

# Issues, Etc.

## JOURNAL



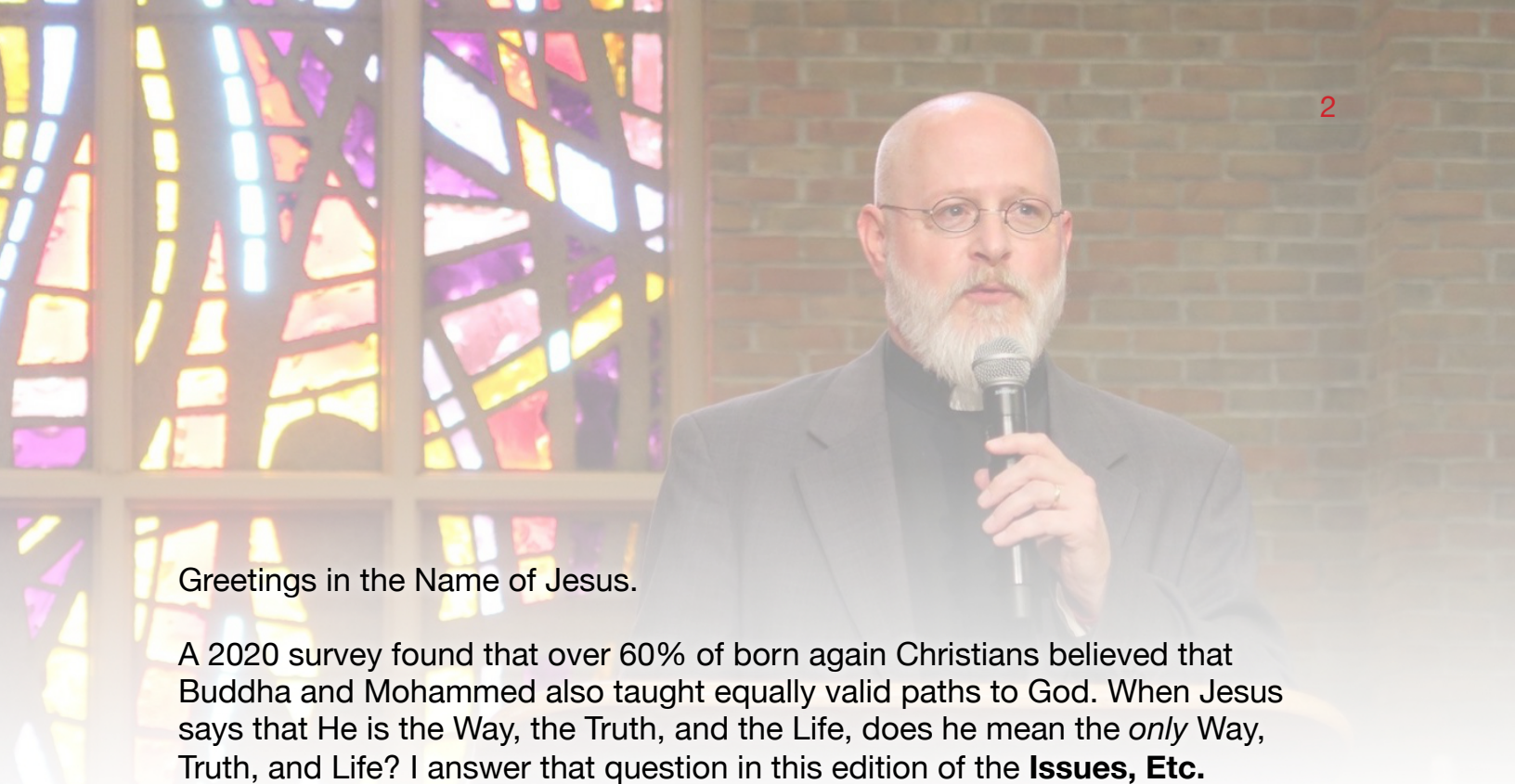
Christ Alone, and No Other

by Todd Wilken

Wittenberg Trail:  
Rejoicing in the Lutheran Confession

by Christopher Neuendorf

Spring—2022



Greetings in the Name of Jesus.

A 2020 survey found that over 60% of born again Christians believed that Buddha and Mohammed also taught equally valid paths to God. When Jesus says that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, does he mean the *only* Way, Truth, and Life? I answer that question in this edition of the **Issues, Etc. Journal**.

In our Wittenberg Trail feature, Christopher Neuendorf writes about his journey into Lutheranism from Greek Orthodoxy. How did he leave what he had believed to be the “one, true Church” for the Lutheran Confession? Read about it below.

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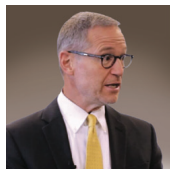
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## *Christ Alone, and No Other*

by Todd Wilken

*Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me.'* (John 14:6)

Is there salvation in anyone or anything other than Jesus? Jesus' words here should settle the question.

*Solus Christus*, Christ Alone is the often-forgotten Reformation sola. We know Grace alone, Faith Alone and Scripture Alone. But without the teaching of Christ Alone, the teachings of Grace Alone, Faith Alone and Scripture Alone are thrown into confusion. In other words, if salvation is possible apart from Jesus alone, then grace no longer means grace, faith is a meaningless word, and scripture cannot be trusted.

But sadly, fewer and fewer Christians understand this. A widely distributed 2020 survey found that over 60% of born again Christians believed that Buddha and Mohammed also taught equally valid paths to God.

By Jesus' own claim, he cannot be simply one among several ways of salvation. Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Either Jesus is telling the truth or he is lying. If there are other ways to be saved, then Jesus is a liar, and cannot and should not be trusted. If Jesus is telling the truth, then there is no other way of salvation, and no other claim of salvation can or should be trusted.

So, where else in the Bible do we find the teaching that Jesus is the only way of salvation?

### **Acts 4:12**

*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

The Apostles Peter and John had been called to testify before the rulers, elders, scribes, and high priests after they had healed a lame man. The Jewish leaders asked them a specific question, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

It was clear to the Jewish leaders that Peter and John themselves had no power or authority to perform miracles, and yet they had healed a lame man. Peter’s answer to their question not only credited Jesus with the power to heal a lame man, but credited Jesus with the power to save all men. And, twice Peter emphasized the exclusive nature of salvation in Jesus’ name: “Nor is there salvation in any other” and “there is no other name.” Jesus, and Jesus alone saves.

### **Acts 17:29-31**

*[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.*

Here we find the Apostle Paul in Athens, at the Areopagus, addressing the city’s philosophers. The Athenians were curious to hear Paul’s teaching about what they regarded as “foreign gods.” Paul began by saying,

*Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.*

Now, Paul was not saying that the Athenians were worshipping the true God without knowing it. It was the *idolatry* and false worship of the Athenians

that provoked Paul's earnest preaching of Christ and his resurrection in the synagogues and marketplaces of Athens. Rather, Paul was affirming what they themselves unwittingly admitted, namely, they did not know the true God.

The true God, Paul informed them, has revealed Himself in "the man whom He has ordained," Jesus Christ alone. In other words, despite being "very religious," and despite allowing for a god that they did not know, the Athenian philosophers did not know or worship the true God because they did not know Jesus Christ. The only way for them to know and worship the true God was to know and worship Jesus.

Only Jesus has been raised from the dead. Only Jesus will judge all mankind. Therefore, only Jesus can give salvation.

### **Romans 5:15**

*For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.*

In this section of Romans, Paul draws a parallel between the "one man" Adam (v. 12), and the "one man" Jesus. Here in this verse he tells us how just as one man's offense brought death, so one man's obedience brought God's grace.

Paul places Adam and Jesus as bookends to all of human history and of God's work of Creation and recreation. God begins with one man and ends with one man. A single man brought sin, a single man brings salvation. We could say that when it comes to the entrance of sin and death, the Bible teaches "Adam Alone," and when it comes to salvation from sin and death, the Bible teaches Christ Alone.

### **Ephesians 4:4-6**

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*



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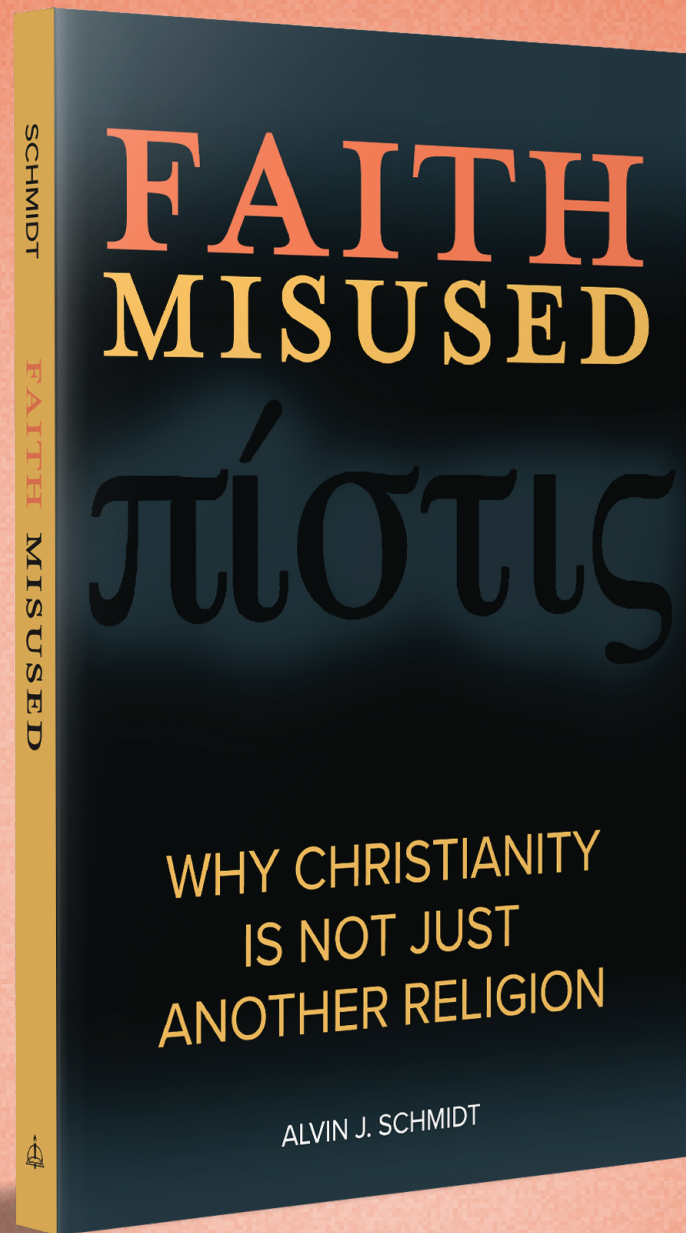
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Paul here emphasizes unity of both the Triune God, and of the Trinity's work to save man. The "one hope" (that is, the only hope) is found in "one Lord," namely, Jesus. Just as there is only one God, there is only one faith. And that one faith confesses only one Savior, Jesus. Just as there is perfect harmony within the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so there is perfect harmony in all the teachings of the one true faith.

Paul understood salvation in Jesus alone as a teaching that is not only in perfect harmony with his teaching on the Trinity, the Church and Baptism, but as the teaching that unites all Christian doctrine. Above I noted that Christ Alone is the key to all the *solas* of the Reformation. In the same way Christ Alone is the key to understanding everything the Bible teaches.

### **1 Timothy 2:5-6**

*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

Apart from Jesus' own statement, "No one comes to the Father except through me," there is no clearer expression of Christ Alone than in Paul's words to Timothy.

Immediately before these verses Paul wrote that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The emphasis is on the contrast between a universal salvation and salvation through a single man. All man are saved through one man.

The Greek of this verse is interesting for several reasons:

Εἰς γὰρ θεός, εἰς καὶ μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς...

First, Paul wants to emphasize the oneness of God. Greek often uses word order to show emphasis. Paul begins this sentence with the word Εἰς or "one." In addition, words that the particle γὰρ of "for" follows are often emphasized.

Second, Paul emphasizes the oneness of the mediator. He does so by again beginning the next phrase with “one.”

Finally, Paul puts the plural and singular forms of the word “man” literally side-by-side: ἀνθρώπων ἄνθρωπος, “men man.” This has the effect of highlighting the singularity of the “man” Jesus Christ.

In these three ways Paul drives home his point: One God gives salvation to all men through a single man. All men are saved through one man. Christ Alone.

## **2 John 1:9**

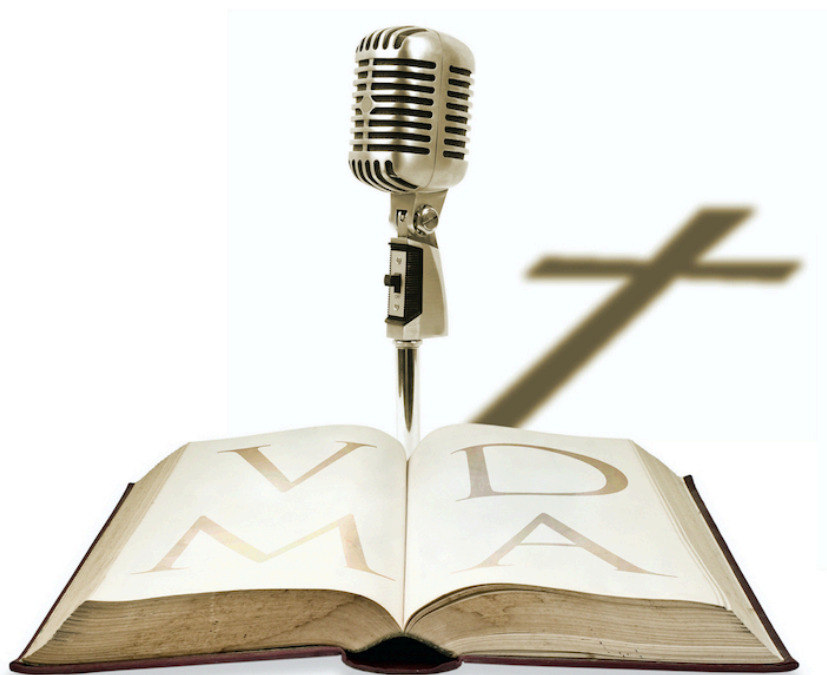
*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*

The Apostle John makes it clear that Jesus is the *sine qua non* for knowledge of God. He uses the phrase “the doctrine of Christ.” This can mean either Christ’s own teaching, or the teaching about Christ, likely the latter. In either case, this doctrine is so important that God cannot be known without it. In the knowledge of God Jesus is singularly indispensable. There are many doctrines in the Christian faith, many of which a Christian may be ignorant and remain a Christian, but not the doctrine of Christ.

These are but a few sections of Scripture that clearly teach Christ Alone. But the truth is, this teaching is the golden thread that runs through all Scripture. Remove it, and the tapestry unravels.

Scripture presents no alternative to Jesus, no other way of salvation, no other Savior. Those who seek salvation apart from Jesus alone will not find it. It is true that there are many paths. All but one lead away from God. Only Jesus saves.

Jesus is the only name by which we are saved, the only one who has conquered death, the one man who brings God's grace, the one mediator between God and man, the only one who gives knowledge of God. Jesus alone is the way, the truth and the life.



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## Wittenberg Trail: Rejoicing in the Lutheran Confession

by Christopher Neuendorf

It has become almost routine to hear about Missouri Synod Lutherans, often pastors, forsaking the Lutheran confession to be received into the Eastern Orthodox Church. The reasons given typically follow a similar pattern. I will not attempt to engage those reasons here, other than to state my strong disagreement with those who cite them. Overall, what I sense in these rationales and the resultant defections to the Orthodox Church is a loss of love for and confidence in the Lutheran confession.

It seems worthwhile, therefore, to provide a counternarrative—to explore how, in one case at least, it was the beauty and reliability of the Lutheran confession that led one Christian from Eastern Orthodoxy to Lutheranism. Mine was not a deliberate, rational process of evaluating all available options in Christendom and choosing that which made the most sense to me. I was acquainted with the Lutheran church from my youth up, and I experienced the inexorable draw of its confession until I publicly embraced that confession as my own. What follows is a brief account of my experience, offered in the hope that it may help others to see the same beauty and assurance that drew me into the Lutheran church, where I will remain by the grace of God until I stand before the dread judgment seat of Christ.

My mother is Greek Orthodox, descended from grandparents who emigrated from Greece. My father is Missouri Synod Lutheran going back four generations. When my parents decided to marry, my mother secured from my father the agreement that any children with which they might be blessed would

be raised in the Orthodox Church. In keeping with this agreement, my younger brothers and I were baptized, chrismated, and communed in the Orthodox Church, and attended the Divine Liturgy faithfully. Each of my parents modeled respect for the other's church, while maintaining steadfast commitment to their own. They learned about each other's churches through adult instruction classes and their own readings, and the more they learned, the more convinced they became of the truth of their own church's teachings. My father never sought to commune in my mother's church, and my mother never sought to commune in my father's—such a thing would have been unthinkable for both. I grew up knowing that my father was a committed Lutheran, but he never spoke ill of my mother's church, nor did he ever try to convince me to become a Lutheran myself.

Though I was raised as an Orthodox Christian, I was educated in the Lutheran day school associated with my father's congregation. I was not impressed with the childish religious songs we had to learn or the puppet shows we had to view in chapel. But I did learn the Scriptures, and in seventh and eighth grade I learned, and was deeply impressed by, *Luther's Small Catechism* in the dignified 1943 revision. It remains my preference for devotion and instruction. As of my graduation from eighth grade, I saw no conflict between the Orthodoxy of my church and the Lutheranism of my school. I fully believed and found comfort in the teachings of *Luther's Small Catechism*.

I also had some exposure to my father's church life. The majestic language of *The Lutheran Hymnal* captured my young imagination and has ever since impressed me as how church *should* sound in English. I found the hymns of my father's church deeply stirring. I learned early on that if the date given for the text and tune was from the sixteenth or seventeenth century, that hymn was bound to be particularly serious, beautiful, and comforting—the sort of hymn one might confidently sing while storming the gates of hell or struggling against

the temptations of the evil one. Even the architecture of my father's church seemed to me to create a fitting environment for heaven to come down to earth.

This is not to say that I never experienced similar sensations in the Orthodox Church. The sanctuary filled with icons--Jesus, John the Baptist, the fearsome archangels Michael and Gabriel flanking the altar, and especially the awesome and mighty Christ *Pantocrator* staring down from the ceiling--continues to fill my spiritual imagination. The grand processions around the church, the jingling of the censer as the smoke of the incense rose throughout the sanctuary, the primal dignity of the Byzantine chant all bespoke an encounter with the living God. The music may not have been as stirring as the Lutheran hymns of my father's church, and the Greek language that predominated may not have penetrated my understanding as much as the English liturgy of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, but as an expression of Christian worship I would have had trouble expressing a preference for one or the other. The Orthodox Church is Eastern, the Lutheran Church is Western, and both, when true to their roots, bear mighty witness to the presence of God in His Word and blessed Sacraments.

It was not until high school that I began to see contradictions between my parents' churches. I became aware that the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, was the recipient of prayers and supplications in the Orthodox Church (incidentally, at no point in my life have I ever personally directed a prayer to Mary or to any other saint). I was asked to kiss relics, the bones of saints. On a pilgrimage to Jerusalem I was asked to participate in a service of worship whose prayers were directed literally to the wood of the True Cross (I am sure this could be explained as poetic excess rather than idolatry, but that is not the impression it made upon me at the time). My growing discomfort with certain practices in the Orthodox Church led me to explore Orthodox doctrine more fully. Upon reading Timothy Ware's *The Orthodox Church* (highly recommended, by the way), I was shocked



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to learn that my church taught synergism (human cooperation in conversion). It found its sources of authority not only in Holy Scripture, but also in councils, the Church Fathers, the Liturgy, the hierarchy, and icons. I experienced a crisis.

I approached my father in hopes of learning more about the Lutheran Church. He gave me his copy of the *Book of Concord* (the Tappert edition), and I read the Augsburg Confession. I was astonished. Article after article, I found that the Scriptures were upheld. Every doctrine was firmly grounded in the sure, firm testimonies of the prophets and apostles. Everything that worried me about the Orthodox Church was either absent or actively rejected. Everything I loved about the Orthodox Church was continued and extolled, especially the Holy Trinity; the God-man Jesus Christ; the forgiveness of sins; and the blessed Sacraments of Baptism, the true washing of regeneration, and Holy Communion, the true body and blood of Jesus.

But what I remember most impressing me about my first encounter with the Augsburg Confession was the spirit in which it was presented. Here were serious men, bold but humble, courageous but trembling, who stated carefully and precisely what they believed the Scriptures taught. They did so with the full awareness that they would have to answer for their confession not only to the Holy Roman Emperor, but also and especially to the Lord Jesus Christ at the final Judgment. I found that spirit irresistible. I wanted to make it my own. And shortly thereafter, I did make it my own, arranging to be confirmed in the Lutheran faith at my father's church.

My confirmation was honestly one of the darkest days of my life, requiring a genuine leap of faith. I was leaving what claimed to be the one true Church, with many glorious externals that weighed heavily on my imagination, for a church that limited itself to Holy Scripture and would rely on no other prop. By this time I had learned that not every Missouri Synod congregation was like my father's. Many had jettisoned much of the best of their heritage, substituting for

it things that were trivial and aesthetically cringeworthy. I was joining myself to a precarious expression of the Lutheran confession. But the confession was there, and my conscience would not rest until I had publicly made that confession my own. Since that day I have grown in the confidence that the Lutheran confession I embraced is in fact the faith of the prophets and apostles—indeed, of the Church all through the ages. Every day since my confirmation in the Lutheran church has been bright with the glorious light of the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I remain deeply in love with the Lutheran confession. I am smitten with its beauty, fascinated by its mysteries, comforted by its Gospel, and assured by its steadfast reliance on the Scriptures alone. We need go nowhere else for these precious treasures. Read the Scriptures, read the Confessions, read Luther, read our theologians, and you will find more than enough to satisfy your deepest longings until you see our Lord Jesus face to face.



*Rev. Christopher Neuendorf is a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. He has served as Pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa, since 2011. God has blessed him and his wife Leah with two precious children so far.*

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