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IN OUR DISCUSSIONS of world peace we have drifted into accepting a premise which is so strange that it cannot easily be put into words. It is this: that we owe a duty to Someone or Something to keep our institutions in existence for as long as possible; that there is some kind of competition among cultures to live longer than other cultures; and that the only true measure of a civilization is its longevity.

If a lodge loses members, a factory suffers financial loss, a bureau's jurisdiction is repealed, a fund-raising group procures a remedy for the ailment which was the basis for the fund-raising — whenever any of our institutions gives sign of the mortality which is in all of us and each of them — then there are membership drives, revivals, reorganizations, recruitments, and replacements.

When the carriage factory shuts down or the mines close or the village is buried by flood or mud, we search for ways to put things back the way they were. We know that as individuals we

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are mortal. Why this urge to make the social machines immortal? To please some God of Continuity?

Almost all men in politics carry this burden of the 'Baton' theory of government, accepting a fixed term of office and specifically pledging that at the end of the term to turn over to successors the office files, keys to the men's room, and all the slogans, institutions, traditions, boundaries, and anthems — if those successors promise to turn them over to their successors intact and unchanged.

There is an assumption that cultures and civilizations are engaged in a kind of longevity competition; that a nation which keeps its boundaries intact scores a point in some Heavenly reckoning; and that the Verdict of History will applaud leaders who preserve slogans, songs, and bureaus even at the cost of people's lives, moral principles, or pursuit of justice or truth.

For each of us as moral individuals the question is not "Will I die?" or "How long can I postpone death?" but rather, "How will I live until it is time for me to die?" As individuals we can say, "Give me liberty or give me death."

But we pretend that the rule is different for our institutions. We have drifted into the worship of the false God of Continuity. Of our institutions we say, "Give me anything but don't give them death. That is the worst thing that can happen to anything. Take our honor, take truth away, destroy our morals; but do not change our anthems or slogans." We have come to believe, without daring to say it, that there is nothing to fear so long as Old Glory still waves, so long as our coins read "In God We Trust."

Now, any sensible communist or fascist leader would be willing to let us play with our familiar surface institutions if this is all that is required to keep us quiet. Hungary and Poland have kept their postage stamps, folk dances, Olympic athletes, boundaries, and songs. They have achieved continued existence, and if continued existence is the proper goal of our foreign policy, there is no real reason for having a cold war.

But we are not in this struggle simply to postpone the death of the man-made accoutrements and trappings which we have accumulated. Continuous identity is not

a god to be worshipped. Not in a free society. Not in a religious society. We could lose all our individual integrity, all our collective morality, all our regard for truth and justice, and still have a Davis cup team, a banking system, and the stamp-collecting hobby.

These trappings and institutions are mortal. They will pass away. It is the totalitarian state which offers this culture continuum as a substitute for the religious faith of the individual. They regard the individual as a perishable drop of water in an immortal stream, a soulless grain of sand on a beach which has life eternal. This culture continuum is the only reward their state can offer for present hardship and sacrifices.

Suppose this promise were taken from them? Suppose we publicly faced the fact that our institutions are not immortal; that for our boundaries, anthems, and traditions the question is not "Will they change and disappear?" or "How long can we make them last?" but rather, "How will they live until it is time for them to change and disappear?"

Then we might crawl out from under the bed and look the

H-bomb right in the eye, and we might speak thusly to the rest of the world:

"We know that someday our boundaries will be different, our flag will be changed, we will have a different anthem and new sorts of constitutions, legislatures, polling places, appellate courts, constables, Elks Clubs, and currency. Vanished down the corridors of Time will be the New York Yankees, the *Saturday Evening Post*, Standard Oil, and the F.B.I.

"Someone will be living on this land when these changes and deaths occur. There will be children, and debts, scientific research, and some hunger during the changes. We do not know when or in what order these institutions will die, but we accept the fact that each of them will die.

"So we refuse to trade away parts of our morals and self-respect, parts of our love for truth and zeal for justice, to give a week more of life to any of these. We refuse to trade any part of morality in exchange for a year of life for any or all of our institutions. We refuse to accept continued existence as a valid goal of our society. Give our society liberty or give it death!"

What a terrifying notice for a moral people to send to a totalitarian state! "We have the prospect of eternal life as individuals, and you do not. If we mutually destroy each other's institutions, this will remain for us; but what will remain for you?"

When the individual citizen faces the fact of his personal mortality, he can destroy a tyranny. Whenever citizens will say, "Give me liberty or give me death," the tyrant is overthrown. The citizen, by being mortal and knowing it, can clog the arteries of the despotism.

Further, the man who faces this choice between liberty and death wins liberty and life. So can a nation. The man who abandons all else to flee death is the first to die; so it is with cultures, traditions, civilizations, slogans, and societies.

If we could take this approach to international tyranny, if we could disown the Duty to History, refuse to worship the God of Continuity, and measure existence by its quality rather than by its duration, we would not only secure the blessings of liberty but also ensure our survival. ♦