

The historical foundations of humanitarian action

by Dr. Jean Guillermand

After nearly 130 years of existence, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continues to play a unique and important role in the field of human relations.

Its origin may be traced to the impression made on Henry Dunant, a chance witness at the scene, by the disastrous lack of medical care at the battle of Solferino in 1859 and the compassionate response aroused in the people of Lombardy by the plight of the wounded. The Movement has since gained importance and expanded to such a degree that it is now an irreplaceable institution made up of dedicated people all over the world.

The Movement's success can clearly be attributed in great part to the commitment of those who carried on the pioneering work of its founders. But it is also the result of a constantly growing awareness of the conditions needed for such work to be accomplished. The initial text of the 1864 Convention was already quite explicit about its application in situations of armed conflict. Jean Pictet's analysis in 1955 and the adoption by the Vienna Conference of the seven Fundamental Principles in 1965 have since codified in international law what was originally a generous and spontaneous impulse.

In a world where the weight of hard-hitting arguments and the impact of the media play a key role in shaping public opinion, the fact that the Movement's initial spirit has survived intact and strong without having recourse to aggressive publicity campaigns or losing its independence to the political ideologies that divide the globe may well surprise an impartial observer of society today.

Such a phenomenon can be explained only by the fact that Dunant's explicit motivations must have touched a profound chord, calling forth a powerful, universal and timeless response. This raises with an acuteness

more clearly recognized today a problem which concerns the very conscience of mankind and which, if it is to be properly understood, must be examined in a long-term historical perspective.*

PART 1

The religious influence

Among the original motivations that gave rise to the Movement founded by Dunant, the religious and especially the Christian one is the most immediately perceptible, suggested not least by the similarity between the Movement's expressed altruistic ideal and the attitude required of Christ's disciples.

Henry Dunant, who was also an active member of the Young Men's Christian Organization, made no effort to hide his religious convictions.

Discussing the subject in 1899, Gustave Moynier stressed that the Committee of Five was created by "a group of men firmly devoted to the evangelical faith". He added that the invitations sent by the Swiss Federal Council to the constituent Diplomatic Conference in 1864 were addressed mainly to Christian States — with the exception of Turkey, which in any case had not replied.

Although the Movement was founded by dedicated Christians and sanctioned by nations which had long been converted to Christianity, it would be wrong to attribute this concurrence to a tradition of non-discriminatory international charitable action on the part of the Church. Over the centuries the Church's attitude has been equivocal on this particular point and in practice its position in the world has even led it to take stands far removed from its original precepts.

Taken literally, the teachings of the gospel were uncompromisingly simple regarding worldly considerations. No exception was to be made to the golden rule "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"¹ (Matthew

* The scope of this article may appear somewhat confined, since only the root causes and motivations most common to the countries which gave the Red Cross its initial form and content have been taken into account. This choice must obviously not be construed as reflecting a judgement upon (and even less a dismissal of) ways of thinking to be found in other parts of the world which, while remaining true to their own philosophies and beliefs, have accepted and adopted the Movement's principles in a truly universal community of spirit.

¹ ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27), nor was it to be applied only to the community of believers as was the case with an identical commandment in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). Luke related the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25) to illustrate the universal nature of this principle, and Jesus, having praised the peacemakers in the Beatitudes, carried it a step further by asking his disciples to love their enemies as themselves: "Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you".² (Luke 6:27).

In Greek the verb *agapan*, used by all evangelists to refer to brotherly love, has a stronger meaning than the verb *philein* employed by the Greek philosophers. The former carries the additional connotation of compassion and respect for the dignity of others and applies especially to enemies.

Despite this distinction, the literal application of the evangelical precepts raised the question whether the first disciples should take part in warfare and even whether they should be present in armies.

The first Fathers of the Church held very clear-cut positions as to what attitude should be adopted. In 211, Tertullian, commenting on the execution of a Christian who had been enrolled in the Roman army and had refused to wear a ritual crown after the celebration of a pagan ceremony, stated the principle of incompatibility between the duties of a soldier and a Christian:

"And will the son of peace go to battle, whom it will not befit even to go to law?"³

Other examples of this incompatibility and the refusal it entailed, with all the accompanying risks, are widely known, namely those of the great military saints at the end of the third century, in the days of persecution by Diocletian.

Saint Maurice, together with other Christian members of the Theban Legion he commanded, was executed in Agaunum towards 290 for refusing to hold sacrifices to the emperor and fight the Bagaudae, insurgent Christian peasants whom he had been ordered to exterminate. Bishop St. Eucherius of Lyons paid tribute to him in his record of the events, ascribing a profession of faith to him that echoes the views of Tertullian:

"Behold, we bear arms and yet we do not defend ourselves, for we prefer to be killed rather than kill, and to perish blameless rather than live by doing evil."⁴

² ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς,

³ "Et proelio operabitur filius pacis, cui nec litigare conveniet?", *De corona*, 11, 1.

⁴ "Tenemus, ecce, arma et non resistimus, quia mori quam occidere satis malumus, et innocentes interire, quam noxii vivere praeoptamus", *Passio Acaunensium martyrum*, 9.

It was also for refusing to make sacrifices in veneration of the emperor and failing to comply with orders to persecute Christians that Saint George and Saint Sebastian, dignitaries in the Roman army, were martyred during the same era.

The Church's position regarding the army and war changed in the fourth century, after the Christian religion had been officially recognized by the Edict of Milan (313), and especially in the wake of the barbarian invasions. It appeared legitimate at that time to protect people from the invaders' cruelty, and if need be to take up arms in their defence.

Early in the fifth century, Saint Augustine, who witnessed the arrival of the Vandals in North Africa, came to define the concept of just war, a concept which was to have a lasting impact:

"Wars may be called just when they are waged to punish unjust acts".⁵

Later, in 418, when the prefect Bonifacius asked him how he could reconcile his Christian faith with a military calling, Saint Augustine wrote:

"So then be a peace-maker even when warring, that by overcoming those whom you conquer, you may bring them the advantages of peace".⁶

This position, which reconciled the Christian faith with acts undertaken in the defence of good causes, was the dominant one throughout the Middle Ages. The initial notion of just war later evolved, eventually giving rise to the concept of holy war and the Christian combatant as a soldier of Christ, and culminating in the long episode of the Crusades and the creation of orders of knighthood. To give one's life fighting to defend Christian victims, and if necessary to take enemy lives, was considered a true act of charity and the most perfect expression of faith. The advocate of the Second Crusade, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, thus wrote to the Knights Templars in 1128:

"In truth, a soldier of Christ fights for his sovereign without a care, fearing neither the sin of exterminating enemies nor the danger of being violently killed. For it is not a crime to take lives or give one's own for Christ; indeed it is deserving of the greatest glory: the one gives you to Christ, the other gives you Christ".⁷

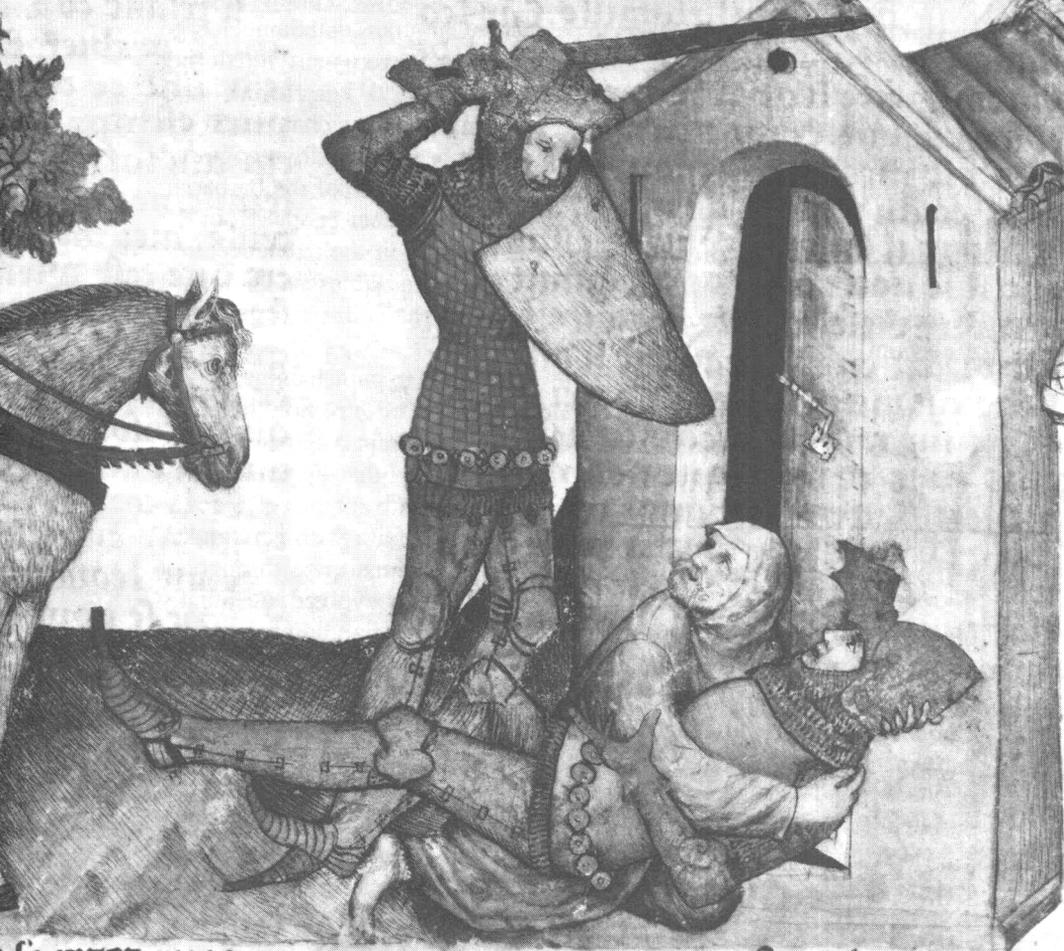
⁵ "Justa bella solent definiri quae ulciscuntur injurias", *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*, VI, 10.

⁶ "Esto ergo etiam bellando pacificus, ut eos quos expugnas, ad pacis utilitatem vincendo perducas", *Epistola CLXXXIX*, 6.

⁷ "At vero christi milites securi praeliantur praelio Domini sui, nequaquam metuentes aut de hostium caede peccatum, aut de sua nece periculum: quandoquidem mors pro Christo vel ferenda, vel inferenda, et nihil habeat criminis, et plurimum gloriae mereatur: Hinc quippe Christo, inde Christus acquiritur", *De laude novae militiae*, III, 4.

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The violence of the world of chivalry is counterbalanced by Cistercian spirituality

In the Cistercian-inspired "Quest for the Holy Grail" which ends the series of legends of the Knights of the Round Table, the heroes Bohort and above all Galahad incarnate the Christian ideal of selflessness, the opposite of human passion.

In this illustrated episode from a fifteenth-century manuscript, Bohort, seriously wounded by his brother Lionel whom he refuses to fight, is saved by an old hermit who places himself between the two brothers and thus gives up his life.

The combatant's renunciation and the death of the peaceable believer both echo the self-sacrifice of Christ.

(National Library Photographic Service, Paris, Manuscript fr. 343, fol. 47+)

The troops derived great strength from this reassurance. But for men who, in the midst of action, could not always refrain from being carried away by violence, it could potentially lead to excesses contrary to the proclaimed ideal. The sacking of Jerusalem in 1099 provided a particularly shocking example of this, according to accounts given by the Christians themselves. However, allowance must be made for the brutal atmosphere of the times, when victory asserted through sheer might was the acknowledged criterion of champions of good causes. The individual exploits of the knights celebrated in mediaeval romances, where the religious element is ever present, offer the same mixture of violence and magnanimity.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages theologians took pains to redefine the concept of a just war as it applied to Christians.

In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas significantly included a long discussion of war in a chapter devoted to charity in his *Summa Theologica*. Along the same lines as Saint Augustine, he stated that three basic criteria underlay a just war:

“I answer (to the questions brought up by war) that, in order for a war to be just, three things are necessary.

First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged (...).

Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault.

Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a right intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil”.⁸

The most delicate point of the argument concerned the soldiers’ “right intention”, of which the innumerable wars that continued to plague mediaeval Christendom provided scant evidence indeed.

Drawing on the work of Scholastic thinkers, Catholic theologians later attempted to make the meaning of this concept more clear. In the sixteenth century, the Dominican friar Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez, a Jesuit, devoted themselves in particular to defining the duties of victors with respect to the vanquished.

⁸ “Respondeo dicendum quod ad hoc aliquod bellum sit justum, tria requiruntur.

Primo quidem, auctoritas principis, sujus mandato bellum est gerendum...

Secundo, requiritur justa causa: ut scilicet illi qui impugnantur propter aliquam culpam impugnationem mereantur (...).

Tertio, requiritur ut sit intentio bellantium recta: qua scilicet intenditur vel ut bonum promoveatur, vel ut malum vitetur”, *Summa Theologica, Secunda Secundae. Quaestio 40.*

For Vitoria, moderation in victory became the third rule, replacing the right intention:

“Third canon: When victory has been won and the war is over, the victory should be utilized with moderation and Christian humility, and the victor ought to deem that he is sitting as judge between two states, the one which has been wronged and the one which has done the wrong, so that it will be as judge and not as accuser that he will deliver the judgement whereby the injured state can obtain satisfaction, and this, so far as possible, should involve a minimum of suffering and misfortune for the aggressor state, the offending individuals being chastised within lawful limits”.⁹

Without using the term of neutrality, Suárez nonetheless states that non-combatants should be safe from reprisals:

“It is implicit in natural law that the innocent include children, women, and all unable to bear arms”.¹⁰

With the sixteenth century came the Reformation. In view of the extreme level of violence rapidly reached in confrontations, the Reformers felt impelled to adopt a position on the lawfulness of war.

Repeating the earlier episode between Saint Augustine and the prefect Boniface, in 1526 Luther devoted a whole treatise to the topic “*Can soldiers be in a state of grace?*” (*Ob Kriegsleute auch ynn selgem Stande seyn künden*) in reply to a question put to him by the knight Assa von Kramm, an officer of the elector of Saxony.

After the encouragement he had given the year before to the brutal repression of the Peasants’ Revolt, Luther, invoking the repeated exhortations of Paul and Peter in their Epistles (Romans 13, I Peter 2), reaffirms the duty of obedience to authorities, whose divinely appointed mission it is to combat evil. But the conviction that it is not sinful to carry out the bloody repression of evil goes hand in hand with the certainty that in doing so one is acting in accordance with God’s will. If there is any doubt concerning the conformity of the one with the other, God’s will must prevail. In the name of personal responsibility, Luther argues for the first time that in such cases men have a duty to disobey.

⁹ “Tertius canon: Parta victoria et confecto bello, oportet moderate et cum modestia christiana victoria uti et oportet victorem existimare se iudicem sedere inter duas Respublicas - alteram, quae laesa est, alteram quae injuriam fecit, non tanquam accusator, sed tanquam iudex, sententiam ferat, qua satisfieri quidem possit Reipublicae laesae, sed quantum fieri poterit, cum minima calamitate et malo Reipublicae nocentis, castigatis nocentibus quantum licuerit”, *De jure belli*. 60. *Tres belligerandi canones*.

¹⁰ “Innocentes sunt quasi naturali jure pueri, mulieres, et quicumque non valent arma sumere”, *Disputatio XIII. De caritate*, VII, 10.

“For a soldier must carry with him and in him the certainty and consolation that he has a duty and an obligation to act as he does. For he must be sure that he is serving God and be able to say: it is not I who strikes, stabs and slaughters, but God and my sovereign, at whose service I put my body and my hands (...).

A second question: what do I do if my sovereign is wrong to wage war?

Answer: if you are absolutely sure that he is wrong, then you must fear and obey God rather than men (Acts 4) (...).

But, you say, my sovereign forces me, takes my life and withholds my money, salary and pay (...).

Answer: that is a risk you must also take, and for the sake of God let perish that which must perish (...).¹¹

Invoking the same scriptural texts, Calvin professes a similar opinion to Luther's. Recognizing that the power of sovereigns is based on divine right, he holds that just wars are inspired by God. However, if the sovereign's will differs from that of God, he shows no hesitation to recommend disobedience of temporal authorities, giving precedence to God's will.

In Chapter XVI of *The Institution of Christian Religion*, first published in French in 1541, he thus writes:

“But in that obedience which we have determined to be due to the authorities of governors, this is always to be excepted yea chiefly to be observed, that it do not leade us away from obeying of hym, to whose will delices of al kinges ought to be subject, to whose decrees all theys commaundementes ought to yelde, to whose majesty theys marces ought to be submitted (...) I know how great and how present peril hangeth over this constancie, bicause kings do most displeasantly suffer themselves to be despited (...).

“But sith this decree is proclaimed by y heavenly harald Peter. That we ought to obey God rather than men, lat us comfort our selves with this thought, that we then performe that obedience which the lord

¹¹ Wenn es sol ja ein kriegs man mit sich und bey sich haben solch gewisheit und trofft, das ers schuldig sey und müßes thun, damit es gewis sey, das er Gott drynnen diene und komme sagen: Mir schlecht, sticht, würgt nicht ich, sondern Gott und mein Fürst, wilcher diener gutt mein hand und leib ist.

Ein ander frage: Mir, wenn mein herr unrecht hette zu kriegem? Antwort: Wenn du weißt gewis, das er unrecht hat, so soltu Gott mehr fürchten und gehorchen denn menschen, Acto. 4., Ja, sprichstu, mein herr zwingt mich, nympt mir mein leben, gibt mir mein gelt, lohn und sold nicht; Antwort: Das, mein wagen und umb Gottes willen laßen faren, was du ferst.

requireth, when we suffer anye thing rather whatsoever it be, than Swarne from godlinesse".¹²

Basically the Reformers, like the Catholic theologians before them, provided those who waged so-called just wars with moral comfort.

Nevertheless, the right to disobey when the lawfulness of a war was in doubt represented a fundamental departure from the past. Sovereigns could not require obedience to orders contrary to the will of God, from whom their power derived and to whom all men owed submission. Soldiers were held personally responsible for fathoming God's will, making it their sole guide. In his Epistle to the Romans (13:5) to which the two great Reformers referred, Paul stresses that obedience to authorities must not be motivated by the fear of punishment but by the dictates of one's conscience (*syneidesis*). And it was a soldier's conscience that had to provide him with the necessary strength to oppose action contrary to his Christian faith, even at the cost of his life.

The Reformation has sometimes been blamed for its role in undermining the principle of unconditional obedience to authority. What was undeniably a call to the individual conscience gave rise to a trend of thought whose influence affected not only the devout but was ultimately instrumental in freeing the minds of all.

In the sixteenth century, however, only the religious aspect of conscience was concerned, in the individual's direct dialogue with God. The brutality of war was not in itself questioned nor were men called upon to disobey on humanitarian grounds.

The wars of religion rapidly demonstrated that the opposite in fact was true. The certainty, equally strong on both sides, that each was fighting for the triumph of good led them to carry out unspeakable atrocities, and neither the Protestants' passionate search to understand God's design nor the generous theoretical speculations of Catholic theologians were able to prevent countless acts of violence from dramatically contradicting the doctrine of love to which all were nominally committed.

¹² "Mais en l'obéissance que nous avons enseignée estre deue aux superieurs, il y doit auoir tousiours une exception, ou plustost une reigle qui est à garder devant toutes choses. C'est, que telle obeissance ne nous destourne point de l'obeissance de celuy, soubz la volenté duquel il est raisonnable que tous les desirs des Roys se contiennent: et que tous leurs commandemens cedent à son ordonnance, et que toute leur haultesse soit humiliée et abaissée soubz sa majesté (...).

Je scay bien quel dangier peut venir d'une telle constance que je la requierz icy (...). Mais puisque cest edit a esté prononcé par le celeste herault S. Pierre, qu'il fault plustost obeir à Dieu que aux hommes (Actes, 4), nous auons à nous consoler de ceste cogitation, que vrayement nous rendons lors à Dieu telle obeissance qu'il la demande, quand nous souffrons plustost toutes choses, que declinions de sa sainte parolle."

The wars that ravaged Europe during the following centuries, including the Thirty Years' War, the wars waged by Louis XIV and the Napoleonic campaigns, evinced the same sense of helplessness.

In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church once again attempted to enforce the calls for moderation which had been constantly reiterated since Saint Thomas Aquinas. Neo-Thomism found expression in the works of the Jesuit theologian Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio, in particular his voluminous *A theoretical essay on natural law based upon facts (Saggio teoretico di Dritto naturale appoggiato sul fatto)*, published from 1840 to 1843.

Drawing on the lessons of the past and appealing to the conscience of Christian Europe, Taparelli called for the setting up of an international order to govern the relations between nations. It was to be based on the principle of love ("principio di amore"), which had been sadly disregarded during the previous centuries and was especially needed in wartime.

In his essay on international benevolence in times of war (Book VI, Chapter IV), Taparelli devotes a lengthy discussion to the special laws of war, referring to the three criteria established by Saint Thomas Aquinas and his successors: the patronage of a legal authority, a just cause and moderation in the conduct of war. The latter is discussed in relation to the recent great conflicts and include some astonishingly modern recommendations concerning the use of certain weapons:

"Indeed, what aims does society pursue (through war)? To restore order through the use of force. In the first place, therefore, everything that is unable to offer resistance must be spared: thus the pointless destruction of dwellings and the indiscriminate slaughter of old people, women and children constitute barbarous excesses in war, since such punishment was undeserved (...).

"Once they have surrendered their weapons and declared their intention to cease fighting, even soldiers deserve pity from civilized peoples, and respect as well when they have surrendered out of duty and not cowardice (...).

"The very obligation which nations have to avoid causing unnecessary suffering forbids them the use of certain means of extermination whose effects could not be prevented or controlled at will so as to inflict damage at the very place where resistance is being shown. To spread disease, poison water sources and make use of other insidiously lethal devices are means that make no distinction as to when they strike, just as they make no distinction between armed and unarmed persons".¹³

¹³ "E infatti, qual è l'intento sociale? ridurre colla forza all'ordine. Dunque in primo luogo, tutto ciò che non può far resistenza, non deve distruggersi: ed ecco tolta la devastazione inutile delle case, la strage confusa di vecchi, donne, fanciulli, eccessi di barbara guerra: se pure alcuni di costoro non avessero individualmente meritata tal pena (...).

Taparelli acknowledges that a universally recognized international authority is necessary to ensure respect for these principles. Pointing to what he considers the harmful role played by the Reformation, which, by introducing the right to disobey, contributed to the decline of the traditional concept of temporal authority, he proposes re-establishing the pope's temporal authority in this area as the only solution.

It is interesting to note that during the same period an English theologian named James Martineau, likewise dealing with the excesses of war in the mid-nineteenth century, reaffirmed the Protestant point of view concerning war in a sermon given in Liverpool in 1855. (The sermon was republished and distributed to British soldiers in 1914.) Just wars are lawful, he states, since their cause transcends the natural feeling of revulsion caused by killing an enemy.

"Wounds inflicted, wounds received by men acting as the organs of a higher personality, and inspired by a sense of fidelity and honour to a power that has a right to wield them at its will, are not the same things as cuts in the private flesh made upon their own account, not debasing the giver, and glorifying the suffering to the receiver.

The objection is often brought against the morality of war, that the soldier is not the principle in the quarrel, but hires himself to kill, without regard to the rectitude of the cause. The remark appears to me essentially unjust in two respects. He does not hire himself out to kill; killing is not the end of an armed force, but only the possible means by which it may enforce its defence of right. As well might you say that the surgeon exists for the sake of wounding".

In 1526 Luther had already used a similar metaphor - that of a surgeon performing an "act of love" [ein Werck der Liebe] for his patient, even at the cost of being brutal.

There is a pathetic aspect to these repeated attempts by clergymen from Saint Augustine onwards to sanctify a deed which continues, to the great misfortune of humankind, to taint relations between societies if not human nature itself.

Perfino il soldato al momento che, rendendo le armi, si dichiara risoluto a cessar dalle offese, diviene fra popoli umani oggetto di commiserazione e, se cede per dovere et non per codardia, ancor di rispetto (...).

La stessa legge di evitare un male non necessario vieta tra le nazioni l'uso di certi mezzi di sterminio, dei quali l'arte non potrebbe arrestare o maneggiare gli effetti a norma degl'intenti suoi, drizzandone il danno precisamente colà d'onde parte la resistenza. Propagare il contagio, avvelenar le acque et simili altre invenzioni mortifere sono mezzi che non discerneranno tempo da tempo, né armato da inerme", Lib. VI, Cap. IV, *Doveri internazionali nello stato ostile*.

Religious thinking, which can thus again be observed in the nineteenth century, may well have inspired military leaders to act with commendable moderation — besides salving their consciences with sometimes adverse effects — but even amongst Christian nations it never led to a universally recognized form of international regulation.

It does not seem to have had any real influence on the birth of the Red Cross in 1863 and 1864, although the support of individual Christians and Christian nations was undeniably in keeping with their convictions and traditions.

Outside Christendom its influence may even have been negative, particularly owing to the choice of emblem. Although in the minds of the Movement's founders, the red cross on a white ground represented an heraldic design devoid of religious connotation (the Swiss flag with its colours reversed), this choice was at first paradoxically a hindrance to the adoption of the Geneva Convention by Muslim countries. The problem was particularly evident in the 1877 Russo-Turkish war in the Balkans, which led, for reasons of expediency and contrary to the initially adopted principle of the unity of the emblem, to the recognition of the red crescent as the emblem of Muslim countries.

The symbol thereby adopted (an attribute of the ancient moon deities) had in fact been established long before it became associated with Islam.

The truth is that both religions of the Book could lead their followers to come to the help of the afflicted and the destitute.

Like Christianity, Islam taught believers to be compassionate. It had also been faced with the problem of reconciling its basic tenets with the demands of life on earth. An analogy may be found between Christianity's difficulties of interpretation and the ambiguities which have characterized attempts to define Islam's attitude towards war and especially the question of how to treat the vanquished.

In a study published in 1980, Yadh ben Achour analysed the teachings of the Koran and the Sunna with regard to this problem.¹⁴ The translator of the most clearly explained French version of the Koran, Si Hamza Boubakeur, also discussed at length in his commentaries the circumstances which preceded or accompanied the writing of the suras during the warring period.¹⁵

The recommendations revealed in the Koran may be found in the suras which refer to the difficult battles that the Prophet had to wage against

¹⁴ "Islam and international humanitarian law", *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 215, March-April 1980, pp. 59-69.

¹⁵ *Le Coran, Traduction et Commentaires*, 2 volumes, Paris, 1985, vol. I.

his opponents after he took refuge in Medina in 622. Although it is a combatant's duty to fight to the end for the triumph of Truth (Sura II, Verse 190), the problems faced by believers after their victory at Badr in 624, and even more so after their defeat at Uhud in 625, led to a determination to refrain from being carried away by violence.

After Badr, the captives on the defeated side had almost been executed, as requested by several disciples. The solution finally adopted — their release in exchange for a ransom — is condemned in Sura VIII, not because it was a gesture of excessive clemency but rather because it indicated greed for worldly goods:

“A prophet may not take captives until he has fought and triumphed in his land. You seek the chance gain of this world, but God desires for you the world to come. He is mighty and wise”.¹⁶

The Sura IX, known as the sura of repentance, extols the merits of a benevolent attitude towards those who for various reasons have not yet awakened to the Truth:

“If an idolater seeks asylum with you, give him protection so that he may hear the word of Allah, and then convey him to a safe place. For the idolaters are ignorant men”.¹⁷

Following the battle of Uhud, the Prophet had to resist the temptation of taking severe measures of retaliation against the captives after he discovered the mutilated body of his uncle Hamza. It is at this point in the narrative, in the last verses of Sura XVI on patience and forgiveness, that the final revelation is given:

“Be patient, then. God will grant you patience. Do not grieve for the unbelievers, nor distress yourself at their intrigues. Allah is with those who keep from evil and do good works”.¹⁸

Islam's expansion through a long series of conquests was doubtlessly marred by a degree of violence in no way inferior to that of Christian

16 مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ أَسْرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يُخْرِجَ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَرْبُدُونَ عَرَضَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

17 وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسْمَعَ كَلِمَةَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

18 وَأَصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَلٰٓئِلٍ مِّمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ ﴿١٦٧﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾

warfare, but the comparison is often favourable to the Muslims. The clemency shown by Saladin when he reconquered Jerusalem in 1187 stands in stark contrast with its sacking by the Crusaders in 1099. As with the Christians, the Muslims' conduct in fact often strayed from the ideal shared by both religions, but the excesses committed on each side owe nothing to religious doctrine. Yadh ben Achour concludes his analysis of the texts by stating that "nothing in the Koran or the Sunna would appear to be contrary to international humanitarian law".¹⁹

This convergence, which appears when the facts are examined, sheds some light on the limited power of religious movements to influence their followers' behaviour in the accomplishment of acts which call into question the basic tenets of their faith, and on the ambiguity of that power. Although the generous impulses of forgiveness and kindness are certainly kindled by faith, they are contingent on considerations of an even higher order and the faithful cannot be blamed for holding their beliefs as more precious than worldly values and indeed than life itself, theirs and those of others included. In addition, the formidable dualities of spiritual purity versus worldly compromise and of individual attitudes versus the weight of the community make it a difficult and often dangerous practice to allow religious thought to intrude upon the running of societies.

In themselves, religious motivations are insufficient to explain the emergence of the Red Cross.

*(To be continued)**

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Apart from his military career, from 1943 he participated on several occasions in the activities of the French Red Cross, where he held the position of administrator, representing the Ministry of Defence, from 1981 to 1983.

Dr. Guillermand has published a number of works on the history of medicine, including Vol. I of the *Histoire de la Médecine aux Armées* (Lavauzelle, 1982), and a history of the nursing profession, whose proceeds went to the French Red Cross (France-Sélection, 1988 and 1992). He is also the author of an article entitled "The contribution of army medical officers to the emergence of humanitarian law", which appeared in the July-August 1989 edition of the *IRRC*.

¹⁹ Yadh ben Achour, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

* The bibliography related to the present article will appear at the end of Part II, to be published in March-April 1994.