

The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

From the Director's Desk

Christian organizations that were not owned by typical denominational structures played an important role in establishing American life as our country was founded. Such organizations facilitated vibrant Christian thought and played a prominent role in shaping the religious landscape of America. A great example of one such organization was The American Bible Society. Their work helped to effectively place the Bible as the single most significant witness for Christian faith and practice everywhere American people lived.

The culture wars of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries have moved the arena for the battle of the American mind to secular circles. That move has been deadly for the soul of our nation. The existing paradigm for public conversation today is that anything of a theological nature is excluded. The basis for this exclusion is an incorrect interpretation of the rule of separation of Church and State. Paradoxically, while secular government prohibits theological discussion, it demands the power for theological interpretation on such issues as abortion and homosexual marriage. So under the auspices of protected freedom, theological discussion has been supplanted by politi-

cal vogue. The exchange has been subtle, but the consequences have been horrific. I believe that, in many ways, we are back to a nineteenth century situation. Our nation desperately needs groups with a focus on society—trans-denominational—for the sake of public conscience. The message of the Francis Asbury Society is clear: we walk together for the redemption of the world through Christ by being faithful disciples, trusting Him to make us holy people, “wholly devoted to God.” We believe God will not give up on His promises until “the Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ.” As Dr. Kinlaw says, “God is not going out of business, and He is not going to lose.”

Had there not been a Society for the Promotion of the Gospel, the modern missions movement may not have risen. But because it did rise, the world is significantly better. So as you live in the new year, why not think about society? And when you do, make evangelism and holiness—lives wholly devoted to God—your aim. John Wesley, along with Jesus, said that kind of living is summed up in lives of love for God and one another. The redemption of the world takes place through persons who love. Why not make that your personal commitment and support our mission of being a Society?

Don

Be Careful with Your Symbols

By Dennis F. Kinlaw, Ph.D.



One of the surprising things about human life that we often miss is how totally we live by symbols. Few things are handled directly. We let a symbol communicate or settle it all for us. It begins early as the mother watches for the wrinkles on the baby's face that tells her that the baby is happy. Or listens for the cry that means he is hungry. The small turn at

the corners of a wife's lips, up or down, can speak volumes to a concerned husband. All words, of course, are symbols, whether spoken or written.

What appears to us as an illegible scrawl can be the key that makes available a priceless drug for a very sick person. We seldom think of it, but a simple signature at the bottom right-hand corner of a piece of paper we call a check can turn an almost worthless piece of paper into access to someone else's bank account.

Organizations establish their identities by symbols. We call them logos. In most of the world, it is completely unnecessary to explain what two or three letters like GM or IBM can communicate. Or a simple movement may have massive importance. Could one not make a pretty good case out of the fact that what holds the United States Army together is the simple movement of the right hand upward in a salute? Symbols are really what holds the human race together.

Even families have their own symbols. Some years ago, one became crucial in our family. It would occur in those moments of great difficulty when our family felt deeply threatened. The symbol that became so meaningful to us was a simple sentence: “We are in His hands, and they are good hands.” In more recent years, another has become common, and it seems to come as a bit of a surprise to some of our friends. It is just two words, the Latin *pro nobis*. It came when we heard that the Roman Christians who met illegally in the catacombs for worship greeted each other with this phrase. We realized immediately the origin of the greeting. It was taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, from verse 31 of the eighth chapter: “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” In the New Testament, the Latin translation for our English phrase “for us” is the preposition *pro*, which simply means “for,” and the pronoun *nobis*, which

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Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace

A Book Review by Ronald E. Smith, Ph.D.



Perhaps the most pervasive theological question growing out of the American context for religious life is the following: Can a democratic nation established under the rubric of freedom be possible without an adequate theology of freedom? Or, how can a nation be free if a person cannot be free?

Historical theologians may unreservedly say that the religious

currents that most prominently shaped America's first one hundred years subsequent to her Declaration of Independence were significantly influenced by the thought of Jacob Arminius. In fact, prolific religious historians such as Mark Noll and Nathan Hatch identify Francis Asbury, an "Arminian," as one of the most prominent shapers of early American religious life. Recognizing then the need for a vital monograph on the thought of Arminius, Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall have released, through Oxford University Press, their work entitled *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*. I wholeheartedly agree with Richard A. Muller, P. J. Zondervan professor of Historical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, when he asserts that this is "a work to be studied by scholars in the field and valued by all students of the early roots of contemporary Protestant thought." Muller's thought, however, may be expanded. This book is a valuable asset to thoughtful Christians everywhere who take seriously the Scriptural teaching, "If you are free in Christ, you are free indeed." For it is not until one has adequately wrestled with the thoughts of Arminius that one has seriously engaged a theology of freedom.

For this reason, the Francis Asbury Society expresses our debt of gratitude to Stanglin, associate professor of Historical Theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology, and McCall, associate professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

The authors organize their book, designed to be a "one stop source of information for ministers and theologians interested in Arminius and the movement that he inspired," under a three-fold exploration of: 1) God and Creation; 2) Providence and Predestination; and 3) Sin and Salvation. It seemed important to the authors that their public know they wrote in such a way as to make their theological discussion "accessible to the extensive audience of interested laity . . . providing a clear, accessible exposition of Arminius's theology." The book, with notes and helps, is 240 pages in length. Its primary purpose is to discuss Arminius's theological thought, so biographical information is subservient to that end and serves only to provide

some context for the discussion. A succinct chronological table is provided for his years, 1559–1648.

One of the many refreshing aspects concerning Stanglin's and McCall's written work on Arminius is that they avoid the bi-polarity of heretic hunting on the one hand and hagiography on the other in favor of a balanced discussion of Arminius's theology. The subtitle "Theologian of Grace" is where that discussion focuses. For Arminius, salvation is by the sufficiency of God's grace, rooted in His nature, grounded in His being, extended to all, yet resistible. Therefore, sinners are culpable and capable of determining their eternal destiny because of God's offering to all. The authors' treatment of Arminius's view of sin and salvation makes it very clear that grace is the only full and sufficient answer for human finitude and, especially, sin.

Chapter two is a crisp treatment of Arminius's doctrine of God. One is left with the understanding that the authors feel he was both biblical and classical in terms of the context from which he expressed himself. God's essence, attributes, and Trinitarian nature are engaged, with some critique of polemics with the Reformed world growing out of his Christology.

Chapter three treats the subject of controversy that is at the heart of Arminius's story: his rejection of the Reformed understanding of Predestination and Providence. The primary work of Arminius's *Sentiments on Romans 9* is used as the writers' springboard for discussion.

"For Arminius, salvation is by the sufficiency of God's grace, rooted in His nature, grounded in His being, extended to all, yet resistible."

The finality of this work makes Creation, Christology, Medieval theology, Reformed theology, the Bible, and God's triune nature threads that, when woven by Arminius, produce a beautiful tapestry of salvation by grace through faith that is universal, compelling, dynamic, and a vibrant legacy for humans in every age to be taken as the best hope for the world.

Stanglin and McCall have handled a major character often shrouded in controversy in such an artful way that a clarion witness emerges from the mist. It will certainly help Wesleyan adherents the world over understand in new ways why Wesley's publication was called *Arminian Magazine*.

Editor's Note: On April 5, 2013, the authors will present their work in the Dennis F. Kinlaw Symposium for Theological Dialogue in Wilmore, Kentucky. Call our office or visit our website (www.francisasburysociety.com) for details and plan to be with us. Dr. Tom McCall serves on the Board of Directors of the Francis Asbury Society.

Just Ask!

By Stan Key

Visiting a member of our church in the hospital some years ago, I invited the family to form a circle around the bed so I could offer a pastoral prayer. Surgery was scheduled for the next day and the outcome was in doubt. After prayer, a member of the family piously said, “Thanks Pastor Stan. One thing we can be sure of is that whatever happens tomorrow, we know it is the will of God.” We shook hands and said goodbye.

As I walked to the parking lot, the words kept echoing in my mind: “Whatever happens is the will of God. Whatever happens is the will of God. Whatever happens is the will of God.” By the time I reached my car, I was in turmoil. *Whatever happens is God’s will? What kind of theology is that? Is that what Christians believe?* I was tempted to walk back to the hospital room and say, “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize that you folks were Muslims!”

Islam teaches that all that happens is Allah’s decree and, therefore, the essence of piety is to submit to his predetermined plan. But I could have just as easily surmised that my friend in the hospital was a Hindu submitting to the law of karma or a believer in astrology accepting the determinism written in the stars. In fact, most religions of the world teach some form of determinism that calls the devout to passively accept what God sends our way.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, however, introduces a radically new concept. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not Fate. And though God is certainly sovereign over everything that happens and though he knows the end from the beginning, he is not the author of evil. Creating humans with the gift of free will, God has injected into human life a variable that leaves the future, at least to some degree, in our hands. As Pascal stated it so eloquently, God has instituted prayer to give to his creatures the dignity of causality.

The first epistle of John is one of the places where this radical view is most boldly proclaimed:

And this is the confidence that we have toward 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 that we have asked of him. (I John 5:14–15).

John is urging us to ask God to intervene in our lives so that the future has his divine stamp on it. He is not asking us to passively submit to a predetermined fate but rather encouraging us to ask God to make things different. Prayer changes

things! Three times in two short verses John exhorts us to “ask... ask... ask...” Charles Spurgeon hit the nail on the head when he said, “Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom.”

The Greek word *confidence* in I John 5:14 conveys the idea of freedom of speech. To be confident with someone is to have the liberty to say whatever is in your heart. It means that you know them well enough to pour out your heart to them, not worried about the words you use or the emotions that go with them. Conversation between a husband and wife or between good friends has this open and frank quality about it. John is telling us that prayer should be like this. When we talk with our heavenly Father, we need no liturgical formulas or pious vocabulary to make it effective. Prayer is simply letting God know what is on our heart (desires, fears, hopes, hurts, doubts, etc.). It is the freedom to tell God anything.

The book of Psalms is full of examples of this kind of prayer. It is almost shocking to see how David expresses the full range of his emotions to God. He has such an intimate relationship with God that he has full freedom to tell him anything!

Though many in church today might find such outbursts inappropriate for a prayer meeting, God apparently delights when we have such verbal freedom in his presence.

In I John 5:14–15, John is especially encouraging petitionary prayer; asking God to intervene in our lives in some specific manner. Yet many seem to teach that when we come into the presence of God, we shouldn’t ask for anything. Rather we should simply be content to bask in his presence and worship him for who he is, not for what he can do for us. While this sounds spiritual, it is simply not the way the Bible presents prayer. In Scripture, over and over again God *encourages* us to ask, to seek, to knock.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in The Lord’s Prayer. When his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, Jesus did not say they should close their eyes and meditate on God’s goodness and contemplate his holiness. No. He encouraged them to ask! *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses. Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.* Examples could be easily multiplied of places in the Bible where we are encouraged to ask God to move in specific ways in our individual lives (Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 7:7; 18:19; 21:22; John 14:13–14; 15:7; etc.).

But if God is omniscient and knows our needs before we ask, then why do we even need to pray? And if God is indeed sovereign and controls everything, why pray at all? Is this some kind of a game? Is this a waste of time? Why not join the Muslims in believing that submission to fate is what religion is all about?

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By John Oswalt, Ph.D.

One of the dreams of the members of the Francis Asbury Society is being realized these days. That dream was for a place where the varied ministries of the Society—publishing, conferencing, evangelism, discipleship, theological development, and mutual encouragement—could be carried on. With the completion of the Ministry Center, that dream is beginning to come to fruition.

Included are some photographs of recent events. Among these events are the Dennis F. Kinlaw Theological Symposium, the Monday night Bible Study, the Titus Women's prayer group, the local leaders' prayer and fellowship time, the Korean Evangelical Church, and a gathering of local staff and associates. In addition to these events, the Society is also making space available to local scholars for their special projects and on-going work. Two of these latter are Mr. Kris Kappler, missionary to Kazakhstan, finishing a D. Min. dissertation, and Dr. Mark Elliott, working on a project related to recent developments in the church in Russia.

The Kinlaw Symposia meet monthly for a presentation on some timely theological topic followed by a light lunch. These meetings are without charge and open to any interested persons. Recent presenters have been Dr. David Rightmire, Dr. Steve Stratton, and Dr. Ron Smith. Topics

A Busy Ministry





Francis Asbury Society Ministry Center

have ranged from biblical, theological and historical, to psychological.

The Monday Night Bible Study has met weekly during the school year for nearly two years and has covered Genesis and Exodus thus far. The participants are now in a year-long study of the book of Isaiah. The study is led by Dr. John Oswalt, and there have been as many as 100 in attendance.

The Titus Women's prayer group meets weekly both to pray for the Titus ministry and to offer mutual prayer support for the participants.

Wilmore is a center for several varied ministries and the FAS Ministry Center has been a place where representatives of these organizations as well as individuals in evangelistic ministry can meet together from time to time for mutual encouragement, for sharing what is taking place in their ministries, and for discussing possibilities for cooperation.

Recently, Dr. Smith convened the local staff and associates to help everyone get an overall picture of the breadth of ministry in which the Society is engaged. It was both encouraging and exciting to see what is being accomplished in the various areas. The participants came away with a renewed appreciation for the Society's contributions and renewed sense of the importance of the tasks to which God has called us.



Though I have no final answer to such profound questions, I have come to one firm conclusion: God likes to be asked. He encourages us to ask, because, like any good parent, he loves it when his children express trust and confidence in him.

Ask Him Anything?

And yet when we read verses like this (v. 14), we wonder: C'mon John, ask *anything*? You can't be serious. Can I ask God for a 2013 Mustang Shelby GT 500 (bright red with a white racing stripe and spoiler)? Can I pray *that* prayer and expect an answer?

I know of no better way to learn how to pray rightly than to pray wrongly. It takes only a moment to realize that asking God for a Mustang Shelby GT 500 is not the kind of prayer God is going to answer. Simply the act of praying such a prayer helps me realize the carnality and greed in my heart and (hopefully) will lead me to repentance. The only way to learn how to pray rightly is to pray...and then allow the dialogue with the Holy One to do its sanctifying work! P. T. Forsyth said it well: "Petitions that are less than pure can only be purified by petition."

Though the Bible gives some amazing promises concerning prayer, we must be sure to read the "fine print." There are conditions that must be met if prayer is to be answered by God. Below are six questions we need to ask ourselves to help us better ascertain whether our prayers are answerable:



1. Is this request in line with the will of God? Our Scripture is explicit on this matter: *If we ask anything according to his will he hears us* (I John 5:14). True prayer is built on a true relationship with God. Those in a right relationship with God soon discover that the real point of prayer is not forcing God to do my will but rather encouraging me to do his! When we delight ourselves in the Lord, then and only then, is he able to give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4).

2. Is there unconfessed sin in my life? The psalmist said it well: *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me* (Psalm 66:18). If I am in conscious, willful, habitual disobedience to a known command of God, then I am no longer in a right relationship with him. This has consequences for my prayer life. The Bible is not teaching that our good actions earn credit so that God will then answer our prayers. No! Rather it is simply describing how prayer works.

3. Are my motives pure? James tells us precisely why our prayers are not answered: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?* (James 4:3-4). When we love the world and

the things in the world (a Mustang Shelby GT 500) then our desires are focused on the wrong things.

4. Can I make this request in Jesus' name? Jesus told his disciples: *If you ask anything in my name, I will do it* (John 14:13-14). To attach the words "in Jesus' name" to the end of our prayers is not to apply a magic formula. Neither is it a liturgical nicety. Rather, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in the character of Christ. It is to desire what he desires. Few tests will better reveal the true worth of our requests than this: would Jesus pray this way?

5. Can I find other mature believers who will join me in this prayer? Jesus knew well our propensity to pray wrongly when we pray alone. Therefore he urged us to include other mature saints of God in our circle of prayer: *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven* (Matthew 18:19). The word "agree" is the Greek *sumphoneo*, the origin of our term "symphony." When believers pray together in harmony, they make a symphony of praise pleasing to God.

6. Can I make this request in faith without doubting? Jesus said: *Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith* (Matthew 21:21-22). On the one hand, we must not make faith a mind game, the power of positive thinking. On the other hand, we must always be mindful that God may not respond to our request in the way we had hoped. We must always pray, even as Jesus did, "Not my will but yours be done."

Faith avoids both ditches and walks the narrow path of trusting God whatever the outcome.

Trust Is Never a Formula

Though the Bible gives many solid principles to guide our prayers, it certainly offers no guaranteed formulas for getting what we want. Yes, we are encouraged to ask...and to ask boldly. But even when we do our best to read the fine print and meet all the conditions, there remains a mystery to prayer that belongs to its very nature.

When it comes to petitionary prayer, the Bible is emphatic: "No" is just as much of an answer as "Yes." The real point in prayer, it seems, is not to get my way, but to get his. Not to do my will, but his. The greatest miracle in prayer may not be a transformation of my circumstances but rather a transformation inside me.

If there is a bottom line, perhaps it is this: one learns to pray by praying; one learns to ask by asking. Don't let the complexities of the theology nor the profundities of the mystery keep you from doing what the devil so desires you *not* do: ask.

Go ahead. Just do it.

means “us.” It came as a surprise to us as a family to find how many times in our life it was appropriate just to look at each other and remind ourselves that God is for us. That statement not only can quiet fears but also is a wonderful way of expressing the joy we sense in some surprising goodness that God has dropped in our lives.

Slowly, we began to note the context for this verse. It may be that the most surprising insights that have ever come to us about prayer came from an examination of the passage from which the phrase was taken. It came as we noticed what the chapter says about how much God is for us. He is not a passive observer waiting to find how we will turn out. The shock is that we are told that God intercedes, actively prays, for us. The divine love that expresses itself in this matter of *pro nobis* is an aggressive concern that is an expression of the divine love (*agape*), which makes the problem of the one it loves its own problem and is willing to sacrifice itself for the one about whom it is concerned. We had read those verses for years and had a reasonable familiarity with them. In reality, we had never actually understood all that what was being said.

God prays? To whom? He is the one to whom prayers are to be offered. Those prayers arise from our human sense of need. God is the supplier of all needs. He himself has no needs. Why would he ever pray? And, again, to whom would he pray? That was the beginning of a somewhat revolutionary transformation in my thinking about prayer. My tendency had always been to think about prayer largely in terms of asking and receiving. Prayer was our opportunity to let God know what we felt we needed or what we thought someone else for whom we prayed needed. We knew that at times it was right that we praise and that we worship God. We also knew that the idea of God praising himself, worshipping himself or even begging himself just did not fit. So what were we to do with the references in Romans 8 and in Hebrews 7 that speak of both the second and third persons of the Holy Trinity living to intercede for us?

It was then that we began to pay closer attention to the language that the biblical passage used. We noticed that the key word was not “pray” but “intercede.” Now I had always thought that intercession was asking, requesting, begging for someone or some cause other than oneself. And the structure that intercession would inevitably take would be in some form of asking in order to receive. It was clear to me that we needed to take another look at our assumptions about this. It is obvious that we do not have the space or time to tell all of this story here, but let me give you one biblical passage to consider.

Years before, I had been impressed with the passage in Galatians 4, in which Paul expresses his concern about the fact that a group of those whom he had helped turn to Christ were now turning away from Christ. His burden was how to get them to turn back to Christ and look to Christ alone for their salvation. Paul’s cry in verse 19 expressed his deep concern: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” The word “travail” and the metaphor that it brings to mind caught my attention. I realized that the picture is not that of a petitioner making a petition to a grantor for a grant. It is rather of a pregnant woman who is in the agony of

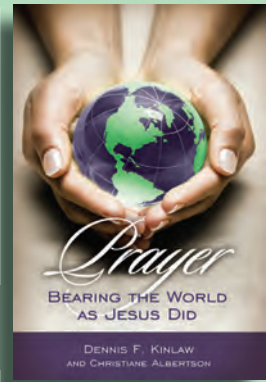
the final hours of delivery. Then I noted that the Greek verb that Paul uses (*odino*), which is translated “travail,” occurs only three times in the New Testament. In each passage, it is speaking of the travail that a woman experiences in childbirth (Gal. 4:19, 27; Rev. 12:2). I noticed further that when Paul speaks of the cry of the creation for redemption that accompanies the intercession of the Holy Spirit, he uses a composite verb developed from this root (*sunodino*—“to suffer in travail with”). I decided I really did need to think a bit more about the idea that God enters so deeply into his concern for us that our burden becomes his burden, and he bears it with us. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he spoke to the Corinthians (II Cor. 5:21) about how the one who knew no sin entered into our situation and bore our burden in order to make it possible by faith in him for us to find deliverance.

When Paul and the writer to the Hebrews speak of the intercession of Christ and the Spirit for us, they are not talking about voicing petitions. The root idea is that of entering into the burden of the one for whom you are interceding until the other person’s burden becomes your burden and you bear it in hopes that your bearing it may improve the chances of deliverance for the person in need. Our thinking on this led to the small book on prayer that FAS is announcing in this issue of the High Calling. You may want to get it. There is plenty of mystery in understanding prayer and God’s willingness to carry our burdens. Yet one thing is sure: when we greet one another with the words *pro nobis*, we know that our Father’s concern for us is far deeper than we had dared to dream. How aggressive is his concern for us? Our answer starts with the manger, the cross, and other symbols!

Prayer
Bearing the World As Jesus Did
by Dennis F. Kinlaw and Cricket Albertson

Christians are troubled by the spiritual indifference and moral degeneracy of our day. **God calls us to respond—by interceding for its deliverance.** In fact, Scripture says that intercession is the life purpose of every servant of God.

Can our prayers help to redeem our world? Dr. Kinlaw says yes.



He affirms that God still hears and answers the prayers of his people. Here he leads us through a careful consideration of the burden-bearing work of God and his people, challenging us to examine the depth of our own relationship with God.

Price: \$12.99

Who Is Your Intercessor?

by Jennie B. Lovell



*“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words”
(Romans 8: 26, RSV).*

During my prayer time, I fight to stay focused on what I want to say. It seems to take longer and longer to filter out all but what is most important: my conversation with God. Yet, God has answered many of my prayers. I believe that is the work of the Holy Spirit, interceding for me in my weakness.

Like most high school seniors, I made a list of colleges to which I would apply. I had only two colleges on my list, but I was allowed to send my ACT scores to three. I didn't want to waste that third opportunity, so I quickly prayed that God would make it count. Then, I literally chose at random. As it turns out, it was a good, Christian college—and it was perfect for me. I am sure the Holy Spirit interceded for me that day.

During my first pregnancy, I had to have an emergency C-section five weeks early, and I was terrified that I would lose my baby. I pleaded with God for her life. My church,

my family, and I prayed that the baby would be born healthy and well-developed in spite of her premature birth. Everything was happening so fast, and I was so sick and scared, my prayers weren't eloquent or long. Yet, God granted my desperate plea. My baby's lungs, brain, and all other organs were well-developed and functioning perfectly. I didn't know how to pray as I ought, and I credit my daughter's life to the Holy Spirit's intercession for me.

I won't stop fighting to stay focused on what I want to say in my prayers. I won't stop trying to filter out all but what is most important, no matter how long it takes. I will rely on the Holy Spirit, because, in my weakness, I don't know how to pray as I ought, and He is my Intercessor.

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