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SOLITUDE, SILENCE and STILLNESS Enneagram's Fake Spiritual Growth

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"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Mystics have promoted asceticism based on silence and solitude for more than a millennia. Church historian Justo Gonzalez highlights the beginning of desert monasticism in his book *The Story of Christianity Vol. 1*.¹ Gonzalez writes, "The very word 'monk' derives from the Greek *monachos*, which means 'solitary.' One of the driving motivations for the early monks was the search for solitude."² In the early part of the 4th century, there were individual Christians who sought a purer form of devotion by leaving cities for solitude in the desert. One famous desert monk was Anthony.³ The sources for monasticism likely included Gnosticism, Stoicism and a misuse of Paul's discussion of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. Whatever the motivation, the underlying deception was that one could find a more pure form of faith in Christ if it were done in solitude and silence, away from Christian fellowship.

Anthony practiced his monasticism by living in an abandoned cemetery. People would bring him bread so he could survive.⁴ Gonzalez narrates how Anthony began having various visions of demons and moved even farther into the desert. He was followed by the demons and also misguided Christians who thought they could learn something from this clearly troubled man who finally agreed to have

some disciples live near him. Along with solitude came a mystical faith replete with dreams and visions that may or may not have been from God and also demonic struggles and torment. Willfully chosen poverty and solitude seemed like a pious answer to corruption in cities and the official church. But soon, according to Gonzalez, there were so many people running to the desert to practice this ascetic version of the Christian faith that the desert became crowded with thousands seeking solitude in the monastic life.⁵ Constantine's approval of Christianity was a likely motivation for this flight to the wilderness.

Nearly 1,700 years later, we have popular teachers promoting the monastic ideals of solitude, silence and stillness as the way to true Christian growth and godly piety. Now there is communication technology that allows such mystical deception to be sent all around the world in seconds. Enneagram is grounded in the same deception that drove Anthony to demonic torment in the wilderness. That ground is the false idea that Jesus and His apostles approved, practiced, and promoted silence, solitude, and stillness as God's ordained means of spiritual growth. Christopher L. Heuertz sees these practices as good and necessary and hopes for a Christian "return to its contemplative roots" as he cites authors who want a return to

monasticism.⁶ He mentions Phyllis Tickle's idea of a "Great Emergence" that would "redefine" Christianity. I encountered Tickle's ideas in my research and writing about the Emergent Church.⁷ I do not doubt that people are attracted to monastic, mystical ideals since some always have been. But I do doubt that it will lead to anything but deception. It is not ordained by Christ and His apostles (the biblical ones).

Self-discovery as the New Monastic Motivation

The motivation for Anthony was escape from the corruption of society and churches that were part of it. The motivation for the Enneagram version of monastic practices is the discovery of the "True Self" which implies finding our "original righteousness." Heuertz does not promote the type of isolation Anthony sought, but nevertheless promotes solitude, silence and stillness as the way "home" that is "critical for everyone."⁸ He approvingly cites pantheist Eckhart Tolle concerning the need for silence and being "present" as they call it. Tolle's pagan ideas (which I wrote about in *CIC issue 114*) are certainly akin to those of Heuertz. The practices of solitude, silence and stillness (we shall shorten to SSS) are Enneagram's version of a rather slow "conversion" where one goes from the illusions of the "ego" which has to be slowly put to death in order to find our way "home" to the True Self. Heuertz claims:

This, [a series of small deaths to the ego] I believe, is the true nature of conversion: it happens not in a single moment of pivotal event but in a lifelong series of inner deaths. It is what Jesus spoke plainly of: "If you wish to

come after me, you must deny your very selves, take of the instrument of your own death and follow in my footsteps" (Matthew 16:24)⁹

This conscription of Jesus' teaching to promote ancient pagan mysticism wed to the pop psychology of "true self/false self" is disingenuous.

Any reading of conversion in the gospels and Acts reveals that the those who come to Christ through the cross go from death to life, darkness to light. If a lifetime process of practicing SSS was Jesus' point, He would have told us. Jesus died for us, to avert God's wrath against sin. Those who embrace the cross believe this and embrace the reality that we were dead sinners needing conversion. We willingly live for Christ. We do not agree to embark on a life of contemplative practices never ordained in the Bible! We are not looking for some hidden "True Self;" we are leaving behind the old dead "self" that came from Adam through original sin. Heuertz claims, "Not only do we have to traverse the chaos and darkness of our fragmented identity, but we also have to die to who we thought we were"¹⁰ How do we do this? – by "contemplative practice."

Ancient mysticism wed to modern pop psychology is Enneagram's version of conversion, albeit a slow painful one. True conversion happens when a person is born of the Spirit and becomes alive from the dead. It involves repentance, faith and the forgiveness of sins. There is an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) which is logical, not chronological. Actual conversion happens at a point in time. Going from death to life is like Lazarus hearing Jesus' voice and coming out of the grave. Enneagram conversion is slow, painful and very difficult. Heuertz writes, "But I'd be lying if I said Centering Prayer is easy, because it truly is one of the most difficult disciplines I've ever tried to cultivate."¹¹ This is in his chapter on SSS and there are other concomitant practices and terms such as Yoga, mindfulness, being present and contemplative

posture.

The reason for this painful, unpleasant and slow process is theological. The need for conversion as defined in the Bible is original sin. We are born lost in Adam, and alienated from the life of God. We were living for self in its sinful condition. When converted, we die to the old life of sin and come alive to God through Christ whose righteousness is imputed to us. This happens once for all. In Heuertz' panentheistic theology, one does not die to original sin, but enters a process to find our original righteousness which is hidden under the layers of a lifetime accumulation of a false identity. Heuertz says, "We can look to Jesus, who had to face these same lies and programs in his own way to reveal to us our original righteousness and True Self."¹² In Scripture the "self" is a dead sinner who will never be able to please God and in Enneagram the "self" is righteous and true, but needs to be recovered through practices and postures never ordained by God. In the case of true conversion, the dead self comes alive in Christ through faith. In Enneagram's fake conversion, the person embarks on an endless process with a possible outcome of finding the real "self." But what if the Bible is true and this real "self" is a dead sinner? Then the Enneagram follower wasted his life trying to be pious through painful and useless practices and still faces eternal judgment.

Jesus' Temptation Misinterpreted

Heuertz tells us that Jesus' temptation in the wilderness was designed to reveal our "original righteousness" so we can find our "True Self." Studying the temptation of Jesus in the gospels shows that no such thing is revealed. Teachers like Heuertz are able to deceive many people because so few know the Bible and how to understand the Holy Spirit-inspired author's meaning. Heuertz interprets the temptations in modern psychological categories

that the gospel writers never mention. He also downplays the uniqueness of Christ and makes His temptations a template for mystical spirituality. For example, Heuertz claims: "The first temptation, 'If you are the Only Begotten, command these stones to turn into bread' (Matthew 4:3-4), gets at the lie *I am what I do* and the program for happiness of power and control."¹³

In reality, Matthew's account is not about the pop psychology but about Jesus' obedience in the wilderness in light of the failure of Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. Jesus is the unique Son who succeeds where Israel failed. The Spirit's descent upon Jesus at His baptism and the voice from heaven identifying Him as the unique Son make His identity clear to Matthew's readers. Jesus' response to the temptation was to cite Deuteronomy 8:3 concerning living by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Such words were just heard as narrated in Matthew 3:17. The OT wilderness wanderers were led by God into the wilderness and their they failed miserably and "craved evil things" (1Corinthians 10:6). Jesus cited the appropriate passage that applied to the situation and thus obeyed as an example for disciples. There is nothing in Matthew 4 that says that Jesus went to practice solitude, silence and stillness, but that He went "to be tempted by the devil." But Heuertz reads into the text his own agenda: "The desert is clearly a symbol of retreat or withdrawal, and intentional moving into solitude, silence and stillness to be tested. . ."¹⁴ If the mystical SSS of Enneagram was the point, why did Matthew say nothing about any about any of them? Jesus actively answered with truth from Scripture which requires knowing God's word and applying it accurately.

True to form, Heuertz interprets the second temptation in terms of modern psychological concerns. When the devil tempted Jesus to throw Himself from the temple by misusing Scripture to suggest that the angels will take care Him if He did so, Jesus

answered with the passage that one should not test the Lord (Matthew 4:7). Rather than mentioning that fact, Heuertz opines: "This is clearly a fortification of the lie *I am what others say about me* and the program for happiness of affection and esteem."¹⁵ Again he offers psychological analysis that has nothing to do with Matthew's point. The real point is found in the failure of Israel in the wilderness when they tempted God (Exodus 17:2 and see Psalm 95:7-9). Jesus is the true Son who succeeded where Israel as God's "son" (Exodus 4:22) failed. Grant Osborne gets it right: "Israel failed the test at Massah; Jesus relives that experience but emerges triumphant."¹⁶

The third temptation gets the same psychological treatment from Heuertz. After citing the devil's words about giving the kingdoms in exchange for worship, Heuertz writes: "a suggestion that supports the lie *I am what I have* and the program for happiness of security and survival."¹⁷ This weak interpretation has very little going for it. It ignores the real issues in Matthew, ignores how Jesus actually responded to it with Scripture, and ignores the issue of whether Jesus would go through with the plan of first dying on the cross for sins and leaving the matter of authority over nations as a still future promise after the parousia (see Daniel 7:13, 14). This is not about how Jesus would find security, but about the fulfillment of Scripture and God's eternal purposes in the Son. Again we have echoes of Israel's failure in the wilderness where they failed to believe God's promise and looked for someone to bring them back to Egypt.

These temptations show that in each key point, Jesus was victorious where ancient Israel failed in the wilderness. They also teach us the about the true person of Christ as the unique Son who always pleases the Father. Furthermore, we learn about being disciples who must know, understand and properly apply Scripture to the tempting situations that we face. Later in the New Testament, we find a great application of this: "*For since He*

Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Ironically, the SSS program does lead people into temptation. Many people cannot handle it and have horrible experiences. I have been contacted by readers whose experience with contemplative spirituality ended in torment, not unlike Anthony in the 4th century. Solitude, silence and stillness do not fill our minds with the word of God or equip us to interpret it accurately and apply the right passage to our present situation. The SSS approach is a set up for failure! Heuertz' analysis is clearly unbiblical. He claims, "In the postures of solitude, silence and stillness Jesus faced himself."¹⁸ No, He faced temptation, answered with Scripture and obedience, and succeeded where Israel failed. So will we if we do not believe God's promises in Christ and live accordingly. Nothing in the gospels even mentions SSS, and therefore it is utter foolishness to claim that they are the key. If Heuertz cannot see the wilderness wandering allusions and the fact the Jesus' answers come from Scripture associated with that, then he is very poorly trained in hermeneutics.

How dangerous it is for people who themselves know little about Scripture to find their spiritual guidance from panentheists who have little regard for the meaning of the Holy Spirit-inspired authors of Scripture. They are being seduced into a damaging program that God never ordained. The promises of Enneagram have nothing to do with forgiveness of sins, freedom from spiritual darkness or eternal salvation through a relationship with Christ by faith. What is laid out as the goal of this process of "contemplative prayer practices"? Heuertz suggestively asks: "If identifying with the trials of Jesus is an invitation to union with God, then how do we allow this process to bring forth the inner integration we desperately need?" This psychological discussion has absolutely nothing to do with what Matthew wrote concerning Christ and His temptations. We do not

need "inner integration," whatever that may be, but we need faith in God's promises and obedience to His word.

True, Objective Faith

The promises of God, which give us confidence in God's ordained means of grace, are clear, meaningful, and accessible to all Christians. The Enneagram material is complex, contrived, confusing and convoluted. It is grounded in the very lie of Satan who said, "You shall not die . . . you will be like God" (Genesis 3:4). This being like God is called the "True Self" which, when found, implies finding God. The process for this involves pagan practices never ordained by God. There is no promise anywhere in the Bible that if we find our Enneagram triad, learn our particular prayer posture and work very hard practicing it we will become "present" and find our "original righteousness." Heuertz' statements and claims come with no solid reason for his readers to believe any of them. He says: "Being truly present requires establishing a particular prayer posture in contemplative practice."¹⁹ Being "present" implies a view of humans that is in direct opposition to the Bible: "But with contemplative practice as our companion and guide, we will find faith and courage to become who we were before the assault on our original righteousness or Virtue occurred."²⁰ Genesis 3 describes the source of original sin. The descendants of Adam never had "original righteousness" and will never have any righteousness if it is not the imputed righteousness of Christ.

When Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church at Pentecost, the early disciples had simple practices that were ordained by Christ:

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

The apostles were appointed and taught by Christ, and spoke authoritatively for God. Their teachings are for all Christians and are not broken down into nine Enneagram numbers with three triads, and postures that are different depending on where one fits in its convoluted scheme. By contrast, the apostles' teaching is for all. It is accessible. The fellowship of which Luke speaks is also for all. It involves outward interaction with other Christians where objective truth is understood and believed. The breaking of bread refers to the Lord's Supper which signifies objective promises from the Lord and is for all. It reminds us of what Christ did for us and looks forward to being gathered together at the end of the age with all the glorified saints and enjoying eschatological table fellowship. All of this is objective, public and understandable. It is not cryptic or confusing like Enneagram.

The last part of Acts 2:42 is about prayer. Here again Enneagram creates unbiblical categories that have nothing to do with the corporate prayer of the people of God. Even private prayer in the Bible is totally unlike the SSS of Enneagram. Under a section called "centering prayer," Heuertz gives this definition: "Centering Prayer is a non-conceptual prayer practice rooted in the Christian-tradition. . . . Centering Prayer is a silent prayer that prepares its practitioner to receive the gift of loving presence in contemplative prayer."²¹ Remember that there are versions of this prescribed by Heuertz and other Enneagram proponents that are tailored for each of the nine numbers. This is certainly not what was happening in Acts 2:42.

Let's unpack the idea of centering prayer (their term) being "nonconceptual." There is no example of "nonconceptual" prayer anywhere in the Bible other than the Holy Spirit interceding for us:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes

for us with groanings too deep for words; (Romans 8:26)

But this is not about us learning to practice centering prayer, it is about the Holy Spirit praying for us. The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity who indwells those who have been born of God. What is "too deep for our words" is not too deep for the Holy Spirit. We also know that Jesus intercedes for us:

"Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

But when the disciples asked how to pray, they were given an example that was filled with concepts! The disciples were to pray that God would show His name to be holy, that forgiveness of sins would be given and received, that the promised kingdom would come, that basic needs would be met and that we would be delivered from the evil one (see Matthew 6:9-13). This prayer shows faith in the promises of God. God's promises are not confused and contrived like the esoteric ideas of Enneagram.

Christian prayer is accessible and is based on God's promises to all Christians, not about waiting for some mystic to work at it well enough to find the "True Self." For example:

"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

Here God promises "timely help" as the Greek says. We are promised mercy and grace. We know that we can cast our cares on Him because He cares for us (1Peter 5:7). Contrast these promises with the difficulties that attend centering prayer:

It is recommended that you practice Centering Prayer

twice a day for twenty minutes each time. It's also recommended that you practice Centering Prayer for six months before giving up or determining it's not for you—it often can take that long (actually much longer for many of us) for the fruit of this prayer to blossom.²²

Remember that all this time is spent being "nonconceptual." This means that you have to keep ideas out of your mind for twenty minutes, twice a day for six months (or longer) before you find "presence" and "to awaken consciousness to God's ever-present nearness."²³ This involves choosing a "sacred symbol" and a name for God and having a certain posture.

This is a lot of mystical baggage and there is no command from Christ and His apostles to believe these ideas or engage in these practices. In stark contrast, the Bible emphasizes God's love and care for us and that He hears us:

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1John 5:14-15)

Obviously we have to have concepts in our minds to know if what is or is not "according to His will." And because Christians have in mind the holiness of God's name (as in the Lord's prayer), we know he hears us. But what is there to "hear" if one spends twenty minutes twice a day trying to avoid concepts in one's mind? Christian prayer is relational in that God loves His people and tells us to bring our needs to Him. Centering prayer is mechanical in that it involves techniques to remove ideas from our minds so that we end up in an abnormal state of consciousness (awake but with no thoughts).

This reminds me of Elijah and the

prophets of Baal (1Kings 18:17-40). Those prophets took extreme measures in hopes that Baal would take action. They even harmed themselves in the process. Elijah had faith in God and knew He would answer. The passages I have highlighted about Christian prayer are just that, for Christians! Pagans are not going to come to God on His terms and pray according to the teachings of Christ any more than Baal's prophets would or could call on Yahweh in faith. Enneagram is pagan and claims to work for everyone—whatever their religion. Enneagram “prayer” is so difficult that many give up. Christian prayer is accessible and grounded in the promises of God who cannot lie. We know He hears us and we know He bids us bring our needs to him, concepts and all! It is shocking that any Christian church or educational institution would promote pagan Enneagram with its SSS based centering prayer when they could instead simply go to the throne of grace and have our great High Priest hear and answer. Do we want Yahweh or Baal?

True and False Prayer

Pagan prayer techniques are not for Christians. The difference between Elijah as God's prophet and the prophets of Baal is that Yahweh is the true God who created all things, while Baal is not. The issue was ontological! The only true God called Elijah as His prophet, and this was confirmed in many objective ways. There is no evidence that Baal or any of the pantheon of pagan deities have the essential attributes of deity. A key attribute is eternal, non-contingent existence. Only the triune God of the Bible has this. In many key passages, God's prophets assert that He alone is the Creator:

For thus says Yahweh, who created the heavens, he is God, who formed the earth and who made it. He himself established it; he did not create it as emptiness—he formed

it for inhabiting. “I am Yahweh and there is none besides me. I have spoken not in secrecy, in a place, a land, of darkness, I have not said to the descendants of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain!’ I, Yahweh, am speaking righteousness, declaring uprightness. (Isaiah 45:18, 19) [LEB]

Those who have a saving relationship with the Creator through faith do not need pagan practices and know they cannot gain any spiritual benefit from them. Christian prayer is based on a true relationship with God, not esoteric techniques.

When Jesus taught the disciples about prayer, He began by warning them not to pray like the pagans:

“But when you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the pagans, for they think that because of their many words they will be heard. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matthew 6:7, 9 LEB)

When Jesus said “your Father knows,” He highlighted the relational aspect of Christian prayer. We are not trying to get in contact with the world of spirits or manipulate the cosmos for personal benefit. The content of the Lord's prayer makes that clear. We know the Father through Christ and pray in a manner that shows we are aligned with His revealed purposes. The pagans “babble repetitiously.” Yet Heurtz promotes the idea of a “sacred symbol” and a self-chosen name for God as we pointed out before. Spending twenty minutes twice a day with nothing but a symbol and name qualifies as repetitious. Christian prayer is relational while pagan prayer is based on techniques or secret names.

What God has spoken through Christ and His apostles is meaningful, clear, authoritative and always for the good of those who know Christ by faith and believe His Word. There is no obscure, muted, confused or amorphous “voice of God” that we are

expected to find through man-conceived techniques. On the contrary, we have the word spoken so clearly that it binds us to what has been said: “how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,” (Hebrews 2:3). The implication is that we will not escape God's judgment if we do not listen to God's clear word. In contrast, Enneagram offers its obscure version of God speaking:

Silence actually teaches us to listen. It helps us learn how to listen to the voice of God, a voice we maybe have not been able to recognize. . . In silence we hear the truth that God is not a hard on us as we are on ourselves.²⁴

Thus Heurtz assures us that his silent, noncognitive prayer leads to a “voice” that will help us think that we have been too hard on ourselves. Those who do not believe the Bible will likely be attracted to such an approach, especially when compared to the warning that we will not escape judgment if we refuse to listen to God's authoritative prophets and apostles who have spoken. But what if Christ and His apostles told us the truth? Then the warm, fuzzy version found through SSS would be revealed as a grand lie from Satan that keeps us on the road to perdition!

Please keep in mind that the metaphysical impressions gained through centering prayer techniques are meaningless, deceptive or both. These impressions are in fact very cognitive because the whole process is designed to undergird the following deceptions: that there is no sin nature, the “True Self” is good and endowed with “original righteousness” and that this version of self will be found and enjoyed. All of this is doctrine (albeit false doctrine) and therefore teaches concepts to people. The lie of Satan that “you will be like God” is made bold and brazen for those deceived by the prescribed processes of SSS. True

silence says nothing. Heuertz' version conveys "the voice of God," or so he claims. Silence is what happens when a person sleeps so soundly that upon waking, nothing is remembered. Silence is not prayer.

True prayer is simple and is grounded in God's commands and promises. We have real needs and concerns. God has told us to bring them to Him in prayer: "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*" (**Philippians 4:6**). This simple instruction from Paul is in stark contrast to the confusion of Enneagram prayer. Heuertz offers a chart for those who figured out their number and then "harmony triad" plus "dominant affect group" which then yields unique prayer postures and intentions for each number.²⁵ The postures are solitude, silence or stillness and are uniquely wed to rest, consent or engage. This produces, for example, "silence and consent" for number 5. For those who think Christian doctrine and theology are too much to expect modern Christians to learn, they seem to be very willing to sign up for this hopelessly complex process with no promise from God that it is even valid.

Conclusion

When the people of God look elsewhere for their spiritual practices they dishonor God and harm themselves. This was the case when the prophet Jeremiah lamented the situation in his day:

They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, "Peace, peace," But there is no peace. "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the ways and see and

ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' (**Jeremiah 6:14-16**)

Enneagram's SSS is supposed to be ancient, but it is in fact contemporary paganism. Pseudo-science mixed with ancient occultism is being sold to evangelicals as a way to find peace and the road back home to the "True Self." What we really need is the road back to the gospel itself. True peace is a gift from Christ who brings those who trust Him to God and eternal life: "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful*" (**John 14:27**). Turn to Christ and know true salvation from the Prince of Peace.

End Notes

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Vol. 1 – The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984)

² *ibid.* 138.

³ *ibid.* 138-141.

⁴ 141.

⁵ 142.

⁶ Christopher L. Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, (Zondervann, Grand Rapids, 2017) 174, 175.

⁷ Bob DeWaay, *The Emergent Church – Undefined Christianity* (2009, updated and republished 2019)

⁸ Heuertz, 169.

⁹ 166.

¹⁰ 167.

¹¹ 176.

¹² 186.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ 187.

¹⁶ Osborne, G. R. (2010). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, p. 134). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁷ Heuertz op. cit. 187.

¹⁸ 188.

¹⁹ 193.

²⁰ 192.

²¹ 227, 228.

²² 228.

²³ 228, 229.

²⁴ 171.

²⁵ 195.

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