

MERCY AND PITY MUST NOT DIE

The War And Christian Realism

By DR. J. H. OLDHAM, D.D.,
in a BBC Talk for Overseas

THE Archbishop of Canterbury maintains—and I agree with him—that what is at stake in this war is the preservation of a tradition and civilisation, made up of strands that derive from Greece and Rome and Palestine. In particular, there lies at the heart of it a belief in the dignity, freedom, and responsibility of man, as a being answerable to the law of God, and intended to live in the world as His child.

Truth or Delusion

This faith in the dignity of man and in God's love and purpose for him is either, as a wise man once said, the greatest truth about the world that has ever been set forth, or it is the greatest delusion ever cherished. There is no half way house. This faith, which is an affair of the mind and spirit, is clearly something which cannot be either promoted or defended by bombs and bullets. How then is it involved in the war? The answer is that in order to do its work in the world it has to build institutions which are in accord with its

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spirit, such as the systems of law and justice which have taken shape through the centuries.

It can flourish only in the soil of freedom, and a network of liberties have been won and secured by the courage, perseverance, and sacrifice of many generations. It is this great and precious tradition and these hard-won liberties that the United Nations are defending. They are fighting for the survival of the peoples who still cherish these gains of civilisation and want to preserve and extend them in the future against those who threaten to submerge them in a new

reign of barbarism. It is on these grounds that Christians feel it right to support their Governments in this war.

The Means and the End

The war can do nothing to achieve or further spiritual ends; while victory is essential, all that it can do is to keep open the opportunity of continuing to work for them. If we have this distinction clearly in our minds, it will be evident that the winning of the war is only a means to an end. It is the end that matters. If we fail to remember that, the terrible fate may overtake us that

through our blindness our sacrifices may turn out to have been in vain; we may win the war and lose all that makes it worth winning.

It is the greatest possible delusion that we can act in one way through the years of war and suddenly become different people when it is over. Life is all of a piece. Our acts leave their mark on our character. We cannot allow ourselves to become brutal and callous for years and then expect to find in ourselves resources of humanity and mercy for the tasks of peace.

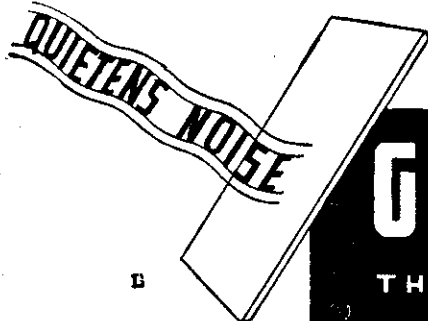
We have therefore to make sure that the war is not waged in such a way as to defeat its own ends. If it is a struggle, as the Archbishop said, between two completely opposed conceptions of life, that difference must never be blurred. It is impossible, for example, for us, like the Axis Powers, to make the nation the object of our ultimate loyalty. The cause we are defending is bound up with belief that there is an eternal and ineradicable difference between right and wrong—that there is

(continued on next page)



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