

ANNIVERSARY MESSAGE

by Jean-Georges Lossier

Few journals have the opportunity, as the *Review* has today, of celebrating their 125th anniversaries. A more suitable occasion could hardly be found to highlight the publication's important contribution to the study of a broad range of subjects, including the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, international humanitarian law, the activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the history of humanitarian ideas and of those who have championed them, world peace and international ethical standards. In fact, an outstanding feature of the *Review* over the past fifty years has been the very scope and diversity of the subjects it addresses. Two of these, among others, have played a significant role in the development of the Movement.

First of all, the *Review* had the privilege of publishing, in several instalments, the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross as formulated by Jean Pictet, together with a detailed commentary thereof. This provided the Movement, which is constantly forced by events to focus on day-to-day practical matters, with a welcome chance to return to its philosophical origins. Soon afterwards the Council of Delegates, meeting in Prague, adopted its own set of concise Fundamental Principles. These Principles were essentially the same as the ones formulated by Mr Pictet, which had been widely circulated in the *Review* and represented a necessary first step towards defining the Movement's values.

Another crucial topic to which the *Review* has devoted several studies and which it was the first to address in depth is that of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and Peace. At a time when the Cold War loomed menacingly, the ICRC, through its publication, drew attention to the problem in response to the call of those who believed that humanitarian work was conducive to peace and that the Geneva Conventions, far from representing conscious acceptance of the rule of force, stood instead for the rejec-

tion of force since their aim was to limit the consequences of war and counter the inevitability of violence through legal rules.

The *Review*, by publishing articles on history and ethics, also invites its readers to ponder over the meaning of Red Cross/Red Crescent action and of humanitarian service itself in contemporary society. This is an especially important and relevant issue today, when the Movement is faced with increasingly difficult conditions and growing responsibilities. Indeed, the issue can hardly be ignored in such a period of uncertainty and violence, less favourable than ever for the flowering of humanitarian ideas. Yet it is precisely because the Movement, as other aid agencies, must grapple with the current situation that it is more determined than ever to pursue the work begun in Solferino. At the same time, it is attempting to understand how changes in society are affecting the conditions in which humanitarian work takes place and influencing its outcome and effectiveness.

The future is often conditioned by the past. It is especially important therefore that humanitarian institutions not lose sight of their origins in their approach to the sociological conditions and moral demands of their day-to-day work. Historically, the founding of the Red Cross was one of the outstanding events of a major movement which, at the end of the eighteenth century, advocated respect for all human beings, regardless of nationality, race, or political, religious or social affiliation. It is this very respect which is in jeopardy today and must be recognized at all costs. One way of furthering this aim is for individuals to rediscover a sense of belonging to the community. It is only by fostering constant communication with and reciprocal commitment towards others that each person assumes his or her own share of responsibility in promoting mutual respect.

Indignation is best expressed in acts, not words. Assistance should be given simply, in silence, in order to dispel shame or alleviate suffering, and it should be motivated not only by feelings of compassion, but also by the fact that harm done to the dignity of any person offends all humankind. In that way a helping hand takes on a deeper meaning, that of a protest against violence, barbarity and injustice, thereby proving that the law of universal necessity can be turned around and that our own humanity must forever be given renewed expression. And it is by assisting others that we can best fulfil this aim, heeding our inner longing to overcome the barriers of prejudice and intolerance. The Red Cross/Red Crescent therefore does not ask about a person's origins or destination, but only whether that person is in distress. It recognizes only one identity,

that of suffering, and responds to its call. It proclaims the supreme value of human life in the name of solidarity and holds that every life is equally precious. Thus ambulance workers on the front lines risk their own lives to save a single wounded person.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent urges faith in humankind. It justifies that faith by its very existence, which serves as a constant reminder to us of our own humanity, and it holds that peace, forever fragile, can be sustained by each and every one of us. If its appeal is to be heard, we must nurture the seeds of an immense hope, that of a more fraternal world. Yet all too often we are overcome by feelings of doubt generated by fear of what lies ahead. These feelings only lead to collective mistrust and passive acceptance of the inevitability of new conflicts and threats. Obsessive fear diminishes us, causing us to turn inwards instead of reaping the rewards that come from opening up and reaching out to others. As a result, cries of hatred drown out the voices of countless people of good will who work steadfastly for a better world.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent draws on a heritage common to all humankind, as the *Review* has shown in several articles dealing with respect for the individual in various religions and philosophies. At the Movement's invitation, thousands of women and men from all over the world with different mentalities have gathered together. Yet the Red Cross/Red Crescent itself does not endorse the values of any particular society. On the contrary, it is by not seeking to impose universally any one concept of morality that it has been able to become universal itself. It believes that a sense of solidarity encompasses, or in fact is, our deepest impulse, the one which enables us to give the best of ourselves.

Today, in the face of a constantly growing need for urgent assistance, humanitarian institutions are striving to affirm the inviolability of life and doing everything possible to promote recognition, in international legislation, of human rights — those rights which the Movement defends on the moral grounds first put forward by Henry Dunant. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights constitutes an ideal aim in this respect and a motivating force for all humanitarian work. The same is true of the Geneva Conventions and the other humanitarian law treaties, which provide vital protection against the excesses of war. Indeed, the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims convened in August/September 1993 declared: "In conclusion we affirm our conviction that, by preserving a spirit of humanity in the midst of armed conflicts, international humanitarian law keeps open the road to reconciliation, facilitates the restoration of peace between the belligerents, and fosters harmony between all peoples".

The Movement acts only with the consent of the parties concerned and is effective only provided it can count on collective and individual support and good will, and on the determination of all parties to respect their obligations. If no one were to take responsibility for the well-being of others, what strength would the Movement have left? To whom could it turn? This is especially true today, when war is waged without restraint, bringing about the displacement of large groups and leaving many people totally destitute, without family, homeland or even identity, forced to wander aimlessly, accepted for a time here or there and rejected elsewhere, desperately seeking a new lease on life. When States or individuals reject the principles embodied by the Red Cross/Red Crescent, the Movement's scope for action is diminished and its appeals meet with increased resistance. As a result, people accept revolting acts, blame cowardice on fate and lose faith in humanitarian work. The only way to restore that faith is by rising to the defence of humane values. This is an aim to which the *Review* has steadfastly contributed through the articles it publishes.

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A writer and sociologist, he has published several collections of poetry and has been awarded four literary prizes. He has also written two major works which are still regarded as authoritative today: *Fellowship — The Moral Significance of the Red Cross* (1948) and *Les civilisations et le service du prochain* (1958). In addition, he is the author of numerous articles on the ideals and principles of the Movement.
