutions adapted to man's requirements. It is not a new religion or a special philosophy, but an attitude which fits in with all religions and all philosophies".¹

On the basis of this study, a working committee set up by the International Red Cross Standing Commission prepared a draft in which the principles were systematically set down. The draft was examined by the Council of Delegates, at a meeting in Prague (1961), and the final text was adopted by the Twentieth International Red Cross Conference (Vienna, 1965) under the heading "*Proclamation of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*". The Vienna Proclamation set forth seven *fundamental principles*, to which were associated a number of principles considered as *organic* or *derived*.² They may be defined as follows:

¹ Jean S. PICTET, *Red Cross Principles*, preface by Max Huber, ICRC, Geneva, 1956, p. 10.

² *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, Commentary*, by Jean Pictet, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1979.

Humanity—The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours—in its international and national capacity—to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality—It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality—In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence—The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles.

Voluntary service—The Red Cross is a voluntary relief organisation not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity—There can be only one Red Cross Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality—The Red Cross is a world-wide institution in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other.

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The principles adopted by the Red Cross to define its doctrine are today the corner-stone of the institution. They constitute, too, a set of standards which can be referred to whenever it is desired to see whether a new activity which the Red Cross is considering is consistent with its doctrine. Any action which diverges from these principles would not lie within its sphere of activity.

The Red Cross does not claim, outside its own specific activities, to impose its own concept of the relations which should exist among men or of the character of the institutions they create. In fact, it is indeed when the ideals proclaimed by the Red Cross are least known that its presence is most necessary. It may be said, however, that the principles which direct its thought and its action form the elements of an ethical code which postulates the pre-eminence of the human person, demands that it be respected and proclaims its dignity, and that those principles propose a pattern for a society in which the concepts of universality, equality and non-discrimination may be applied.

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THE PREVENTION OF WAR

Those who endeavour to alleviate the ills caused by war must sooner or later ask themselves if they have not embarked on a never-ending task and whether, as they tend the wounded, they should not at the same time direct their attention to the elimination of war altogether.

That is the objective which today the Red Cross seeks. It is the result of a lengthy process of thought and study which has changed the attitude of the Red Cross towards war over a period of more than a hundred years. It is only gradually, or more precisely by a series of changes thrust upon it by two world wars, that the Red Cross has made efforts to link to its plans for the mitigation of the ills of war a programme for the promotion of peace.

For all those who refuse to be satisfied with merely comforting phraseology, that is not an easy undertaking. The struggle against war may be conducted with a degree of efficiency only by making a scientific study of the "war phenomenon"¹ in all its complexity. It requires a clear-headed intervention in a field which States and organized groups claim to be under their sole authority, as the intangible sign of their sovereignty. That struggle sometimes comes up against a basic reality which has existed throughout the ages, namely that the notion of freedom,

¹ Gaston BOUTHOU, *Les Guerres, Eléments de polémologie*, Payot, Paris, 1951.

whether of a nation or of an individual, contains within it the seeds of possible violence.

However, in a situation which had become intolerable, it was inevitable that the Red Cross, as it had done in the sphere of protection and assistance, should seek to extend its range of action and to fight against war, but without renouncing its neutrality and without depriving itself of the means to mitigate the suffering caused by war.

For the scope of this evolution to be better understood, it may be divided into three main phases:

— Until the First World War: the *realist* phase. War was “*one of the forms of evil in the world*”, it was “*collective wickedness on a large scale.*”¹

This was recognized and deplored, and the role of the Red Cross was to alleviate the pernicious effects of war and bring charity right onto the field of battle.

— From the First to the Second World War: the *idealist* phase. By encouraging understanding among peoples, combating disease and suffering, and spreading the spirit of peace, the Red Cross was making its contribution to the prevention of war.

— After the end of the Second World War: the search for *practical action*. The Red Cross had to define its aims in participating in the struggle against war and set itself a specific programme.

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In his book, “*A Memory of Solferino*”, Henry Dunant paid attention to the consequences of war, the suffering caused by war, rather than to war itself. It was not that he approved of war, or accepted it; but finding that *the state of mind of the people in Europe was such that there was a likelihood of wars taking place at some time in the future*, Dunant thought that the most pressing task was to protect the victims. He had not yet developed his thought to its conclusion, to a fundamental pacifism, and to the absolute condemnation of war and of militarism which he was to express later in his memoirs.

Dunant’s colleagues on the *International Committee for Relief to Wounded Soldiers* adopted a similar attitude. Their aim was not to ban

¹ Dr Louis APPIA, *Rapport sur sa mission dans le Schleswig*, Communication du Comité international de secours aux militaires blessés, Genève, 1864.

war, but to prevent or to alleviate the sufferings which it brought in its wake. In his opening address to the Geneva Conference of 1863, General Dufour, while paying tribute to the efforts of peace congresses, did not think there was much likelihood that they would put an end to all conflicts: “*Therefore, rather than chase the dream of war’s elimination we should, in order to be really useful to society, endeavour to render the consequences less terrible...*” It is true that, as he was speaking to the representatives of States who had come to Geneva to discuss ways and means of improving the efficiency of the military medical services, the first chairman of the Conference could hardly tell them that peace was soon at hand.

Nevertheless, the International Committee soon found that it had to take a stand on the problem of war. Was there not a contradiction in introducing humanitarian rules in war, without expressing an opinion on the legitimacy of what was after all a resort to violence? On this point, the attitude of the members of the International Committee was clear. They condemned war and thought that the efforts of the partisans of peace and those of the Red Cross were complementary, each contributing in its own way to the prevention of war.¹ But they had chosen to devote themselves to the alleviation of the victims’ sufferings, an undertaking which could be immediately put into practice, while the establishment of peace was, in their opinion, still a distant possibility. They did not, therefore, attempt to combine those two tasks which, in the Europe of the latter half of the nineteenth-century, would probably have required quite different lines of approach.

But they did not consider that, in mitigating the ills of war, and in getting nations to accept rules of law, they were conferring legitimacy on war. On the contrary, Gustave Moynier proclaimed that war was “*a relic of barbaric times that had to be rooted out, it was not like the germ of a plant which had be tutored*”. Never, he said, would the conscience of mankind come to terms with war. And he concluded with the statement: “*A civilized war is an absurdity*”.²

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¹ Gustave MOYNIER, *Les causes du succès de la Croix-Rouge*, Paris, 1888, p. 15.

² Gustave MOYNIER, *Essai sur les caractères généraux des lois de la guerre*, Genève, 1895, p. 45.

It should not be forgotten that the founders of the Red Cross were nationals of a neutral State, whose permanent neutrality had been guaranteed by the great European Powers. Of course, this neutrality, brought about by historical and geographical circumstances particular to Switzerland, did not present a general solution to the problem of war. At least, it allowed the members of the *International Committee for Relief to Wounded Soldiers*, to view war as a phenomenon alien to their convictions, and in which they became involved only to relieve suffering.

Besides, right from the beginning, the Red Cross barred from its means of action any resort to force. Although the principle of non-violence was not expressed, it was one of the institution's characteristics. The entire development of Red Cross thought and action never departed from this precept which was thus conducive to the promotion of peace. This attitude of non-violence is, together with the protection of the individual against gross injustice and suffering, one of the characteristic traits of the Red Cross enabling it to diversify its action while remaining true to its origins.

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After the First World War, it became clear that the Red Cross could not remain satisfied with the traditional benevolent works it performed during hostilities and that it was necessary for it to grapple with the causes of wars in order to prevent, if possible, their recurrence. At the time when the League of Nations was founded, when President Wilson's fourteen points seemed to herald an era of peace, and when the National Red Cross Societies joined to form a federation that was to direct their activities towards assistance in time of peace, the Red Cross placed the maintenance of peace in the forefront of its concerns. The first International Red Cross Conference which met after the war (Geneva, 1921) called upon the ICRC and the League to "*address an appeal to all peoples to combat the spirit of war which is still rife throughout the world*". Later, and until 1934, at every subsequent International Red Cross Conference and at every assembly of the League, resolutions were adopted calling upon the Red Cross world to continue the struggle for peace.

The Red Cross based its approach to the question of peace on the postulate that the spread of the spirit of peace and mutual understanding among nations was essential for the maintenance of peace and that

the Red Cross world, by virtue of its universal nature and its role in the alleviation of suffering, constituted a favourable element for bringing nations closer to each other. It was therefore for the Red Cross to work “within the framework of its functions”, for the prevention of all wars and to consider that one of its prime duties was the moral combat and propaganda against war.

Actually, the means available to the Red Cross for its fight against war were singularly small. There were certainly hopes that the indirect action of the Red Cross against war might lead to a kind of moral disarmament and would have a long-term influence for peace. But such hopes were belied by events. Ethical values weigh but little when the vital interests of nations are at stake. From 1934 until the Second World War, the Red Cross refrained from making any concrete move in favour of peace.

Nonetheless, although it is not evident that the efforts of the Red Cross in this domain have had any practical effect, one should not underestimate the part such efforts played in the moulding of the Red Cross attitude towards the promotion of peace. They represented an initial approach, which was not then based on any systematic analysis but which opened the way to future investigation. The Red Cross, in stating that in its work in search of peace it did not move away from the path laid down by its founders but that it was “*in complete harmony with the spirit and tradition of the institution*”, replied to those who criticized it for having implicitly accepted the inevitability of war, and it showed that its vocation of charity, which had led it to work at first “in war”, and later “in peace”, would lead it inevitably to work “for peace”.

Furthermore, in its enumeration of the means by which it was hoping to reach a situation of permanent peace, the Red Cross tacitly indicated that it rejected the idea of a conqueror’s imposed peace; the peace envisaged by the Red Cross was one based upon mutual understanding between nations, the personal beliefs of individuals and the respect of their rights.

The first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 1901 jointly to Henry Dunant and to the French philanthropist Frédéric Passy. The Norwegian Parliament’s Nobel Committee later twice awarded its Peace Prize to the ICRC, in 1917 and in 1944, and once more in 1963 when the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies were jointly awarded this distinction.

At the ceremony in Oslo on 10 December 1945, the ICRC President, Max Huber, spoke of the essential link which, in his view, existed between “*constructive peace*” and assistance to war victims:

“No organization set up to ensure peace among nations can last unless it draws its inspiration from active solidarity among men, an idea which the Red Cross is anxious to preserve even in the darkest hours of humanity”.

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As the Red Cross continued after the Second World War to seek an approach to the problem of peace, it wished to avoid repeating the idealist declarations which people justifiably thought had not made any significant contribution to the preservation of peace. Even more impelling was the fact that while the world conflict was terminated war was starting again in many different countries, forming a belt of localized wars around the earth and at the same time the cold war was splitting the nations into two ideological blocs. The Red Cross, therefore, began to seek more efficient modes of action. But there was no easy solution, for both the maintenance of peace and the prevention of war called essentially for measures of a political nature, which the Red Cross was neither able nor willing to take.

The struggle for peace was to be frequently associated with the demand to ban the use and testing of atomic weapons. Just after the war, the ICRC appealed to the Powers to hold back such weapons in reserve, if they could not be totally rejected, “*as an ultimate guarantee against war*”, or what could be called today a deterrent weapon. Later, the ICRC was given a mandate by International Red Cross Conferences to draft a set of rules for the limitation of the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects, including atomic weapons. The draft was submitted to the International Conference in New Delhi in 1957, but it did not lead to any positive results. Problems relating to the development of nuclear weapons, like the problems of disarmament, have too many political aspects and non-governmental bodies can do nothing except voice their wishes.

The *Declaration on Peace*, drafted by the League Board of Governors and adopted by the Seventeenth International Red Cross Conference (Stockholm, 1948) after the war, was very much like the joint appeal for peace by the ICRC and League of Red Cross Societies in 1921.

It contained the usual emotional sentiments that were to be found in Red Cross pacifist declarations: peace was built in the hearts and minds of men by deeds prompted by mutual sympathy, understanding and respect for their fellow-men; Red Cross activities were practical, constructive measures in the cause of peace; the work of the National Societies in the field of hygiene, the Junior Red Cross programmes, international co-operation among sister Societies, all contribute towards the elimination of some of the causes of war. However, the Declaration on Peace did introduce a new concept which was to become an essential element of the *Programme of Action of the Red Cross for Peace*: "Peace is not simply the absence of a state of war".

From that time, international Red Cross meetings systematically referred to peace as one of the institution's objectives. To obtain peace, they mentioned in particular the peace-making role of assistance and protection activities, the advantages of co-operation and understanding between peoples, with the addition all the same of more constructive proposals. An important innovation was introduced at the Vienna International Conference: the ICRC was invited to undertake, in liaison with the United Nations and within the framework of its humanitarian mission, every effort likely to contribute to the prevention of possible armed conflicts, and to be associated, in agreement with the States concerned, with any appropriate measures to that end. For the first time, the ICRC was empowered to take practical action with a view to the prevention, not only of war in general, but of specific conflicts. Following the Vienna Conference, two round table meetings attended by representatives of National Societies, the League and the ICRC were organized in 1967 and 1969. These were clearly influenced by sociological studies on war, which had been initiated after the world conflagration, and by the investigations carried out by various institutes specializing in research on war. New questions were discussed: world population explosion as a cause of conflicts and the possible role of the Red Cross in birth control programmes; aid for Third World development; measures to counter warlike and xenophobic propaganda; development of contacts with institutes conducting research into problems of war and peace; the role of the ICRC and National Societies in the event of conflict or the threat of conflict.

The Red Cross world accordingly sought to elaborate a complete doctrine that would enable it to play a positive role in the struggle for

peace. The International Conference held at Istanbul in 1969 urged that study groups should be set up to seek practical ways of enabling the Red Cross to participate more effectively in the safeguarding of peace, and recommended that the ICRC should examine with the National Societies what contribution the Red Cross could make towards preventing the outbreak of a conflict or achieving a ceasefire. In 1973, the League Board of Governors at Teheran recommended that a Red Cross Conference be convened to study the role and the activities of the Red Cross to promote peace and suggested that an Organizing Committee be set up to make the preparations for the conference.

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The Organizing Committee's work, in which representatives of the League, ICRC, Henry Dunant Institute and fourteen National Societies took part, led to the convening of the *World Red Cross Conference on Peace* at Belgrade, from 11 to 13 June 1975, the first to be held by the Red Cross on this theme exclusively.

The final document drafted by the conference under the title, *Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a Factor of Peace*, and the interpretative texts that supplemented it in 1977¹, are today the working documents of the Red Cross in this field. In its preamble, the *Programme of Action* stressed that the Red Cross must make constant efforts to safeguard and strengthen peace, and to combat forces violating or threatening it, and it went on to develop the definition of peace which had been outlined in the *Declaration on Peace* adopted by the Seventeenth International Red Cross Conference (Stockholm, 1948):

"The Red Cross does not view peace simply as the absence of war, but rather as a dynamic process of co-operation among all States and peoples; co-operation founded on freedom, independence, national sovereignty, equality, respect of human rights, as well as a fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet the needs of peoples."

The Programme of Action took up and developed the traditional themes on the peace-making value of Red Cross activities related to solidarity, to legal protection and to relief to war victims' sufferings.

¹ Council of Delegates, Bucharest, 1977.

It proposed to the national and international Red Cross bodies the adoption of specific objectives to increase their co-operation in assistance, to amplify international humanitarian law and to strengthen its application and dissemination.

The programme specified two further kinds of activity where Red Cross institutions could make a more direct contribution to the prevention of war and the maintenance of peace. One was by asking the ICRC and the Red Cross bodies to take constructive measures, where necessary in close co-operation with the United Nations, to prevent the outbreak of hostilities or help to bring about a cease-fire or cessation of hostilities; the other was by proposing the essential points of a systematic programme to promote peace, especially active co-operation with scientific institutions undertaking research on peace, the struggle against racism and racial discrimination, the establishment of bodies specialized in peace research, and the implementation of programmes and plans of development, education of youth and dissemination for the promotion of peace.

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The Red Cross has now passed one stage further in its search for ways to prevent war. It would like to adopt a more active role, in which its world-wide organization, its moral force and its ideals could be used to advance the cause of peace.

It must be acknowledged that the Red Cross has only limited means at its disposal for action in this field. The organization and maintenance of peace are specifically political tasks. A body or an ideology with no power behind it may perhaps play a conciliatory or a moderating role in the sequence of events leading to or preventing a conflict situation, but it will find it much more difficult to have any decisive say in the matter.

The Red Cross, however, can undoubtedly take—and has, indeed, taken in the past—an active part in the promotion of peace, principally by attempting to divest war of its mythical quality and of its spurious reputation, by contesting the eminent position granted it in the history of nations and, in contrast, by setting co-operation and understanding among people as one of its unchallengeable objectives. But there are limits to this patiently conducted campaign: the disarmament of minds

is certainly one of the necessary conditions for the prevention of war, but it is not alone sufficient.

In this sphere, the educational role of the Red Cross is undoubtedly of considerable significance. It should not be forgotten that for a very long time the teaching of history has been primarily focused on military, political and social events without any reference to the Red Cross. To remedy this lack, the ICRC and League prepared a teaching guide ¹ containing material for teachers in most countries of the world. The aim was to help teachers introduce into the school curricula the salient facts of the Red Cross—its history, institutions, ideology and goals. This may well be one of the most striking achievements in the world of education, in that it introduces a new subject of universal significance, which is the same for all people, while usually the curricula are centred on national characteristics. Nonetheless, to be of any real value, this new departure will call for great perseverance and authority, for it is in the nature of man that his attention is gripped and his sense of emulation and enthusiasm excited by tales of mighty conquests, as exemplified, in the words of Henry Dunant, in the “rapacious and savage battles for empires waged by Alexander and the Caesars, by Charlemagne and Bonaparte” ², while the patient, persevering, and sometimes monotonous struggle of an institution pitting reason against force, and moderation against violence, goes practically unheeded.

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At all events, the Red Cross, in this domain, has gone through an inevitable evolution, marked, as in most of its actions, by the changes that have taken place in the civilization to which it belongs. When wars were merely a succession of pitched battles, the founders of the Red Cross were right in concentrating their efforts on the alleviation of the sufferings and hardship they caused. After the First World War, the hope to see the disputes settled by negotiation or arbitration, at a time when what had been then named the “spirit of Geneva” reigned over men’s minds, led the Red Cross quite naturally to be in favour of an idealistic concept of peace. Today, the problem is wholly different.

¹ *The Red Cross Teaching Guide.*

² Henry DUNANT, *L’avenir sanglant*, Henry Dunant Institute, Editions L’Age d’homme, p. 176.

War appears to have escaped man's control and to have become a phenomenon of which he is but the instrument. In its worst form, war could prevent the normal performance of humanitarian assistance. It therefore behoves the Red Cross, which was born of a cry of protest at the sight of men suffering on the field of battle, to go back to the cause of those sufferings and, so that they should not become irremediable, to make its own contribution to the prevention of war, as a logical continuation of its vocation.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, we have stressed the essential aspects of ICRC action and thought, and its peculiarities distinguishing it from other institutions which have also as their objective the defence or the protection of the human person, but pursue that same goal along different paths. We have followed the progress of its evolution, impelled by the interaction of events and doctrine, and we have seen how every initiative of the ICRC can be the origin of a new development in law, and how, conversely, every advance made by the law opens to the ICRC further possibilities for action.

This development and the corresponding evolution of the Red Cross are the fruit of experience and trials over the past one hundred and twenty years. It is certain that over such a long period of time, marked by so many political, technological and social upheavals, there have been few institutions whose advance has been so constant and irreversible and who, while remaining closely knit, have preserved their character of universality. In the first place, this universality is of worldwide application; it seeks to extend Red Cross action to every nation, and to every circumstance corresponding to its objectives. Secondly, its universality is of participation, and allows all persons, without distinction of any kind, to embrace its principles and co-operate in its work.

Of course, it may be assumed that, to obtain worldwide acceptance, overcoming the diversities of cultures, ideologies, traditions and degrees of technical development which characterize the community of nations, any programme of action must take into account those differences and

must be presented as a sort of common denominator for all beliefs and all philosophies. Similarly, if the provisions of the Conventions are to be ratified and applied, they have to be the object of a *consensus* on the maximum acceptable to each one.

This does not mean that the character of universality may be gained only by granting concessions. The Red Cross must single out that which is common to all mankind, and eliminate the particularisms so as to retain only the general characters, in order to educe, in the diversity of nations, that which draws them closer together, and so to disclose what peoples have in common when their dissimilarities are set aside.

One could understand, accordingly, that for the Red Cross to avoid any deviations or splits, it was essential to guide it by the establishment of a doctrine and principles that would keep it in the right direction. As Max Huber wrote, "*it is by their adherence to spiritual values that institutions are able to live, subsist and enter into history, throughout the transformations imposed upon them by the passing of time and despite their wish to adapt themselves to new conditions*".

But we have also seen that it is only in its practical applications that the ICRC justifies itself and fulfils itself. Its elaborate system for thought and juridical construction has meaning only if it succeeds in improving the condition of a human being. It is therefore not surprising to find when one examines the historical development of the ICRC, that its action preceded the law, that practical measures carried along the doctrine and that the ICRC insisted on the recognition of its right of initiative in all circumstances: for it is by its practical achievements that it justifies its existence.

André Durand