

A CONVERSATION ON THE HYDROGEN BOMB

F. H. DRINKWATER

Three priests are talking: Philip, James and Jude

PHILIP. Well, it looks to me as if the Catholic pacifists have turned out right after all.

JAMES. What on earth makes you say that?

PHILIP. They always said that modern war is essentially mass-destruction and therefore immoral. Now they are proved correct by the N.A.T.O. statesmen in Paris, authorizing the military plan for using atomic and nuclear weapons in case of attack.

JAMES. Well, what do you *want* the military to do? Fight with bows and arrows? I thought that was for the next war but one.

PHILIP. It's all very difficult of course. But one thing seems clear to me: that mass-destruction is always wrong, even in a just war. I mean mass-destruction of military and civilians alike, or of the natural resources of our earth itself.

JAMES. My dear Philip, we've had all that over and over again. Hydrogen bombs are just another weapon. And as for non-combatants, there aren't any nowadays. If you have war at all, it's total war, and the main thing is to get your blow in first.

PHILIP. But what about morality? What about the moral theology of killing 50,000 women and children in one second?

JAMES. Moral theology will take care of that by the doctrine of right intention. When you push the button you don't *intend* to kill the women and children; you *intend* to destroy the enemy's nerve-centre or something. He's going to do it to *you*, if he can. In fact, I suppose he will do it anyhow. We may as well be realistic—there won't be much left of civilization after the button-pushing starts. But if it comes to a choice, isn't it better for civilization to go under, even for humanity to sacrifice itself, rather than allow the Red Peril to conquer the earth? Samson at the pillars, you know. Let's be resolute!

PHILIP. God might have some other way of preventing it.

JAMES. We can't know that. We have to put up a fight. Resolute, that's what we have to be now.

PHILIP. There's no hope at all then, according to you?

JAMES. I didn't say that. The hope is that modern war is so appalling that nobody will start one.

PHILIP. That's a poor hope! You can't rely on the human element. It's the 'men of action' that are sitting by the button, and men of action will start acting, sooner or later. Anything like reflection or imagination or long-term foresight is unendurable to them. Their nature is to *act*.

JAMES. You might be right there, I'm afraid. The thing is to try and get some action *away* from war. I agree for once with Bertrand Russell. He says it's only waste of time trying to abolish this or that weapon. The only practicable thing now is to abolish war itself.

PHILIP. In that case you should agree, then, that the pacifists—the Catholic pacifists at any rate—are right. Who else is *doing* anything to abolish war?

JAMES. No. A one-sided decision is no good. Pacifists are not abolishing war, they are only abolishing resistance to aggressions. Or if not abolishing resistance, at any rate crippling it, as far as they can.

PHILIP. At least they can feel they are *doing* something about the situation, not just yielding to the general drift towards doom!

PHILIP. Jude, I know you think that modern warfare is morally wrong—I've heard you say so often. Haven't you anything to say?

JUDE. You've never heard me say that modern warfare is wrong. Do let's be a bit more careful about the use of words. 'Modern' simply means 'in our time'. Warfare in our time—war for a just cause—may be wrong or right; it is wrong whenever it practises indiscriminate mass-destruction.

PHILIP. Still, what difference does it make? For practical purposes, mass-destruction means atomic warfare.

JUDE. Excuse me, you can have mass-destruction even by conventional weapons, as they call them. And I suppose atomic weapons need not *necessarily* be indiscriminate; at least they talk about tactical atomic shells and so on, to be used against armies in the field. I doubt if anything is known about them

to the non-military, and I doubt very much whether the military would understand or admit any moral distinction between destroying armies and destroying cities. So for practical purposes I would agree with you, Philip, about that N.A.T.O. decision in Paris at the end of Advent—what a sense of timing they had, hadn't they!—anyhow it seems to me their decision does start a new chapter and does create an urgent problem for the Christian conscience.

JAMES. You talk like a book, don't you? All the same, I refuse to believe you too are going pacifist!

JUDE. No, I can't see any way out in that direction.

JAMES. Nor in unilateral disarmament, I hope?

JUDE. Ah, there you must let me distinguish. I wouldn't be in favour of complete disarmament on our side only. But I am all in favour of unilateral disarmament in these nuclear weapons, hydrogen bombs and what not: in fact I regard it as a duty.

PHILIP. Why not go all the way while you're about it? Think of what the soldiers would say—you'd be asking them to fight with one hand tied.

JAMES. Come on, Jude, give us your ideas in orderly fashion about methods in warfare. First, what you think on the theological aspect. Then tell us what the Western Governments ought to do. And finally what the individual Christian ought to do now, as things are at this moment.

PHILIP. You've forgotten one point—what the *Church* ought to do.

JAMES. An important point, certainly, but I think we'd better let him off that one. No, go ahead, Jude: just give us the theology in a nutshell.

JUDE. All right. Speaking as an amateur theologian I stick to the traditional Catholic principles about war: war in a just cause is still lawful, but indiscriminate mass-destruction and killing is unlawful, as it always was, and nothing can make it lawful. Details would need working out by experts, but clearly it rules out atom-bombs on cities, or hydrogen bombs or such-like, I should imagine.

JAMES. Even in self-defence?

JUDE. Yes, even in self-defence.

JAMES. Even in retaliation?

JUDE. Yes, even in retaliation.

JAMES. Even if the bomber directs his intention to the military objectives within his target?

JUDE. Yes, that is the sort of misuse of principle that makes one want to vomit.

JAMES. Thanks for your theological contribution. Now in the light of that, will you kindly tell Sir Winston Churchill and President Eisenhower what they ought to do about it?

JUDE. Well, it's simple enough—the Western powers should say openly, We will not sink to sub-human warfare whatever happens—it would be destroying the very values we are fighting for. So we will stop making weapons of mass-destruction and dismantle those we have made already, and invite all other nations to follow our example.

JAMES. And you think they would?

JUDE. They might. Anyhow, whether they do or not, *we* ought to, because it is God's will, and we say we believe in God.

JAMES. I see. And what about when the next war breaks out, and the first thing that happens is a good fat hydrogen-bomb on London and another on New York?

JUDE. Listen, James. That is going to happen to us in any case, as things are. That or something like it.

JAMES. Maybe, but I don't want our side to be the only ones to get it. So you want to have no atomic weapons at all? Not even for nice discriminating battles in the Arctic circle or somewhere?

JUDE. I'm afraid you could never trust the generals to keep it to those regions, could you? Theoretically it would be all right, I suppose, so long as you are not destroying the earth's atmosphere or something. But in weapons you have to draw a line. My line is the good old theological word—*discrimination*.

JAMES. All right, let's suppose you've written to Winston and Eisenhower, and they write back to say they quite agree, and all nuclear weapons are now dismantled. The news goes out on the radio. Now look, I'm the Kremlin, I write to the British and American Governments an ultimatum: either you accept a Soviet Adviser in your Governments, by such a date, or else it will be war. What would you do then if you were the Government?

JUDE. I would put up the best fight we could, with ordinary weapons.

JAMES. And if I threatened to drop an atom-bomb on say Birmingham?

JUDE. I think I should have Birmingham evacuated, and wait to see if it was only your bluff.

JAMES. And if all the same, I began dropping atom-bombs on your cities?

JUDE. I suppose we would have to cease fire, as Japan did. We would have to go in for underground resistance or something. But I don't think the Kremlin would want to make themselves so unpopular—after all they want to convert our countries to their faith, so they can't reasonably destroy their prospective converts, can they? And all this time you're forgetting the biggest factor of all.

JAMES. What's that?

JUDE. God. After all, God might take a hand. You never know what he is going to do. All sorts of things might happen, on the other side of the iron curtain or anywhere.

PHILIP. Exactly: but if you're going to trust God, why not trust him from the beginning, like the pacifists?

JUDE. I do trust him from the beginning, but one must try to see what his will would be at each stage. I can't see that God would want us just to surrender to evil without a fight, still less to surrender sectionally so to speak, without being able to carry our own side with us.

PHILIP. I see what you mean: that is what always kept me from going pacifist myself, until now.

JUDE. Of course if the Pope, or the Bishops of our country, ever called on all Catholics to save humanity from self-destruction by refusing military service, that would be different. But I don't think they will, and at present I hope they won't.

JAMES. Well, thank you anyhow, you've explained what the Governments ought to do, and you'd better write to Winston and Eisenhower about it. Now let's turn to the third point: what should the ordinary Christian do in the present situation? I gather you don't suggest he should refuse military service.

JUDE. No, it's a man's duty to answer the call to defend his country. That's part of the Fourth Commandment. But I think he should try to get into some branch of the service

which has nothing to do with mass-destruction-weapons. And if he is ordered to use such weapons in war, or train for them in peace-time, I think he should say: No, this is where I have to disobey orders, this is where I must obey God rather than man. After all, that has always been the duty of a Christian when ordered to do things that outrage humanity. We've been getting our consciences a bit blunted lately, but it's time to make a stand again and distinguish right from wrong even in war.

JAMES. A hopeless task by this time surely. And quite hopeless for the average individual soldier. All he can do is do what his generals and governments tell him. One theologian I know (not perhaps a professional exactly) says the ordinary man must always do anything his Government and military superiors tell him unless all the bishops in his country tell him he mustn't. What would you say of such a theologian, Jude?

JUDE. I would say he is betraying God and the truth and the Church. There is just this grain of truth in it, that the average man doesn't feel able to decide such things himself. He needs
* advice from someone he trusts. If he thinks he can trust his Government and his officers, well and good. But he can't expect the Pope or all the bishops of his country to step in every time he needs advice. He's got a conscience, and he can ask advice.

JAMES. And when he asks *your* advice in this matter of mass-destruction you tell him to disobey orders, do you?

JUDE. I shouldn't lay down the law to him, because I know there are plenty of tough-guy priests like yourself who would tell him different. But I should tell him that if I were in his place I would disobey orders of that kind, and take the consequences.

JAMES. You'd soon be taking some consequences yourself, wouldn't you? I suppose you would say the same to scientists or munition-workers.

JUDE. Well, of course. For them it's simple enough, they can just change their job. But soldiers are under orders.

JAMES. They certainly are, and it's a criminal offence to tamper with their discipline. Where are you going to draw the line? It's like strikes in industry. Suppose you are an ordinary soldier guarding a guided-missile site? Or an army doctor

taking care of the health of the hydrogen-bomb squadron?
Or their chaplain, God help us?

JUDE. There are innumerable problems, of course, just as in other matters of conduct. They can ask advice.

JAMES. And supposing—just *supposing*—that all other priests were as crazy as you. Supposing large numbers of Catholics began refusing to go into certain branches of the service, or refusing certain kinds of orders—what effect do you think it would have on the generals and the Governments?

JUDE. Well, it might make them think again about their policy.

JAMES. I know one Government that would be very glad to hear about it—and that's the Kremlin.

JUDE. Can't help that. If it's God's will, it's God's will, Kremlin or no Kremlin.

PHILIP. It wouldn't make any *difference*, Jude. Not *enough* difference. Even if all the serious Christians followed your advice, there would still be plenty of other tough-guys ready to take on the mass-destruction jobs.

JUDE. Can't help that, either. You asked me what the ordinary Christian should do in the present situation, and I've told you. Perhaps your guess is better than mine, perhaps the world is definitely going to destroy itself whatever we do. Even so, it seems to me the ordinary Christian shouldn't join in the general suicide. He ought to keep his little flicker of practical common-sense alive as long as anything is alive at all, in the hope that it may be contagious.

PHILIP. The Christian pacifist—

JUDE. Yes, I know, the pacifist is doing his best, and I have deep respect for his sincerity; but when *he* protests against indiscriminating war nobody takes any notice, because he is against *all* war anyway. What is needed is the conscience of the ordinary practical man, rising up and saying he's had enough of this nonsense, and that it's time to tell right from wrong once more.

JAMES. You mean *your* conscience, my dear Jude. But your conscience seems to be so peculiar. There are plenty of atom-bomb-defenders and plenty of pacifists and plenty of ditherers in between, but I can't think of anybody on earth who takes your exact viewpoint. Can you?

JUDE. There may be thousands for all I know, but it isn't every-

body who has the chance of getting into print. I will venture on one statement though: it seems to me that everything I have been saying is fully consistent with what Pope Pius XII has been saying for the last few years in the many references he makes to war and its possibilities.

JAMES. Consistent?

JUDE. Yes, that's as far as I would venture to go. The Pope gives us principles. It is up to us to try and apply them. Taking the whole of the present Pope's utterances on war, would either of you claim that your opinions are *more* consistent with those utterances than mine are?

(The conversation is doubtless still going on)

THE FUTURE OF ITALIAN FILMS

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

'AFTER the Steppe-cat—What?' It is with the feeling of baffled uncertainty posed by Mr Thurber's wistfully evocative question of long ago that the English filmgoer may look at the Italian cinema today, or at least so much of it as he is able to see for himself or learn about from the writing of those who have seen more, or other, films than he. For after *Umberto D*—what? This great film is not only the climax of the neo-realist school in Italy, it is also its full-stop, for after this there is really nothing more to be said in this line without repetition or recession. The Italian cineasts must either drive roads across new country or they must fall back on old ones which have for some time been abandoned.

This is not the first time that Italian films have had great importance; in the very early days of the cinema the Italians had an influence quite disproportionate either to their output or to their distribution. That taste for the grandiose and the magniloquent which had so far had to express itself in opera (should we prefer not to go back quite so far as the Imperial Games), seized upon the cinema as the perfect vehicle for the spectacle, seeing