

INTERCONTINENTAL CONVERSATION

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Two diocesan priests talking: Father Sam from U.S.A. and Father John from England

SAM. Tell me, Father, what's the position in England now about the H-bomb and all that? The way people feel, I mean.

JOHN. I would say the facts are slowly sinking into the public mind, and meanwhile most people are rather inarticulate; they probably feel until things become clear the less said the better. There was hot discussion, around 1955. The Government said that N.A.T.O. would fight with nuclear weapons even if the aggressor hadn't used them; and also that England was making the hydrogen-bomb. But the discussion was only by the articulate few: the vast majority seemed to swallow it without being distracted from the football results. Then this year the discussion blew up again over the nuclear tests. This time there has been an organized protest-movement, big meetings and marches, around London first and also throughout the country; but so far (August) it has remained a minority cranky sort of movement, and its members are beginning to discuss publicly why N.D.C. has failed. N.D.C. means Nuclear Disarmament Campaign.

SAM. Well, that's a gloomy account. And why has this N.D.C. failed? If I understand rightly, its declared purpose is reasonable enough: just to get Britain to resign from the Suicide Club, since it looks like getting too large?

JOHN. That's so, but from the first it was in the hands of cranks: on the one hand pacifists of all kinds and on the other leftish agnostic sort of people who talk about moral law but won't hear of God. The Chairman of the movement, the Anglican Canon Morris, is a 'Christian pacifist', so he is quite unable to talk convincingly against H-bombs. Everybody knows he would be equally against swords and pistols. Worse still, most people in England think that really *is* Christianity. England has been so long multi-sectarian that the public mind is completely muddle-headed. All the ordinary man can say about war is:

'Of course it's wrong, but we have to do it'. He respects religion, but regards its teaching as impracticable, and doesn't even trouble to examine what it is.

SAM. But there are several million Catholics in England—surely *they* are not so muddle-headed as that?

JOHN. No, they understand that war can be lawful, and that there are some limits to its methods. But this nuclear business has knocked them right off their balance. In ordinary times they would outlaw it at once. But as it was a case of resisting atheistic Communist Russia, they said perhaps it would be all right to use it. That was when only the West had atom-bombs. Now that Russia equally makes such things as well as we can and better, the Catholic Englishman, like others, is disconcerted but not daunted. I'll say that for my countrymen—they don't panic easily. In fact I think that is one reason why N.D.C. is a comparative flop—it happened to coincide with the sputnik, and people felt they must not seem rattled.

SAM. You say the nuclear crisis knocked Catholics off their balance though, how do you mean?

JOHN. Well, a few of the intellectuals have gone off into a more or less pacifist position—modern war has got so bad that a Christian must stay out of it altogether—that kind of thing. But the vast majority, including practically all the clergy, just take refuge in bewildered silence, accepting the situation as inevitable. The semi-official Catholic line, so to speak, is to hush the whole matter up—don't disturb anybody's conscience. We have four Catholic weekly papers. Two seemingly have been all for the H-bomb (if necessary, of course); the other two have qualms, but say they can't see that it has been fully proved that there could never be occasions when—oh, well, you know the kind of thing. Only one of them permits any regular discussion of the matter by correspondents. Some of the smaller monthly society or piety publications have steadily justified atomic warfare, mostly by anonymous priest-columnists whose authority is nil, but they achieve their object of securing the acquiescence of the rank-and-file Catholic.

SAM. It's much the same in my part of the world, kind of moral paralysis. Bit of a scandal really, isn't it?

JOHN. A man I know says that these years after Hiroshima will seem in retrospect one of the great historic scandals of the

Church. I suppose the greatest scandals are never recognized as such by most people at the time, are they?

SAM. Maybe not, now you mention it. The Council of Trent put an end to the traffic in indulgences, but there wouldn't have been a traffic unless the ordinary Catholic had welcomed it, would there? And I expect there were plenty of high-ups who justified it as a necessary concession to popular taste, and blamed people like St Thomas More for criticizing.

JOHN. You bet there were, but they're not remembered of course.

SAM. Your English bishops now—what do they say about this H-bomb business?

JOHN. They say listen to the Pope.

SAM. Well, what's the matter with that? Pope Pius XII is the one bright spot, surely?

JOHN. Nothing's the matter with it. All the same the Holy Father doesn't reckon to have to give day-to-day advice to individual consciences everywhere. That is for the clergy on the spot to give when it is needed. What the Pope keeps on saying about nuclear warfare is addressed primarily to nations and their rulers, and if he hopes to be listened to he has to say it with tact. He is the Common Father of a family, a family of proud, touchy, quarrelling nations. He mustn't always say all he thinks, or just whom the cap fits. Put yourself in his place!

SAM. Yes, I see what you mean. It's taken a dozen years, but most Americans are coming to see that Hiroshima was a crime and a blunder. But perhaps it's just as well the Pope didn't denounce us to the world.

JOHN. It works better when people can draw the conclusions for themselves. That's real education. Always supposing there is time for it!

SAM. That's true. Well now, see here, you and I seem to be two level-headed people. I guess there must be plenty we agree about in all this, even if hardly anybody else agrees with us two. Suppose we just reckon up the points where we agree, eh?

JOHN. Go on then, you begin.

SAM. First of all, I guess we both agree that the out-and-out pacifists are wrong.

JOHN. Yes. You have to say it's a man's duty to help defend his country when called upon. Or perhaps even defend some other country. In fact, to defend justice and humanity in general.

SAM. Mind you, we've got some grand Catholics at home who call themselves pacifists—even 'anarchists', I believe—God knows what they mean by that. They've got something, but whatever it is, they haven't got enough of it.

JOHN. They haven't got enough knowledge of human nature, as it is. There's been a Fall of man, or if you're not a Christian you can call it something else. But there it is; and when you've seen enough of life on this earth you know in your bones there will always be bad men, selfish and power-lusting men, little Hitlers and Stalins and Mussolinis, and plenty of other men to follow them. Perhaps they can't always help it; God will judge them, we needn't judge them; perhaps in our own way we others are no better than they are; but we've got to resist them. We can't let *them* run the world. That means the human race can never settle down to complete peace. There'll always be some little shooting-war going on somewhere, some bit of police-action that has to be done, and somebody's got to do it.

SAM. And that's the final answer to the pacifist.

JOHN. I'm afraid so. Mind you, I nearly went pacifist myself in the twenties. There was something called the Peace Pledge, started by a famous parson—at that moment it seemed like a modern version of St Francis's Third Order and its rule of not carrying arms. But something held me back. Then Hitler came on the scene, of course. Still, I know how a pacifist would feel, having committed himself.

SAM. Well, we agree about that.

JOHN. And so do ninety-nine point nine per cent of the human race, not to mention the Church. That's consoling, because on the other items we are more likely to be a minority of two.

SAM. Oh, it isn't quite so bad as that. There's another point where many would agree with us: I mean the primacy of the moral law. There *is* a difference between right and wrong, it's something absolute and eternal. We recognize it roughly by our conscience; and we know it is the Will of God that we should observe it.

JOHN. There's no absolute right and wrong for the true-blue Communist Party member.

SAM. No, but there is for us; and we've got to stick to it, even when it places us at a disadvantage.

JOHN. I agree with you, but there are many Christians who

would agree only in theory. When it comes down to brass tacks, they re-state the moral law to suit themselves according to expediency, strategy and what not.

SAM. Sure they do, but you and I are not going to. Some things are evidently and absolutely against God's Will, such as wiping out 100,000 civilians in a single explosion.

JOHN. I agree, but I warn you that in England there are Catholic columnists who argue it *would* be right if it was going to save the world from Communist domination, and if the bomber had a military target in mind. I've known a C. of E. rector declare in print that it might be necessary to destroy a whole nation.

SAM. We've got fellows like that, too. What's your answer to them?

JOHN. That they've got everything right out of proportion: no possible disaster could ever be proportionate to such wholesale slaughter of women and children.

SAM. And what do they say to that?

JOHN. They say that Communist domination would be a greater evil, since it would be a moral evil, involving the destruction of religion; whereas the wholesale slaughter would be only a material evil, like some great earthquake.

SAM. Yeah. You see the fallacy, don't you? *This* slaughter isn't an earthquake, it is caused by deliberate human will, and is consequently a sin, a moral evil just as much as the destruction of religion and more so. Besides, the true religion *can't* be destroyed; we have Christ's word for that.

JOHN. I suppose the trouble with some Catholics is their faith just isn't strong enough.

SAM. That must be it. Well, what else do you and I agree about? That Hiroshima was a crime, as well as a blunder?

JOHN. Of course. Objectively, that is.

SAM. That the self-destruction of the human race, or at any rate of Western civilization, is now an imminent possibility?

JOHN. Yes. But it's no good getting excited about it. If it's going to happen it's going to happen, and it's going to happen because most people haven't much imagination or intelligence. People like you and me can't speed up the mental processes of the majority just by getting excited. The only way to do that would be some sort of large-scale dramatic action—educative action, I mean—like our Lord's Crucifixion-Resurrection. If somebody could think of something.

SAM. Why do we have to think of something? Why not that same Dramatic Action, held up again to the world?

JOHN. Why not, indeed? But it would need to have a quicker effect this time. Besides, that too would call for imagination and intelligence. *And* courage, plenty of it.

SAM. Don't you think it's possible, with the human race on the edge of self-destruction, that religious leaders everywhere might get together and plan some dramatic collective mass-repudiation of the H-bomb? Calling on their adherents to resign from or refuse all work or exercises connected with it?¹

JOHN. I'd like to think so, of course. But it doesn't look probable at present, does it, even in the Catholic Church?

SAM. Well, perhaps that's going out of our depth. Let's come back to our present campaign. You and I can see that the mass-bombing of Coventry and Dresden was somehow wrong, that Hiroshima was still more wrong, and the H-bomb is wrongest of all. But to many people it is just a case of inevitable progress, bigger and better weapons: they can't see any *principle* involved. Perhaps you and I could work out some simple formula that would make it plainer.

JOHN. Isn't that a job for the professional theologians?

SAM. They don't seem to think so. They mostly just flounder about in a sea of ifs and buts; their idea is that they will sit in judgment on the evidence somebody else presents to them, they don't go out assembling the evidence themselves. Sometimes one wonders if they even read the newspapers!

JOHN. I see what you mean. Well, the first word we need is 'discrimination', and the second is 'proportionate'.

SAM. What about 'uncontrollable'?

JOHN. That's only another word for '*ipso facto* indiscriminate'.

SAM. And what about 'intrinsically evil'?

JOHN. Forget it. It's a red herring. Nothing that God made is intrinsically evil. And if we are talking about human actions and purposes, they're either lawful or unlawful.

SAM. All right, then, we start from the principle that defence against an unjust aggressor is lawful, even to killing if necessary.

That is the justification of war, and it means that the killing must be restricted to the aggressors, that is, to combatants. The

¹ Since this was written it has been stated that H-bombs are now being made in small sizes and without harmful fall-out. If this were true our terminology might need changing: at present we use 'H-bomb' as equivalent to 'mass-destruction'.

term 'combatants' has been arguably widened nowadays to include various civilian war-workers, but most women and the whole child-population must obviously be classed as non-targets. Justice and humanity, then, demand that warfare should discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, and when war becomes indiscriminate it is destroying the very things it is fighting for, namely justice and humanity.

SAM. Certainly that's a principle that civilized men have accepted for thousands of years, even though they sometimes failed to observe it fully.

JOHN. So much for *discrimination*, then. But even when the warrior has observed discrimination as regards his enemy, there is still something else he ought to observe, and that is *due proportion*. He must not use more force than is necessary in the given circumstances, and in general his destructive efforts must be kept *proportionate* to the just war-aims in view. For instance, even combatants should not be killed after they have surrendered. Nor should long-term destruction (of dwellings or fruit-trees or water supplies, for instance) be carried out for merely short-term strategic reasons. If we say then that war-destruction must be kept discriminating and proportionate, we are formulating a practical principle that the military ought to accept and apply today as in the past. Discrimination and proportion are merely long words for justice and humanity as applied to war.

SAM. I agree heartily. All the same, these long words do make the idea difficult for the weaker brethren. Couldn't we think up some example that puts the idea in a nutshell?

JOHN. The example I like is an armed policeman who is searching for a dangerous armed criminal or spy. The criminal must be captured dead or alive, else grave international disaster will follow. At last the policeman spots his man, but the man is in a crowded café full of ordinary people. The policeman feels he dare not take any risks, so in order to make sure he throws a Mills hand-grenade into the café, and the criminal is captured badly wounded; twenty other people have been killed and injured. Did the policeman do right? The answer is no; it was a case of indiscriminating slaughter, even though he only wanted to kill the one man. No good purpose, however important, could justify such an action.

SAM. Thank you, that seems to illustrate what we mean by discrimination, or the lack of it. And I take it that such a principle rules out the mass-bombing of town areas even by conventional bombs, as well as by atom-bombs.

JOHN. Yes, and H-bombs altogether, if only because of the wide extent of complete destruction by blast and heat; twelve-mile radius, isn't it? We don't seem to get many hard facts about these things. But anything that is merely terroristic, that goes beyond the force that is strictly necessary, would have to be barred.

SAM. Those Japanese fishermen in the Pacific, who were killed and injured by fall-out from our test-bomb, were a hundred miles from the explosion.

JOHN. And then there is the problematic effect on later generations through pollution of the atmosphere. Yes, one way and another, you can't imagine any possible evil big enough to be remedied by H-bombs.

SAM. And yet, here's these clergy who tell the young airman that it doesn't matter how many civilians his H-bomb will be killing, so long as he turns his mind from them and fixes his intention on the railway junction or what not in the 'target area'. His intention (they say) is to hit the railway junction; from his intention a double-effect follows, the intended one being the damage to the railway junction, the unintended one the slaughter of some thousands of women and children.

JOHN. What disgusting hypocrites they are! In the first place, the airman's intention, the thing he is actually doing, is not to destroy the railway junction but to blast the whole area in the hope of destroying the railway junction as part of the damage. In other words, his effective intention is to blast everything in the area including the women and children (and that is probably just what was intended by the men who sent him out).

SAM. Yes, I agree. It amounts to doing manifest evil that good may come. All the same, perhaps it is easier to feel a loyalty to your own side than a loyalty to God's eternal law. I know what some people in the States would say, if you suggested they should renounce the H-bomb. They'd say, No, we can't do that—it would be letting down our fellow-Catholics in Europe; they've got to be saved from Communist aggression, or liberated some day.

JOHN. That's all very well, but it didn't save the Hungarians, did it? If the balloon ever does go up, the first thing that will happen to most Catholics in Europe is to be roasted alive without warning, by the H-bombs of one side or the other. No, I think you can tell your friends at home to cancel that argument.

SAM. Still, you know, I think we've got to face the final possibility of what might happen. Suppose everybody in England agreed with you, and abandoned nuclear weapons, and then suppose Russia started to order you about?

JOHN. I hope we should resist with ordinary weapons as long as possible.

SAM. But supposing Russia threatened to drop atom-bombs on you?

JOHN. I don't believe they would, you know. The Communists have a sort of religion, they hope to convert people; they can't do that with atom-bombs. They never *have* used atom-bombs yet. But if they did, then I suppose we would have to lay down our arms as the Japanese did. Resistance would go on, but it would be passive resistance, non-violent resistance, by the whole nation.

SAM. Yes, tell me about that. There's a fellow named King-Hall: he's got some proposals, I fancy.

JOHN. Commander Stephen King-Hall, a former naval officer, member of Parliament, and broadcaster, has written a book called *Defence in the Nuclear Age*. His idea is that even if the whole country was overrun and occupied, resistance of a non-violent kind could be carried out effectively by the whole population. After all, something of the kind has been pretty effective against British rule, in Ireland, India and so on. It could be properly organized and the population could be trained beforehand in the technique of non-violence. No country can hold down the rest of the world by sheer force. Perhaps the real Ultimate Deterrent nowadays is a whole population determined not to give in. Anyhow, that's what King-Hall says, and it is an answer to those who say the alternatives are using H-bombs or cowardly submission.

SAM. As for cowardice, I can't see anything more cowardly than showering instant death on millions of harmless women and children, can you?

JOHN. It is fear that makes men do such things. All these loud-mouthed politicians and generals breathing out fire and slaughter—you can look inside their souls and see them dithering with terror because they know the Russians are now able to do to them what they used to threaten the Russians with.

SAM. Yes, fear and guilt. Every American feels guilty—most of them subconsciously, I suppose—about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We know, even if we daren't say so, that our nation committed an appalling crime without any necessity, since we were winning the war anyhow. We did it simply to try out the new super-weapon, like any little boy indulging his curiosity, with two cities full of Japanese women and children for our guinea-pigs.

JOHN. I'm afraid our country, at any rate our then Government, was a partner in the guilt. They agreed to it beforehand, almost without discussion, and shared the responsibility. The facts are coming out gradually—Churchill's account is rather different than Truman's, but there's no doubt about the main fact.

SAM. Guilt and fear! That's what it comes to. That's us, at the present moment, below the surface.

JOHN. Well, there's a well-known remedy for guilt, at any rate.

SAM. Confession! Yes, and perhaps we are slowly, slowly, getting around to that. Look at me here, talking like this to you. And look at all those young fellows who carried out the actual bombing of Hiroshima. You couldn't expect them to know any better at the time—the responsibility was on their elders. But now they've had twelve years to think about it, and one reads of them indicating second thoughts in various unexpected ways, such as entering monasteries or going in for works of mercy.

JOHN. Still more significant, the scientists who worked to produce the nuclear-bombs are now expressing their bitter regrets, at least Sir Edward Appleton in his Reith Lectures two years ago said so. Yes, I would like to see the Western Powers declare publicly that they regret their share in letting warfare degenerate more and more into sub-human savagery, ever since 1940, ever since Guernica in fact.

SAM. That might help to create a better atmosphere. But even if we got rid of our guilt-complex, we should still be obsessed

by the fear of the other fellow. He's got the new weapon. Suppose he decided to take advantage of our repentance?

JOHN. The way to deal with fear is to look it full in the face, and then cope with it in some constructive way. Face up to the very worst possibility that could happen: Russia sending us an ultimatum, crushing resistance with nuclear bombs, and occupying the country. I don't think it's very likely, because I don't believe the Russians would want to antagonize the ordinary English people completely; they want to make Communists of them. Besides, they just wouldn't have the competent personnel to administer so many occupied countries—all the despotic empires break down that way, they spread themselves too wide and too thin. Still, let's suppose occupation by the Russians became a real possibility. That would be the time for the King-Hall ideas to be put into practice—a non-violent resistance by the whole population, organized and trained for it beforehand. As I said, that nowadays may well be the genuine Ultimate Deterrent. It would be something constructive, anyhow, and mankind would survive instead of committing universal suicide as seems only too likely at the present moment.

SAM. Well, yes. King-Hall may be all right for Europe, but I think Americans would take longer to get used to the idea. Meanwhile, I do think we could embark at once on a still more long-term constructive policy—I mean economic aid for the under-developed countries—not just distribution of relief but real training to put them on their own feet. Don't forget that the same American President who launched the first atom-bombs was also the one who launched a call on behalf of that two-thirds of mankind who are still living in semi-starvation. 'For the first time in history', he said, 'humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the sufferings of these people.' If the West would just start spending for peace on the same scale as it spends for war, we might turn the world's thoughts in a more healthy direction.

JOHN. That's enormously true, of course. It's what the Pope is constantly saying, too. Have you read a book of broadcast talks by that French Abbé Pierre? The English version is called *Man is Your Brother*. He shows in the simplest terms what is happening at present: the West has shown Asia and Africa

how to reduce disease and infant mortality, and so has increased populations by leaps and bounds, but has *not* shown them how to provide food for the increasing millions. In Algeria alone the population has gone up from four to nine millions in twenty years, with no corresponding arrangements for extra work or food. No wonder there are little wars and big wars. It isn't just shiploads of food these people want, but millions of dollars worth of machinery and fertilizers and all that, and thousands of technicians to train them in their use.

SAM. Yes, the U.S.A. is doing something of that already, but only a drop in the ocean of what's wanted. After all, it's just the Sermon on the Mount, isn't it? Man is your neighbour, your brother. All one family under God.

JOHN. That's about it. It all goes into a nutshell if we listen to God: 'Scrap these H-bombs', he says. 'Roll your sleeves up to help each other get enough to eat.' If only we could get people to believe, really believe, in God!

SAM. Sound idea! What about starting on our own English-speaking Catholics? But that reminds me; there's one other point, Father, but a very important point. Most of what we've said has been at national and government level, so to speak. You and I tell the British and American people what they ought to do—that's easy enough, anybody can do it. But what are the consequences of all that for the ordinary citizen, the ordinary young soldier or airman? I mean now, at this moment, with the world situation as it is and Governments as they are. What is the individual Christian to *do*?

JOHN. Must we say the individual *Christian*? Can't we say the individual believer in God? Jews and Moslems and everybody, all who believe in God and a natural law of right and wrong. Of course Christianity provides supreme incentives for doing right—and, what is more, provides the grace-power to do it. But as far as justice and humanity are concerned, all believers in God can surely be invited to help—and don't we need them *all*, in the present situation?

SAM. All right, then—the ordinary believer in God, everywhere. What should he do, *now*? I gather as regards Britain you think that the ordinary service-man should refuse to co-operate in indiscriminate war-methods, and the ordinary scientist or factory worker should refuse to make H-bombs?

JOHN. That is so. If anybody asks my advice, that is what I say.

SAM. What about people in the U.S.A., then—would you say the same to them?

JOHN. I'd say that is definitely none of my business.

SAM. Still, putting yourself in my place for a moment, couldn't you make some kind of suggestion?

JOHN. Well, as for scientists and factory-workers I suppose it would naturally be the same. But as for service-men, your laws are different to ours. If I understand right, the American law recognizes several grades of conscientious objection, doesn't it? According to their various convictions, men can be assigned to combatant service, or to non-combatant service in the Forces, or again to necessary civilian farm-work and so on. Isn't that so?

SAM. More or less, yes.

JOHN. Well, would it not be possible to arrange for still another grade, namely for those who are willing to serve as combatants, but not in any nuclear-weapon capacity? That might not prevent nuclear warfare, but it would satisfy conscience and would also be an effective way of making a protest. It might conceivably lead the Government to declare that A-bombs would never be used except with discrimination, as for instance on some Arctic base. But I feel more at home with England. In the last war a young airman officer refused to go on the block-busting raids on German cities, and spent the rest of the war in prison. And the other day an R.A.F. sergeant (I think he was) refused to go on a training course as a bomb-aimer and was demoted to the ranks. It takes more than one swallow to make a summer, but such instances would multiply rapidly if they were praised and encouraged as they ought to be by leaders of opinion. Young men naturally aspire to the heroic, but they can be led to see that there is nothing heroic about unleashing death and torture from the skies on thousands of women and children, and that moral courage is the rarest and highest kind.

SAM. I guess we've gone so far down the slippery slope that it will take a long time and lots of hard effort to struggle back to normal standards of conduct.

JOHN. If it's going to take a long time, then in God's name the sooner we start the better.

SAM. As you say: in God's Name!