

CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
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We are already several years into the 21st century, and yet the Catholic Church is more like 1960 Catholicism than 1965 Catholicism. The Second Vatican Council was the momentous upsurge of intellectual and spiritual energy unleashed by St. John XXIII (so canonized by the traditional method of popular acclamation by the *Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church*—ARCC) that dragged the Catholic Church into Modernity. However, from the 1968 *Humanae vitae*, through the increasing Hamlet-like drift till the end of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI in 1978, followed by the repressive *Reconquista* of the more than quarter-century of Pope John Paul II, to the current stagnation/regression under Pope Benedict XVI, the Catholic Church has lurched back toward pre-Enlightenment Ultramontaniam (remember that word?).

I. THE COPERNICAN TURN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Many years ago I wrote an essay about “The Copernican Turn in the Catholic Church.” Its contents will be familiar to you, but let me briefly refresh your memory because the elements of that revolutionary turn are basically the characteristics of Modernity.

1. The Turn Toward Freedom

The image Catholicism projected at the end of the 1950s was of a giant monolith, a community of hundreds of millions who held obedience in both action and thought as the highest virtue. For a hundred years—but really not much more than that!—Catholics were treated like children in the Church, acted like children, and thought of themselves as children. With the Second Vatican Council, however, this very unfree image, and reality, was utterly transformed. Suddenly it seemed humanity, including Catholics, became aware of their “coming of age,” as St. John XXIII put it, hence, their freedom and responsibility. This was clearly expressed in many places, but perhaps nowhere clearer than in the “Declaration on Religious Liberty.”

2. The Turn Toward the Historical/Dynamic

For centuries the thinking of official Catholicism was dominated by a static understanding of reality; it resisted not only the democratic and human rights movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, but also the growing historical, dynamic way of understanding the world, including religious thought. That changed dramatically with Vatican II where the historical, dynamic view of reality and doctrine was officially fully embraced, at least for the time.

3. The Turn Toward Inner Reform

Since the 16th century, inside the Catholic Church even the word “reform” was forbidden, to say nothing of the reality. At the beginning of the 20th century Pope Pius X, falling back to his predecessor, Pope Pius IX, launched the heresy-hunting Inquisition of Anti-Modernism, crushing all creative thought in Catholicism for decades. In the middle of the 20th century leading theologians were

again silenced (e.g., Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, John Courtney Murray, Karl Rahner).

But Pope St John XXIII burst those binding chains and called the Second Vatican Council. He spoke about “throwing open the windows of the Vatican” to let in fresh thought, about “Aggiornamento,” bringing the Church “up to date.” Indeed, the Vatican II documents even used that neuralgic word “reformation”: “Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation (*semper reformanda*) of which she always has need”; “**All** [Catholics] are led to... wherever necessary, undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform,” and insisted that **All** Catholics’ “primary duty is to make an honest and careful appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and achieved in the Catholic household itself” (*Decree on Ecumenism*).

4. The Turn Toward This World

Until very recently the term “salvation” was understood exclusively to mean going to heaven after death; its root meaning from *salus* of a “full, healthy life” was largely lost in Christianity after the 3rd century. Marx was not far from the mark when he claimed that Christianity (and religion in general) was mainly concerned about “pie in the sky bye and bye.” But that focus shifted radically with Vatican II, especially as reflected in the document “The Church in the Modern World,” which in effect, though without the name, launched Liberation Theology.

5. The Turn Toward Dialogue

For centuries, especially since the 16th, the Catholic Church has been largely trapped in a kind of solipsism, talking only to itself, and shaking its finger at the rest of the world. Again, St. John XXIII and Vatican II changed all that navel-staring radically. Ecumenism was now not only not forbidden, but “pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone” (*Decree on Ecumenism*). Pope Paul VI issued his first encyclical (*Ecclesiam suam*, 1964), specifically on dialogue:

Dialogue is **demanded** nowadays.... It is **demanded** by the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society. It is **demanded** by the pluralism of society and by the maturity man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak and conduct a dialogue with dignity.¹

At Vatican II Catholics were taught—especially in the “Constitution on the Church,” the “Declaration on Religious Liberty,” the “Decree on Ecumenism” and the “Declaration on the Relationship with Non-Christian Religions”—that to be authentically Christian, Christians must cease being enslaved by their tribal forms of Christianity; they must stop their fratricidal hate; they need to recall their Jewish roots and that the Jewish people today are still God’s chosen people, for God’s promises are never revoked; they need to turn from their imperialistic convert-making among

¹*Ecclesiam suam*, no. 9

Muslims, Hindus, and other religious peoples and turn toward bearing witness to Jesus Christ by their lives and words, toward helping the Muslims be better Muslims and the Hindus better Hindus. This will make Christians love their own liberating traditions not less, but more, for these traditions will then be even more fully Christian.

Nowhere was this proclaimed more forcefully than in the Vatican Document *Humanae personae dignitatem*:

Doctrinal discussion requires recognizing the truth everywhere, even if truth demolishes one so that one is forced to reconsider one's own position, in theory and in practice, at least in part....in discussion the truth will prevail by no other means than by the truth itself. Therefore the liberty of the participants must be ensured by law and revered in practice.²

This then was the five-fold Copernican Turn in the Catholic Church of Vatican II. In response to the solar plexus blow of *Humanae vitae* in 1968, national conferences of bishops of at least Belgium, Germany, Canada, and the United States issued public statements which essentially said that in the end, individual Catholic couples must follow their own consciences on the matter of artificial birth control, even if that led them to oppose Pope Paul VI's position (according to subsequent polls, well over three-quarters of American Catholics in fact approve of artificial birth control). The U.S. bishops even explicitly stated that **"the expression of theological dissent is in order"** if three conditions are met: "(1) if the reasons are serious and well-founded, (2) if the manner of dissent does not question or impugn the teaching authority of the Church, and (3) is such as not to give scandal."

The high point of Vatican II reform was reached in the middle 1970s, exemplified especially by the West German National Synod which ran 1971-1975, and the massive grass-roots involved American "Call to Action" organized by the American bishops in 1976. In 1978 Pope Paul VI died and was quickly followed by the long-lived Restorationist Pope John Paul II 1978-2005.

II. MODERNITY IS WHERE WE LIVE!

This year, just thirty years after Pope John Paul II started to drag the Catholic Church back behind the Enlightenment, behind Modernity, I finished a book which I titled *Club Modernity. For Reluctant Christians*. I argued that we in Western Civilization—which is increasingly morphing into Global Civilization—live in the mental world of Modernity, but because Christianity, as all world religions, was founded in pre-Modern mentality, there is a disconnect which we must overcome. Hence, after laying out in some detail on how I understood the mental world of Modernity, I proceeded to reflect on how we who live in the mental world of Modernity can at the same time be Christian. When preparing my reflections for this article, I was struck by how similar the characteristics of Modernity as I laid them out are to the five-fold Copernican turn of Vatican II. Therefore, I would like to lay out here my understanding of the mental world of Modernity because not only is that in fact the mental world that we live in today—it was also the mental world of Vatican II. Then, juxtaposing these two mental worlds, I will suggest some conclusions for

where Catholic leadership for the 21st century must lead.

1. What Is Modernity?

Modernity, as I understand it, is a world which cherishes a) *freedom* at the core of being human, b) *critical-thinking* reason as the arbiter of what to affirm or not, c) *history*, process, dynamism seen at the heart of human life and society, d) the increasing need to be in *dialogue* with those who think differently from us—and yet senses that there is somehow more to life, to reality, than meets the eye, that there is a depth or spiritual dimension that is not captured on the surfaces of our everyday experiences.

We cannot avoid Modernity, even if we do not allude to it, are not consciously aware it. Modernity is all around us. It is the very air that we breathe, even when we might be vigorously trying to reject some part of it. In our bones we feel *free*, and feel outraged when we learn of others being robbed of their freedom. We cannot help but involuntarily ask of every new or old idea or bit of information that comes along whether it *makes sense*, whether we "buy it." So too we are increasingly aware that reality around us is *constantly changing*, that old givens don't necessarily hold anymore, and that consequently we constantly ask whether old saws are still valid, or are something of a past context. Also increasingly we do not automatically discount those who are different from us, but are more and more inclined at first to tolerate them, then to open out to them, and then even to *seek them out*.

Modernity makes up our mental world like water is where fish live, or the air is for us mammals. We don't even notice it, unless it is severely damaged and we start to choke and even die. We automatically resist when our freedom is threatened, and protest when something unreasonable is being forced down our throats. We would do the same if our radios, TVs, or now increasingly our cell phones or computers, were taken from us and we were forced to go back to living in the older context, or if we no longer could learn new things from those elsewhere in the world. This is all true even if we don't think about it—until part of it might be taken away.

Consequently, if a hoary tradition is to find a helpful, creative place in our life, we need to undertake two important steps. First, we need to reflect more intensely and consciously on just what our mental world of Modernity is like. We need to learn in greater depth what its elements are and how they intertwine to constitute the atmosphere in which we "live, move, and have our being," as St. Paul wrote in quoting an ancient Greek poet. The contemporary philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) put it this way: "In fact history does not belong to us; but we belong to it."

When we become more self-aware of the mental context in which we live, we will then be forced to ask ourselves questions about the "explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly, based on some notion of the transcendent," which is my terse definition of religion. In our case that religion is Catholic Christianity. The questions we will have to ask of our religion, of Catholic Christianity, will automatically be raised by the elements of Modernity: Can Catholic Christianity promote my freedom; can it make reasonable sense; can it adapt to the changing world; can it help me expand my understanding through dialogue with the Other? If it can't answer those questions adequately, it will not be able to provide us with the

²*Humanae personae dignitatem*, in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), p. 1003.

“explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly.”

III. HOW TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN MODERNITY AND CONTEMPORARY CATHOLICISM

The question now facing the leadership of the Catholic Church, whether those in position of structural power or those in intellectual, social, and financial power, recognize it or not, is precisely how to bridge the gap between the mental world of Modernity in which we all live and Catholicism of the 21st century. I am convinced that we have the primary resources to answer that question adequately already in the Second Vatican Council.

1. Modernity Compared to the Copernican Turn of Vatican II

If we line up the Vatican II five-fold Copernican turn we see that they match the fundamental characteristics of Modernity.

The latest poll, done by the Pew Foundation this spring, 2008, found that Catholics comprise about 24% of the general (300 million) population—the same percentage as 35 years ago, that is, today there are 65 million American Catholics. The shocking figure, however, is that there are today 30 million *former* Catholics! The number of current Catholics stayed at 65 million only because of the huge influx of Hispanic Catholics, most of whom—like their Irish, Polish, etc. predecessors—are very poor and poorly educated. It is obvious that those 30 million former Catholics are for the most part not the poor and poorly educated, but most likely the opposite! In other words, the Catholic Church is suffering a huge brain drain and financial drain, which is reflected in the latest figures which show that Catholic give less than one half as much to the Church than Protestants do. The reason Catholics give so much less than Protestants is that Catholics have no control over where their money goes.

Vatican II	Modernity
Turn Toward Freedom Turn Toward the Historical/Dynamic Turn Toward Dialogue Turn Toward This World Turn Toward Inner Reform	Freedom at the core of being human History, dynamism at the heart of life & society Dialogue with those who think differently Critical-thinking reason Increasing self-awareness—consequent change

In brief, if we Catholics ask what Catholic resources we have first, to help ourselves, and then assist other Catholics to reconcile the key characteristics of Modernity and our Catholic Christianity, we have, after the Scriptures, the highest resource possible, namely, all the Catholic bishops of the world, including the bishop of Rome, gathered together in a solemn Ecumenical Council! All the “huffing and puffing by the big bad anyone” will not suffice to low down that house, for, to quote Jesus, it is built on rock!

2. Transformation of Consciousness

What is desperately needed is a transformation of Catholic consciousness, especially the consciousness of the laity. The time is long past that the Catholic laity are theological, or any other kind of, ignoramus. As far as I can tell, I was the first Catholic layman to receive a degree in Catholic theology—from the Pontifical Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen in 1959 (half a century ago!). Since then thousands of lay women and men have received degrees in Catholic theology and many other thousands have received degrees in religious studies. In the United States and Canada, and doubtless in many other countries as well, there are laity in every parish who are better trained in theology than the pastor!

The first problem that needs to be addressed is to transform the consciousness of the Catholic laity to recognize that they can, and therefore should, take a seriously active role in the whole life of the Catholic community. This is not an easy task, for the laity has had passivity bred into their bones for centuries. In Europe in general, the percentage of active membership is abysmal. Even in the U.S. where the numbers are comparatively high, the signs are deeply discouraging.

3. Shift in Catholic Church Governance Desperately Needed

The Catholic Church has had many forms of governance throughout its history and geography. What should determine the form of governance is its effectiveness. The current Roman Imperial form had a certain effectiveness in the past when the vast number of people were unlettered. But since that is less and less the case, it clearly is no longer appropriate. Rather, some form of democratic governance much better matches an increasingly educated population.

What I want to do here is to analyze democracy in its fullness, that is, both its externals and its internal spirit, its spirituality, which must enliven the externals if we are to have a living, vital human community. What I propose to do is to look at what are eight obviously key “externals” of democracy and look for what must be the “internals,” the “spiritual” dimension of those eight “principles” of democracy. First, a brief list of those principles, especially as they pertain to the Catholic Church, though what is said here throughout applies to other bodies as well:

1. Principle of Representation:

All groupings of the faithful, including women and minorities, shall be equitably represented in all positions of leadership and decision-making.

2. The Principle of Subsidiarity:

All decision-making rights and responsibilities shall remain with the smaller community unless the good of the broader community specifically demands that it exercise those rights and responsibilities.

3. The Principle of Written Constitutions:

Throughout the Church each community, from parish on

up, shall form its own body of governing regulations, its Constitution.

4. The Principle of Participation through Elections:

Throughout the Church leaders shall be elected to office through appropriate structures, giving voice to all respective constituents.

5. The Principle of Term Limits: Leaders shall hold office for a specified, limited term.

6. Principle of Accountability: All leaders and councils will regularly provide their constituents an account of their work, including financial accounts, to be reviewed by an outside auditor when appropriate.

7. Principle of Separation and Balance of Powers:

A separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, along with a system of checks and balances, shall be observed. This entails representatively elected councils and leaders, as well as established judicial systems at all levels. All branches share responsibility in ways appropriate to the spirit of the Gospel and the community's Constitution.

8. The Principle of Dialogue:

Throughout the Church the formulations and applications of the tradition shall be arrived at through a process of charitable and respectful dialogue.

For the sake of brevity I will lift up only four of these eight principles.

1. Principle of Representation

A community is made up of both individual persons and groupings of persons. If a community is going to make decisions about individual persons and/or groups of individual persons, it is obvious that those individuals and groups whose fate one way or another is being decided have the greatest stake in such decisions. Who could possibly have more concern about these decisions than those whose fate is thereby impacted? The Spirituality of Democracy claims that those who are affected by decisions should have a proportionate voice in those decisions.

Indeed, even that redoubtable representative of authoritarianism, Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461 A.D.), who faced down Attila the Hun and saved Rome from the sack, nevertheless wrote: "Let him who will stand before all be elected by all!"³ Thus, in that same spirit Pope John Paul II made it clear that,

Democracy...represents a most important topic for the new millennium...[the Church] values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them....⁴

Surely if this insight is valid for the secular community, it is all the more valid for the even more comprehensive religious community, the Church!

2. Principle of Accountability

Often one hears a demur that the Church is not a

democracy precisely because its authority comes from God. But this claim proves far too much, for it is true of *all* authority, secular as well as religious—just as Jesus himself pointed out to the secular potentate Pontius Pilate: "You have authority only because it was given to you by God." (John 19:11) Just because authority comes from God does not militate its being mediated by a variety of human instruments. Remember, the key first seven Ecumenical Councils were all called by, presided over, and promulgated, not by the pope, not by the bishops, but by laity, both male and female (!) the Emperor or Empress.

Thus, the chosen leaders, by whatever means, are responsible to the choosing constituents. This is manifested in a variety of ways, such as the very traditional (first articulated in 1140 by Gratian, the "Father of Canon Law") "Doctrine of Reception": "The canonical doctrine of reception, broadly stated, asserts that for a law or rule to be an effective guide for the believing community it must be accepted by that community."⁵ For example, Pope Gregory XVI's and Pope Pius IX's dual condemnation of freedom of conscience as "madness" (*deliramentum*) in 1832 and again in 1864,⁶ simply were not accepted by the bulk of Catholic faithful, and then was definitively rejected by the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* of Vatican II in 1965.

We have an especially outstanding example of how well this principle of accountability was put into action early in the history of the American Catholic Church. John England (1786-1842) was the bishop of North and South Carolina and Georgia from 1820 to 1842. Bishop England set up a representative democratic Constitution by which his huge diocese was governed. His Constitution made provision for annual diocesan Conventions for all the clergy, and a proportional representation of the laity from each parish, elected by all the people. The Convention possessed certain decision-making powers parallel to those of each Parish Vestry, such as control of the General Diocesan Fund. The bishop was *required* to make a full report on the expending of all funds to the Convention; England in fact did an exemplary job of this at every Convention.

In addition, he took the opportunity to present an overview of the Church in all America as well as in his diocese at each Convention. Most importantly, it was through the Convention that the scattered Catholic churches began to grow together with a sense of unity and belonging to a larger church, which was *their* Church where they had both rights and responsibilities.

3. The Principle of Term Limits

The principle of limited term of office for leaders is something that we humans have learned from hard experience. Suffice it to recall the immense benefits of a limited term of office in the modern civil experience. Surely it is very easy for us to see why a time limit on the exercise of a leadership office helps to protect the holder from the siren seduction of power. Knowing that one day I will be on the other side of the desk provides a powerful prophylactic against slipping into an insensitive or arrogant exercise of

³Leo, *Epistle*, x, 4; *PL*, 54, 634. "Qui praefuturus est omnibus ab omnibus eligatur."

⁴John Paul II to Sixth Session, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Feb. 23, 2000

⁵James Coriden, *The Canonical Doctrine of Reception*; see: http://arcc-catholic-rights.net/doctrine_of_reception.htm

⁶See Leonard Swidler, *Freedom in the Church* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum Press, 1969), ch. IV.

power.

Unfettered power, with the best of will, tempts the realization of the famous saying of Lord Acton: "Power corrupts, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." Hence, it is no surprise that in the wake of the liberating winds of Vatican II the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen in Germany produced a special issue of their periodical, the *Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift*, 2 (1969), devoted to the questions of the election and limited term of office of bishops and that the whole faculty signed a careful argument in favor of the notion of a limited term of office of eight years for resident bishops. What is perhaps surprising, however, is not that Hans Küng was one of the signers of that document (which he was) but that Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was also!⁷

4. The Principle of Written Constitutions

It might at first seem odd to include as a principle the need for Written Constitutions. However, every teacher knows that open dialogue, and especially writing, produces a quality of thought that is not only precise, but also tends both to be practical and to capture the heart. Think of 1789, not so much as the beginning of the French Revolution, but the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and how it directs 300 million Americans' lives to this very day! Having to write down a set of rules by which a community decides to govern itself is in itself a very sobering, reflective interior experience. It develops both a *deep-dialogic* and *critical-thinking* interior mentality. It is "deep-dialogical" for it forces each of us to listen carefully to the deep concerns of our partners, to try to get inside their minds and hearts so as to address adequately their concerns—and to lead my partners to do the same for me.

It is "critical-thinking" for it forces all partners to try to lift out of the unconscious level all those pre-suppositions that each of us is unknowingly burdened with—"women are emotional and men are rational," "the poor are irresponsible," are some of the better known ones, but there are many, many others which are as yet unknown to each of us because they are unconscious. Only then can we analyze the unconscious pre-suppositions that we all carry, and make a judgment about them.

We all know that it is very easy to "talk around" a subject and seemingly arrive at a consensus, only to have the apparent consensus later, when some crisis arises, show itself to be totally chimerical. However, if one is forced to write down what one thinks in such a way that all the others likewise agree with the line of thought, then such later potential disagreement, though never totally eliminated, is vastly reduced. Everyone is forced to think very, very clearly and choose words very, very precisely, for everyone, including one's grandchildren and great grand-children, are going to have to live by those words. Of course, even such written words will in the future have to be interpreted and applied to new situations, but there will be a solid foundation of the written word to build on.

Thus, the linkage between the external words and actions built on them, and the internal thought—deep-dialogue/critical-thinking—is clear for all to see. Community action without the inner spiritual dimension of the carefully thought through—and perhaps even fought through—reflection and choice of the right concepts, insights, concerns as reflected in the precisely written words will drift into arbitrariness and even tyranny. Hence, the Principle of Written Constitutions.

IV. SUGGESTIONS OF CONCRETE STEPS TO BE TAKEN

First, further inform yourself by going to the website of the *Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church* (ARCC— <http://arcc-catholic-rights.net/>); see especially the *Constitutional Catholicism* lectures there, and get an online copy of the 1997 book *Toward a Catholic Constitution*.⁸ Then, as suggested above:

1. work as imaginatively as possible on changing the consciousness of Catholics to get them committed to making the Church their own, and not that of the pope, bishop, or pastor alone. This will take ingenuity and persistence.
2. If at all possible work to get your parish, or some parish(s) to develop a parish constitution. This will of course require the agreement of the pastor, a serious commitment by parishioners with intelligence, passion, and persistence. Once the parish has created its own Parish Constitution, it should be formally liturgically enshrined—with the pastor, parish council, and congregation publicly and prayerfully annually committing themselves to living by it. Then the Constitutional Parish needs to "evangelize" other parishes to likewise become Constitutional Parishes, and form a Network of Constitutional Parishes so that they will be able to request future collaborative pastors from the bishop from a position of relative strength.
3. I strongly suggest that each parish also start a non-profit organization to run through it funding for any and all parish projects that are not the regular fare. For example, perhaps some in the parish would want to start a soup kitchen in the poorer part of the city, or set up scholarships for certain categories of students, or sponsor a Boy Scout troop, or the like. Run the funding for these through the non-profit organization. The result will be that parishioners will get used to contributing and disbursing their own funds. Further, experience shows that *in toto* more money will be contributed with a non-profit organization alongside the regular parish finance committee. As money is run through the non-profit organization, it will automatically create a "field of force," gently shifting the balance of power more toward the contributors of the money, the parishioners.
4. Become involved in the building *American Catholic Council*, a coalition of American Catholics working toward

⁷English translation, Leonard and Arlene Swidler, *Bishops and People* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

⁸See: <http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/swidlerbooks>; Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Catholic Constitution* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1996, online at). See also Leonard Swidler, *Making the Church Our Own. How We Can Reform the Catholic Church from the Ground Up* (Lanham, MD: Sheed&Ward, 2007).

a grassroots movement to make the American Catholic Church more representative in decision-making, accountable in governance, and human rights protective and due-process structured in its judicial system (<http://americancatholiccouncil.org>).

These are only a few concrete suggestions. The real work can be done only on the ground in concrete situations. The goal is to employ all of the gifts of all the people in the Church, and this can be done effectively today only by addressing Catholics as mature persons of Modernity, who are free, rational, dynamic, and dialogic. Then maybe many of the best of the 30 million former Catholic Americans, and their counterparts in Europe, will be drawn back to the Church and help to make it the humanizing force it should be and the world desperately needs.



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