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THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE ANTICHRIST

HERMAN A. HOYT
President, Grace Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

Just as the seed of the woman culminated in the great masterpiece of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, so also the seed of the serpent will ultimately culminate in the great masterpiece of Satan, the great Antichrist of the endtime. This person will surpass all his forebears in power, prominence, pride, blasphemy, ruthlessness and lawlessness. This adversary of God, Christ, the saints, and even humanity itself will sound the death knell of civilization. At last his destruction will mark the close of this present evil age.

Two extreme attitudes have been expressed toward the doctrine of this person set forth in the Scriptures. There are some who do not care for any discussion of this evil genius. This is tragic, for the Bible not only gives an amazing amount of information, but Christian people, and others as well, are hungry for that information. Failure to provide information from the proper source exposes people to information from the wrong source. There are others who want to major on this area of prophetic truth to the exclusion of other precious truth, and thus become lopsided. The proper attitude is to give this doctrine the same measure and place in teaching as do the Scriptures. It will thus take on proper perspective in the thinking of God's people.

For two very good reasons, there ought to be an adequate discussion on this subject. On the one hand, the Scriptures have a great deal to say on this doctrine for the protection and edification of believers. On the other hand there are certain tendencies in operation in the world today that make it clear that such a person will appear on the scene. Believers should be informed so that they will be enabled to discern the signs of the times.

There is a wealth of material in the Old Testament on this subject, but the vast amount of information is to be found in the New Testament. While the picture will not be entirely complete to confine the investigation solely to the New Testament, it is amazing how nearly complete it is. Though isolated details can be found in many books of the New Testament, for the most part the doctrine is confined to Matthew, John, II Thess., I John, II John, and Revelation.

1. THE GREEK TERM "ANTICHRIST" USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The meaning of this compound Greek word is threefold in its significance. The preposition anti means to stand over against and thus in opposition to. So that in combination with Christos the ultimate sense is that this one is opposed to Christ.¹ This is not difficult to believe inasmuch as the Scriptures clearly declare that this evil genius shall "make war against him that sat on the white horse" (Rev. 17:14; 19:19), and "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

The method of accomplishing this end is suggested by another meaning of the preposition, namely, that it means "in the stead of," hence usurpation or substitution. If the compound word will not bear this meaning, the idea does appear in the Scriptures. Of the Antichrist it is declared that "he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). In this sense he is "a pseudo-Christ who will present himself to humanity as 'the man of the hour'"² (Matt. 24:5,24). The manifestation of this great adversary of Christ, at least at the outset, is that of a counterpart of an imitation of Christ. This is Satan's method. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:13-15). When this one appears on the scene his "coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness...and...strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:9-11). Thus he comes on "a white horse" (Rev. 6:2).

2. The usage of the term "Antichrist" is confined to the New Testament, though the idea certainly appears in the Old Testament. The apostle John employs the expression five times in his epistles. The first use of the term is to designate this eschatological personage in his qualities as an opposer of Christ. Therefore the definite article is not used: "little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come" (1 John 2:18). The second usage points to the "many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). The third use points out one of the essential qualities of this adversary, namely, that he is a liar, for he denies that Jesus is the Christ, and thus denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22). The fourth use has to do with the message in relation to the first coming of Christ. The spirit of antichrist will not confess "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1 John 1:3). And most amazingly, the fifth appearance of the word is in relation to the second coming of Christ. His spirit will not confess that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1 John 7). "Is come" in 1 John 4:2 is a perfect tense and is rendered more accurately into English by the expression "has come," whereas the verb in 1 John 7 is present tense and is best translated into English by the expression, "is coming."

3. The confirmation of the meaning and usage of this term comes in the larger content of teaching in the New Testament bearing on this personage. The warnings of Christ cannot be set aside. "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). "For there shall arise false Christs...and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). The apostle Paul enlarges on the various details that will characterize the appearance of the Antichrist, such as lawlessness, the working of Satan, and strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:3-12). The apostle John emphasizes the inner meaning or quality of this man in his epistles (1 John; 11 John), leaving the particular identity of this one for rather full presentation in the Book of the Revelation (Rev. 6, 11, 13, 17, 19).

II. THE NAMES OF ANTICHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As far as it is possible to determine, eight designations are given to this adversary of the end time. In Matthew he is referred to as "the abomination of desolation" (24:15), though more specifically this probably denotes his image, and as a "false Christ" (24:24). In John's gospel he is probably referred to as "the one coming in his own name" (John 5:43). Paul refers to him as "that man of sin," or perhaps better as "the lawless one" (2 Thess. 2:3), and as "the son of perdition"

(2 Thess. 2:3). The name "Antichrist" appears in the epistles of John (I John 2:18; II John 7), and the name "beast" in the Revelation (11:7; 13:2). According to Pink at least 22 names appear in the Old Testament.³ Others still supply additional names from the Scripture.⁴

III. THE PERSONALITY AND GENIUS OF THIS MAN

The greatest person ever to appear in the earth, save one, the Lord Jesus Christ, is yet to come. The great saints of the world such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and Paul fall in the class of holy men, and their greatness belongs to an entirely different sphere. This man will rise head and shoulders above men in general, calculated to earn him the designation of superman, in fact the worship that belongs to deity. His appearance on the scene, his rise to power, his genius as a military leader, and his exploits will be nothing short of spectacular, colossal, supernatural.

1. He will be different from all other men, so different that the peoples will be saying, "Who is like unto the beast" (Rev. 13:4). In his qualities for kingship he exhibits ability to suffer a death stroke and experience some sort of miraculous healing, producing wonder in the multitudes of earth and eliciting their worship (Rev. 13:3-4). With this sort of leader at the head, his kingdom differs from all other kingdoms.

2. This man will possess an amazingly high degree of intelligence. His number is the nearest approach to perfection that man can reach, which is 666 (Rev. 13:18). For the trinity of holiness the number is 777. For the trinity of evil it is 666. He rises up out of the sea of nations (Rev. 13:1). He demonstrates his ability among ten kings, so that they decide to give their power into his hands (Rev. 17:13). Satan recognizes his qualifications for leadership and gives to him "his power and his seat, and his authority" (Rev. 13:2). He is able to attract the services of an able man to serve as his premier and publicity agent, the false prophet (Rev. 13:11-17).

3. Antichrist turns out to be a great orator and demagogue. He is described as having a "mouth as the mouth of a lion" (Rev. 13:2), suggesting the regal authority with which he speaks. The content of his speaking is "great things" (Rev. 13:5), which may describe the amazing ability he has to handle a wide range of subjects with facility. It seems evident that blasphemy against God, Christ, the saints, and the church will characterize most of his speech. "Upon his heads the name of blasphemy" appear (Rev. 13:1). "There was given unto him a mouth speaking...blasphemies" (Rev. 13:5). "And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven" (Rev. 13:6). Inasmuch as he comes in his own name (John 5:43), the claims for himself will constitute a large part of his public utterance.

4. It seems to be a valid conclusion that this man is a philosopher of some distinction. The "great things" uttered by his mouth surely point in this direction (Rev. 13:5). He appears on the scene in the wake of a great religious rebellion (2 Thess. 2:3). The motivating force of this rebellion is the philosophy of pantheism which prepares the way for the rejection of all thought of the supernatural as in any way transcendent to this world and inculcates the doctrine of the unity of human and divine.⁵ Upon this background he is able to promote his own prominence and make his claims to being divine (2 Thess. 2:4). He traffics with the demonic world (Rev. 16:12), who promulgate doctrines contrary to the sound and wholesome words of Scripture (I Tim. 4:1). Vast throngs of humanity are thus led astray with his clever rationalizing away of the truth (I John 4:1-6).

5. This man is also a clever and persistent politician. He recognizes the value and force of religion. So he does not hesitate to submit outwardly to the domination of the false religious system of the endtime (Rev. 17:3,7). Once he has gained his end, he will turn and destroy the whore who is sitting upon him (Rev. 17:16-17). With craftiness, he gradually rises to power among the ten kings in whose midst he first appears. At last he convinces them that they should form a confederation of which he becomes the head (Rev. 17:12-13). They place their countries and resources at his disposal, hoping for protection and prolongation of power, little realizing that it will last only for "one hour" (Rev. 17:12). They carry out his will in destroying the whore (Rev. 17:16-17), and march at last with the Beast to the battle of Armageddon and their own destruction (Rev. 19:19-21). With ruthless intent Antichrist climbs to one height after another on the fallen forms of his accomplices until at last he reaches his goal, sovereign rulership of the entire world (Rev. 13:3,7).

6. The Scriptures suggest that he will present a strong, attractive, physical appearance. The words "shewing himself" of 2 Thess. 2:4 mean quite literally to show off or to make a public exhibition or display. The people shall see something in him, and it is what they see that impresses them. As a result the whole world of unregenerate men shall marvel at him, shall follow him, and shall worship him (Rev. 13:3,4; 17:8). These facts lead the Bible student to conclude that he will be an exceptional physical specimen, possessing not only a large, well-proportioned body, but also an attractive countenance, and an impressive appearance.

7. The foregoing qualities combine to make him the world's great military genius. He will demonstrate this in his rising military career. Astride a white charger, he goes forth conquering and to conquer, and equipped with a bow, he rides into one victory after another to capture and hold the crown he wears (Rev. 6:1-2). Red war, black famine, pale death, and religious persecution follow him, but his career is ever one of ascension. Even the wound unto death does not hinder his progress upward. For at last it is healed in such an amazing way that the peoples of earth cry out "Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:4).

8. This man then becomes the astonishment and wonder of the world. Differing from all others who have preceded him, possessing an amazing degree of high intelligence, demonstrating himself among men as no other demagogue before him, displaying an insight into the abstruse areas of human thought, cleverly manipulating the political strings of society, winning a following by his massive frame and attractive face, and in his military campaigns across the world, even defying death, he becomes the latest wonder of the world (Rev. 13:3-4). Yet beneath this glittering exterior is the nature of a beast, a wild beast who knows no law but the law of his own desire (Rev. 13:1; 2 Thess. 2:3-4).

IV. THE RELIGION AND MORAL CHARACTER OF ANTICHRIST

All that is good in mankind will come to its fruition in this man. Yet all of this will be turned to carry out the purposes of Hell because this man will be the very incarnation of human sin, pride, orrorgance, rebellion, and unholy ambition.

1. In religion, this man will be a materialistic pantheist (2 Thess. 2:3-4). A religious rebellion prepares the way for his appearance in society. Basically this philosophy is pantheistic, denying the transcendence of God and asserting that creation is the total of reality. Once this

philosophy permeates society, this great man appears on the scene and demands the worship belonging to deity.⁶ This consists in the deification of the natural level, the enthronement of physical forces, the obliteration of moral and spiritual distinctions, and the inauguration of the wildest outbreak of physical violence, moral corruption, and spiritual degeneracy the world has ever seen. Opposition to God and the exaltation of self above all that is called God or that is worshipped can lead in no other direction.

2. In expression, this man will be a blasphemer on an extraordinary scale. He wears the name of blasphemy (Rev. 13:1), is given a mouth to speak blasphemy (Rev. 13:5), gives expression to blasphemy (Rev. 13:6), and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped (2 Thess. 2:4). Blasphemy originates from two sources: one is intellectual and the other is moral. It consists in the affirmation of untruth about God or the things of God for the purpose of injuring. In the case of this man, it would appear that the source is wholly moral, namely, hatred for God and the desire to injure Him and all who are associated with Him. Dispassionately, deliberately he denies the truth about God (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 11 John 7).

3. In character, this man is the greatest antinomian of all humanity. He is described by Paul as "that man of sin" or "that Wicked" (2 Thess. 2:3, 8). Both of these expressions represent the Greek words which means "the lawless one." At last, the mystery of lawlessness produces its fruit in this man (2 Thess. 2:7). Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4 ASV). But through the centuries there has been a certain restraint placed upon it, in that the Holy Spirit of God has exercised through God's people a hindrance to its full expression. But at last this restrainer, the Holy Spirit, will cease to operate since the Church in whom He dwells will have been translated (2 Thess. 2:6-7). Immediately this Lawless One will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:8). Being intolerant of all restraint, except the law of his own sinful desire, there will then begin the course and career of the most high-handed tyranny the world has ever seen.

4. In conduct, there will follow an almost unbelievable exhibition of selfish ambition. In the ultimate sense this will consist of at least four things. There will be a calculated and persistent course of opposition to God and all things associated with Him. Running parallel with this will be the claims to deity in his effort to exalt himself above God. To buttress his claims and achieve his end, there will be a carefully developed and executed system of demonstration to prove his claims. Finally, there will be the demands for worship and the compelling measures to bring this about. Opposition to God, exaltation above God, and demonstration of deity (2 Thess. 2:4, 9-11), can well be expected to culminate in the image to whom divine adoration must be paid, or suffer the penalty of death (Matt. 24:15; Rev. 13:14-17).

V. THE ORIGIN OF THE ANTICHRIST

A sevenfold origin of the Antichrist provides food for thought, though perhaps not all details can be insisted upon.

1. Out of the social chaos of the times, which provides an excellent opportunity for the strong man and savior of society, this man appears. He is described by John as rising up out of the sea (Rev. 13:1). If the waters are in any sense a picture of the troubled conditions of society (Rev. 17:15; Luke 21:25-26), then this is the opportunity for such a man to offer himself to the world.

When such men as Arnold Toynbee, noted British historian, are calling for the strong man, it would appear that the very conditions of the world are maneuvering to that end.

2. Out of a geographical division of the world represented by ten horns (Rev. 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16) comes the beast. Equating this with Daniel 2, 7, and 8, it must be concluded that this man arises out of one of the divisions of Alexander's Empire, and this division must be that portion lying to the West on the continent of Europe.

3. In the political sense, this man is a citizen of that area which will eventually become the revived Roman Empire. This is the final Empire of Gentile civilization, that eventually swallows up all other great powers (Rev. 13:7). In the final period there will be given to the leader of this ten-horned Roman confederacy "power...over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

4. This raises the question concerning the national origin of Antichrist. Though there is by no means any decisive answer, there are suggestions that he must be a Jew. The absence of the tribe of Dan from the listing in Rev. 7:4-8 has been cited as proof, but it is doubtful whether this reasoning can be trusted. Speaking to His own people Jesus said, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). Implicit in this is the appearance of one from their own nationality. Inasmuch as this one will enter into negotiations with Israel, suggesting confidence on their part, it is doubtful if any other than a Jew could so completely deceive them.

5. But there is a personal element in the origin of the Antichrist. This man is a member of the Satanic trinity (Rev. 16:13). He is commissioned of the Devil (Rev. 13:2), and energized and equipped by him (2 Thess. 2:9). But he is in every sense a man, that man whose greatness and moral disposition lends himself to a covenant with the Devil (Rev. 13:18). In Christ, the Devil found no answering response. But in this man he finds one who is ready to sell his soul and freedom for sovereignty over the world (Matt. 4:8-9; Luke 4:6-8).

6. The spiritual origin of this man must not be overlooked. He is the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), but in that sense he is the product of the mystery of iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7 cf. 3, 8). Lawlessness having been initiated by Adam at the suggestion of Satan has been operating through the centuries. At last it reaches its fulness in this man. The pervading influence and power of sin not only provides the atmosphere and environment in which lawlessness can survive, but it actually molds and shapes a human personality into the measure and stature of itself.

7. There is finally the providential origin of the Man of Sin. To the countless millions of earth who have maneuvered themselves into the position of accepting a false Messiah by rejecting the true Christ, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). The definite article appears before the word "lie" in the original Greek. Antichrist is the lie, the masterpiece of Satan. Yet even this does not happen outside the providential movements of God in the unfolding of His plan. Christ works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Therefore it is reassuring to know that it is Christ who tears away the first seal that sends the Antichrist forth upon his mission of deception, persecution, and devastation (Rev. 6:1-2). This means that God is ultimately in control, even during that time of trouble such as the world has never seen.

VI. THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST TO WORLD POWER

1. The steps in the rise of the Antichrist to power can be summarized as follows. In general this order is correct, though there could be features that are out of place, and will be discovered only as prophecy unfolds in history.

(1) Immediately following the rapture of the Church, Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-8 ASV). It is then that the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit as wrought through the Church will cease to operate. The first move on the part of Christ to take possession of earth is the release of Antichrist by the tearing away of the first seal (Rev. 6:1-2).

(2) Antichrist appears on the scene as an inconspicuous figure, but nevertheless, starting out upon a career "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:1-2).

(3) He makes a treaty with the Jews in his own name (John 5:43), which brings them into possession of the temple area where they can renew their long discontinued worship (Rev. 11:1-3). What he gets in return from the Jews no one knows, though it is fairly certain that money figures in this move somewhere.

(4) Running parallel with negotiations with the Jews is the development of a ten-power confederacy that at last brings him into complete power (Rev. 13:1; 17:12-13).

(5) This ten-power confederacy results in world power by the middle of the seven-year tribulation period (Rev. 13:7). All other great powers fall before his march to world power. This includes the powers in the East and South, though perhaps the Northern power is removed from before him by the immediate judgment of God.

(6) Two mass movements to which he has submitted for three and one-half years finally result in a break and a change of plans. First, the false religious system of this time is no longer needed for he has reached supreme power throughout the world. So he destroys this system (Rev. 17:3, 16-17). Second, a movement of opposition among the Jews spearheaded by two witnesses is broken. With beast-like ferocity he slays the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-13), and inaugurates the great tribulation against the Jews for the last three and one half years of this period (Rev. 11:2, 7), and extends it beyond to include millions of Gentiles who have believed on Christ (Rev. 7:9, 14). He now appears to be in undisputed control of the whole earth.

2. The means by which he has risen to world power are many.

(1) Chaotic world conditions, consisting of universal war, famine, pestilence, dislocation, and distress with no way out have provided an occasion (Matt. 24:6-7; Luke 21:25-26; Rev. 6:3-8).

(2) Great personal ability energized by Satan enabled him to gain recognition (Rev. 13:2-4; 2 Thess. 2:9).

(3) The material support from Jewish people, in return for religious privilege provides the material help (Rev. 11:1-3).

(4) In addition there is the influence and aid of apostate religion.

(5) Superhuman power communicated by Satan is especially important (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:2).

(6) Last but not least, is the divine permission and providential control from heaven. God sends the strong delusion in the person of Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:11), and it is Christ who holds the seven-sealed book in His hands and under His control and direction tears away the seal that sends Antichrist forth (Rev. 6:1-2).

3. The chronology of Antichrist's rise to power is clear as to order though not as to exact dates.

(1) The revelation of the Antichrist to the world comes immediately following the rapture of the Church (2 Thess. 2:7).

(2) The negotiations with Israel constitute the next major event (John 5:43), though perhaps this may not be the next event in time. But these negotiations mark the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week.

(3) Coronation as the supreme monarch of the world comes at the middle of this seventieth week of years (Rev. 13:7).

VII. THE PERIOD OF SUPREME WORLD POWER

1. The death of the two witnesses marks the breaking of the covenant with the Jewish nation and the beginning of world-wide persecution against the nation of Israel (Rev. 11:1-7; 12:6, 14; 13:7).

2. The temple worship now stopped, he deifies himself and demands that divine honors and worship be paid to him (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15). He orders a huge image of himself made and moved into the temple area and divine honors paid to it (Rev. 13:14-15; Matt. 24:15). In the eyes of the godly Jew this constitutes the abomination of desolation.

3. By three different means he is able to secure universal worship for himself. By means of his great personal ability and attraction he arouses the hero-worship instinct of men (Rev. 13:3-4). He makes a personal display of superhuman powers such as causing fire to come down from heaven and making the image speak (Rev. 13:12-14). By means of economic and military sanctions he compels men under penalty of death to do him homage (Rev. 13:15-17). He is so successful that "all that dwell in the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 13:8).

4. Since many of the Jews will resist him, he becomes the persecutor and prevails over them for three and one-half years (Rev. 11:2-3, 7; 12:6, 16; 13:5-7; Matt. 24:15, 21). So intense and

severe becomes this persecution, that if it were not for the immediate interference of the Lord in behalf of His people, they would be annihilated (Matt. 24:22).

5. At the very outset of this last three and one-half years, Antichrist destroys the apostate Church. Now that he has attained his goal, he no longer needs this false religious system. Under the direction of the ten confederated kings, her wealth is confiscated, her system is destroyed, her support is withdrawn (Rev. 17:16-17).

6. At last, this superman has reached the pinnacle of all earthly power, religious, economic, and military. All shall worship him (Rev. 13:8), none can buy or sell without his sanction (Rev. 13:17), and there is no one who is able to make war with him (Rev. 13:4).

7. At last, the ambition of Satan has been achieved in that creatures turn their worship toward him, and the proposal of Satan to Eve in the garden of Eden has been achieved, namely, "Ye shall be as gods" (Rev. 13:4), for men are now giving reverence to Antichrist as though he were God.

VIII. THE DOOM OF THE ANTICHRIST

1. The judgment of God upon the kingdom of Antichrist comes in two phases. The fifth angel poured out his bowl of wrath upon the throne of the Beast and his kingdom was full of darkness physically, morally and spiritually (Rev. 16:10-11). Though plagued with pain, the followers of the Beast gave evidence that they were confirmed in their sin and apostasy and therefore the fit subjects for final destruction. For they blasphemed the God of heaven. The great city Babylon, the center of the political and commercial interests of the world was destroyed (Rev. 18:1-24). In one hour this vengeance falls upon this city and is left an utter desolation. While this happens some time near the end of the seven years of tribulation, it is not the absolute end, for Antichrist yet organizes a campaign against Jerusalem, known as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16) at which time he is personally destroyed at the coming of Christ.

2. The rising pride and arrogance of this monarch leads him to plan a campaign against the Lamb of God himself (Rev. 17:14a; 19:19). It is possible that his return from death, or the healing of the death wound (Rev. 13:3), together with other exploits has given such overweening pride that he imagines now that he can ascend the heavens and defeat Christ. The remnant of Jews finding refuge in Jerusalem seems to him to be the first object of his hatred. So while in conflict with them, Christ breaks through the clouds of heaven on His white charger and streams toward the center of conflict. With the sword of his mouth (Rev. 19:15), His almighty word, he breaks the power of Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:8). With the brightness of His coming, he demonstrates that Antichrist has deceived his followers, and he is deserted on the field of battle (2 Thess. 2:8), and all his armies are smitten into the dust (Rev. 19:21). Both the Beast and the False Prophet are taken alive and cast into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). This brings his meteoric career to its end.

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