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# INTRODUCTION: THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

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*BY JAMES A. ALTER*

The local church has one Head, Jesus Christ. We do not believe in popes, cardinals, archbishops or metropolitans because all of these would be positions higher in rank than that held by our precious Saviour. *“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”*<sup>1</sup> In this issue of the ANCIENT BAPTIST JOURNAL we are focusing on the Baptist distinctive known as the autonomy of the local church. Defined simply, autonomy of the local church is the biblical distinctive concerning the relationship of church with church and church with government. Consider the following verses:

*“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”* Colossians 1:18

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter 2:25

*“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”* II Corinthians 8:1-2, 19, 23

*“And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind.”* II Corinthians 8:19

*“Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.”* II Corinthians 8:23

These verses from the Word of God teach us some interesting truths about the church. Its Head is Christ and He alone is to receive the preeminence. Churches do not govern one another, but do cooperate for the support of other Bible-believing churches. The pastor of a church may recommend workers to other churches. What is a church? A church is a called out assembly of born-again, baptized, believers meeting voluntarily in a specific location for the purpose of fellowship and support, observing and defending the ordinances, carrying out the Great Commission and doing all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded.

The word “church” itself denotes only a local body. It is an error to speak of the “Episcopal church”, or the “Catholic church” or even the

“Baptist church” in a corporate sense, (meaning all Baptist churches). The local church is an independent body accountable only to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church. All human authority for governing the local church resides within the local church itself. No religious hierarchy outside the local church may dictate a church’s beliefs or practices.

Autonomy does not exclude fellowship. A Baptist church may fellowship with other churches around mutual interests, supporting missionaries, and in loose associations, but a Baptist church cannot be a “member” of any other body—it is a body unto itself.<sup>2</sup> That the church is local and autonomous in the Scripture is beyond dispute. The government and discipline of the local church must never be ceded to any religious hierarchy, be it a bishopric, archdiocese, convention or association. The government and discipline of the local body must be only by that body.

We have, in this issue, compiled some great authors to help explain this vital distinctive. Some, like Francis Wayland and J. M. Pendleton and J. R. Graves are old favorites of the JOURNAL. Some like Hezekiah Harvey are less well known. These great Baptists of yesteryear will give us a new appreciation for this unappreciated doctrine.

Next, we are highlighting in this issue the writings of I.M. Haldeman (1845-1933). Ira Massey Haldeman was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of New York City for almost fifty years (1884-1933). He was a dominant intellect and passionate advocate for biblical doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup> See I Corinthians 12

He is famous for his book *The Tabernacle Priesthood And Offerings* as well as *The Coming of Christ*, *The King's Penknife*, and *How To Study The Bible*. He wrote many books and pamphlets, some of which we will feature here. Haldeman was an expository preacher, a dispensationalist, a controversialist, and a soul-winning Baptist. I hope you will get to know this powerful man of God.

In the next issue we will continue our series, "*The Bible: The Baptists' Sole Authority Throughout The Ages.*"

Thank you for reading the ANCIENT BAPTIST JOURNAL. Come with us now as we examine the autonomy of the local church.

# THE REFORMATION IN LIGHT OF BAPTIST HISTORY

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BY JAMES A. ALTER

How should Baptists view the Reformation? The simple answer is—*Biblically*. Our heavenly Father has promised to give us biblical sight. “*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*”<sup>1</sup> We follow this guidance as the Holy Spirit of God guides us into all truth.<sup>2</sup> This truth is found in only one place, the changeless Word of God. “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*”<sup>3</sup> Abraham Booth (1734-1806), long time pastor of the Prescott Street Baptist Church verbalized the heart of the Baptist:

This divine book, this heavenly volume, I accept with humility and gratitude from the hand of my adored Creator, as a gift of inestimable value; and, considering it as the grand charter of my eternal salvation, I cannot but esteem it as my indispensable duty implicitly to submit to its sacred dictates, in every affair of religious concernment.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 32:8

<sup>2</sup> “*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*” (John 16:13)

<sup>3</sup> John 17:17

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Booth, *Posthumous Essays*, “A Confession of Faith, Delivered by Mr. Abraham Booth at his ordination over the church of Christ in Little Prescott Street, Goodmans Fields, February 16, 1769,” (London: W. Button, 1808), 94.

# NOTES ON THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF BAPTIST CHURCHES: INDEPENDENCE OF THE CHURCHES

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*BY FRANCIS WAYLAND, D.D., LL.D.*

## INDEPENDENCE OF THE CHURCHES—CAN A CHURCH BE PROPERLY REPRESENTED?

**B**efore closing my remarks on the dangers to which we are exposed from following the examples of other denominations, I desire to offer a few remarks on our ecclesiastical organization. We are liable in this respect to swerve from our principles, and of this liability it is well to be aware.

The Baptists have ever believed in the entire and absolute independence of the churches. By this, we mean that every church of Christ, that is, every company of believers united together according to the laws of Christ, is wholly independent of every other; that every church is perfectly capable of self-government; and that, therefore, no one acknowledges any higher authority, under Christ, than itself; that with the church all ecclesiastical action commences, and with it it

terminates, and hence, that the ecclesiastical relations proper, of every member, are limited to the church to which he belongs. If it be said that a member may thus be exposed to the tyranny of a majority, and suffer censure when it is undeserved, without hope of redress; to this I reply, the principles of independence, carried consistently to their results, furnish a remedy for this form of injustice. A church owes courtesy to every other church, but is under no obligation to take part with it in wrong-doing. The injured person may, therefore, apply to any other church for admission. It is perfectly competent for them to examine the case for themselves, and if, in their opinion, the member has been guilty of no wrong, they may rightfully receive him. In such a case, however, it would probably be the preferable course to call a council of disinterested brethren who might examine the facts, and give the aggrieved members, and the church with which they proposed to unite, the benefit of their advice. This seems to provide a sufficient remedy against ecclesiastical tyranny, and this is the result to which the doctrine of the independence of the churches necessarily leads.

The doctrine of the independence of the churches rests upon a few plain and well-established principles. Some of these I take to be the following:

1. Religion is a matter which concerns exclusively the relations between an individual man and his Maker. It teaches us how we may so serve God as to secure his favor, both here and hereafter.

# DISTINCTIVE PRINCIPLES OF BAPTISTS: DEFINITION OF CHURCH INDEPENDENCE

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*By J. M. PENDLETON, D.D.*

There are three prominent forms of church-government, indicated by the terms Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and Independency.

Episcopacy recognizes the right of bishops to preside over districts of country, and one of its fundamental doctrines is that a bishop is officially superior to an elder. Of course, in that church, a modern bishop has under his charge the “inferior clergy” as well as “the laity;” for it is insisted that the “ordaining power” and the “right to rule” belong to the episcopal office. In apostolic times “bishop” and “pastor” were terms of equivalent import. The elders of the church of Ephesus are styled (Acts 20:28) “overseers”—in the original, *episcopoi*, the word generally translated “bishop,” if, indeed, “bishop” may be called a translation. It is so evident from the Scriptures that bishops and elders are identical that it is the greatest folly to call it in question. This, however, is not the place to enlarge on the topic.

Presbyterianism recognizes two classes of elders—*preaching*

elders and *ruling* elders. The pastor and the ruling elders of a congregation constitute what is called the “Session of the church.” The “Session” transacts the business of the church, receives, dismisses, and excludes members. From the decision of a Session there is an appeal to Presbytery, which is composed of preaching and ruling elders. From the action of a Presbytery there lies an appeal to Synod, and from the adjudications of Synod there is an appeal to the General Assembly, whose decrees are final and irresistible. These Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies are often termed “church courts,” “judicatories of the church.”

The friends of Presbyterianism, no doubt, deem their form of government most expedient and satisfactory, but to prove it scriptural must be as difficult as to show that baptism has been substituted for circumcision. Where is it intimated in the Scriptures that there is an appeal from the lower to the higher “church courts”? While Presbyterians, therefore, talk and write about the *expediency* of their form of government, they ought to say nothing of its *scripturalness*. It is unquestionably

**While Presbyterians, therefore, talk and write about the *expediency* of their form of government, they ought to say nothing of its *scripturalness*.**

a better government than the Episcopal, but it is not the government established by Jesus Christ. It is easily seen that Episcopacy and Presbyterianism imply that

many local congregations enter representatively into the composition of what is called “the church.” We, therefore, often hear of the “Episcopal Church of the United States of America,” the “Presbyterian Church

# FOURTH MARK OF THE DIVINE MODEL

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BY J. R. GRAVES, LL.D.

Excerpted from *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* by J.R. Graves LL.D.  
(Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House: Graves, Mahaffy & Co., 1880)

*The "ecclesia" of Christ a single congregation—Not universal, national or provincial—Was independent of all other bodies.*

"The church which is at Cenchrea."—Rom. 16:1.

"Salute . . . Nymphas and the church which is in his house."—Col. 4:15.

"Ubi tres ecclesia est, licet laici."—TERTULLIAN.

"Ea quae est in quoque loco ecclesia."—IRENAEUS.

"All congregations were [in the 1st and 2d centuries] independent of each other."

—GIESELER.

Several important marks of a true church I pass for lack of space, and because not so essential to this discussion—e. g., the perfect equality of its ministers, the purely democratic and executive character of its government—that I may notice more at length what I will call the

#### FOURTH MARK OF THE DIVINE MODEL

##### **It was a Local Organization, a Single Congregation.**

Now, there are three theories concerning a church, and upon one or the other of these all organizations claiming to be churches are built; but, according to Bishop Doggett, only that one can be a Christian church that is in all respects conformed to the scriptural model, so particularly described by the inspired writers. Let us examine these theories:

*The first is the Catholic or Universal church theory.* According to this, there can be but one church, of the denomination adopting it, throughout the world. No single congregation is a church in any sense, but an infinitesimal part of the universal idea. The Greek Catholic Church is formed upon this theory, having the Grand Patriarch at Constantinople for its Supreme head.

The Latin, or Roman Catholic Church, is constructed upon this idea. No local congregation in one place is a church, but only a minute part of the great whole, the seat of which is at Rome, and the absolute governing power, the Pope.

The reader will notice that, according to this theory, (1) the word can not be used in the plural—there is but one Roman Catholic, and but one Greek Church in the world; (2) that the local congregations are not churches; and (3) that these universal churches never were, and never can be, assembled in one place for any purpose.

*The second is the National or Provincial theory.* This is like the

# THE CHURCH: ITS POLITY AND ORDINANCES

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*By HEZEKIAH HARVEY, D.D.*

## SECTION VI.

### THE CHURCH: ITS EXTERNAL RELATIONS

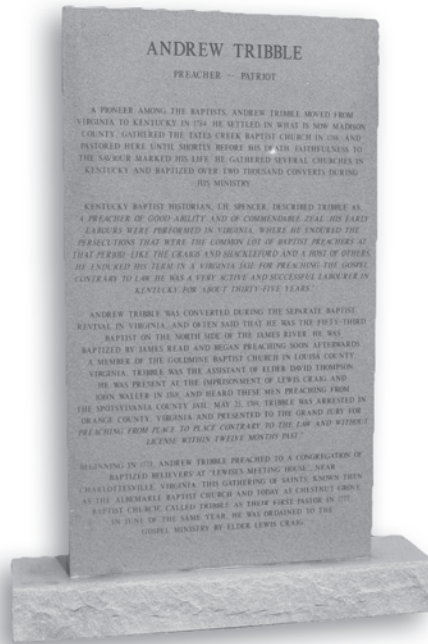
#### I. EACH CHURCH IS COMPLETE IN ITSELF: ITS DECISIONS ARE SUBJECT TO REVISAL BY NO ECCLESIASTICAL TRIBUNAL ON EARTH.

This position is in itself reasonable. For the word of God, the completed revelation from heaven, is entrusted to each church; and, as a special promise of the Spirit is given to it, none could be better fitted to interpret the will of Christ than the church itself. Jesus said to His church (Matt. 18:20), “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” Besides, each church in the New Testament does in fact appear thus independent. No example or intimation is found of the subordination of a church to organizations outside of itself; but in all the counsels, rebukes, and warnings addressed

to churches, each is represented as directly accountable to Christ. The church is required to obey civil magistrates in things not inconsistent with God's word, and is to be in subjection to the spiritual teachers and guides whom by her own election to office she has recognized as called of God to official position. But she is subject to no ecclesiastical control from without: diocesan bishops and higher church judicatories are nowhere found in Scripture.

#### OBJECTIONS TO INDEPENDENCY CONSIDERED.

1. It is objected that the church at Jerusalem (and other large cities), from the number of Christians there, must have embraced several separate organized congregations, which, however, were under one general organization, and were collectively called "the church at Jerusalem;" such an organization must have been a presbytery or a diocese. To this we answer: (a.) The existence of several organized congregations in these cities, under a common presbyterial or prelatie government, is a mere assumption, there being no intimation of it in Scripture; on the contrary, repeated instances occur in which the whole body of believers met together. It is said of the church at Jerusalem, "*all that believed were together,*" "*continuing daily with one accord in the temple,*" "*they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*" No less than six occasions are recorded in which the entire body of disciples at Jerusalem met as a church in one place; and in some of these cases the form of statement indicates



MARKER PLACED BY THE BAPTIST HISTORY  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY - JUNE 20, 2009  
ANDREW TRIBBLE  
PREACHER - PATRIOT

**A** pioneer among the Baptists, Andrew Tribble moved from Virginia to Kentucky in 1784. He settled in what is now Madison County, gathered the Tate's Creek Baptist Church in 1786, and pastored here until shortly before his death. Faithfulness to the Saviour marked his life. He gathered several churches in Kentucky and baptized over two thousand converts during his ministry.

# WHAT THE BAPTIST CHURCH STANDS FOR

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*BY I. M. HALDEMAN, D.D.*

## I. A REGENERATED CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

**B**efore everything else, the Baptist Church requires that those who become members must be born again (quicken from above), receive new and spiritual life through faith in a crucified, dead, buried and risen Lord; and having received this new life, shall give evidence of it in daily walk and conversation.

The one law fundamental to the Baptist Church is legislated in the words of the Son of God:

*“Ye must be born again.”* (John 33:5.)

## II. BAPTISM, IMMERSION OF THE BELIEVER IN WATER, IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.

The Church demands the baptism of each believer because it is a command of the risen Lord.

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”* (Matthew 28:19.)

Since the preacher is commanded to baptize those whom he teaches, and he is to teach them to believe, then every one who accepts the teaching and does believe, is commanded to submit himself to the hands of the teacher and be baptized.

The Church demands this baptism shall be—immersion.

It demands it because:

1. *The Greek word “to baptize,” signifies—immersion.*
2. *Because Scripture affirms baptism is a burial.*

*“We are buried with him by baptism.”* (Romans 6:4.)

As burial is by agency of baptism, *baptism must bury.*

Burial is immersion.

3. *Because baptism is a symbol of doctrine.*

*“Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you.”* (Romans 6:17.)

The word “form” is symbol.

The passage, therefore, literally reads:

*“Ye have obeyed from the heart that symbol of doctrine.”*

The doctrine of which baptism is a symbol is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

*“I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was*

# SOCIALISM

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*BY I. M. HALDEMAN, D.D.*

There is no stint nor poverty in nature. Provision seems to have been made for all. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, and the most infinitesimal degree of animal and insect life appear to find ample sustenance and sufficient area for the exercise or enjoyment of their functions. Logically, it should be expected that man, the head of creation in this world, would find, individually, the same plethora in respect to himself. Looking at the world as a dwelling place for man, there is every reason to expect that one would be able to enjoy as much of the wealth and bounty of the earth as another. There is room enough for every one to have a home and large domain. There is wood in the forests, coal in the mines, gold, silver and tin, in the earth's veins, brass that may be dug from the hills. The lakes and rivers teem with fish, and the sea sends its bromides with health salutations to all. The wheat and corn, fruit and vegetables, are ready to respond with the same largess to the effort of each; flowers bloom in their beauty till even

the desert is made glad. The sky is over all with the same blue by day, and the same shining stars by night. The sun, the rain and the dew, are continually at work, with no respect to persons. There is air enough for all to breathe. In short, provision and equipment for each individual to stand on an equality of possession and hopefulness with the other.

This might well be expected from the fulness of nature.

It requires only the most casual observation to see that such is not the case—that the reverse is true.

Practically, today, the world is, as it has always been, in the hands of the few. It is the few who own the land and its resources. The few who control the product of mother earth, and benefit of the value of human labor. The few, relatively speaking, are rich, and may live as kings live, without the care of tomorrow's expenses, without fear of yesterday's debt. A multitude live without actual poverty, but within lines that are circumscribed, and where it is necessary, always, to keep the sentinel of economy on the walls and submit to the law of limitation even for legitimate demands. There is the vaster multitude who eke out existence. They are the toilers, the hard workers in the chain gang of labor, as much under the whiplash of daily service as a slave beneath the blows of a master. Their life consists in realizing the things they cannot have. They live close to the earth, are hewers of wood and drawers of water, have little chance to see the sky, because of the close attention they must pay to the ground on which they walk, and, in the final analysis, are little better than machines wound up by the inexorable hand of necessity, set going

# POLITY OF THE BAPTISTS

---

*BY T. G. JONES, D.D.*

It is objected to the Baptists that their church polity is too democratic; that it is *radical* and *agrarian* in its tendencies, deficient in *disciplinary power*, and wanting, generally, in strength and efficiency; that it gives to the uneducated and the ignorant as much authority and influence as to the most highly cultivated and refined; that, allowing no great, controlling, centralizing power, strifes and divisions weakening and rending the societies which adopt it are likely to be constantly engendered among them; and that, providing for no fixed organic union of all these societies, it furnishes, no adequate means of making so imposing and effective a demonstration before the world, as is necessary widely, powerfully, and permanently to impress it.

In other ages, Baptist views of the constitution and government of the church called forth the severest denunciations. Their enemies not only insisted upon a prelatial authority, which the Baptists could not allow, but, with fiery zeal, upon an ecclesiastical unity and catholicity,

in which the Baptists had no faith. Contending for unity as though it were a mere mechanical thing, they compelled it by external pressure, and thus secured an outward uniformity, while there was no oneness of mind and heart. These erroneous notions, with the unreasonable, unscriptural, and oppressive measures which were adopted to enforce them, the Baptists always resisted. They contended that true unity is the unity of the Spirit—the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace; not unity enforced by discord and contention; not unity produced by bonds of fear and of force. Hence, while always insisting upon spiritual and doctrinal unity, while uncompromisingly maintaining that there is but one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; while fervently praying and assiduously striving for harmony of purpose and concert of action, they did not require any formal and inseparable confederation of their churches. The advocates of the false unity we have named, regarding it as of prime importance, naturally, therefore, looked upon the Baptists—dividing, as they supposed, the *one church* of Christ into many different sects—as its worst enemies, and the greatest barrier in the way of its realization. Hence they represented them as the sowers of the seeds of discord, strife, and confusion, the renders of the body of Christ, the foes of truth and order, peace and love; and, as such, they persecuted them with all the means which they could command. To all the allegations against their polity, the Baptists might with propriety reply, that the fact that it was instituted by Christ, and recognized and adopted by the apostolic and primitive churches, is a sufficient proof of its excellence, and should be

# FIDELITY TO OUR BAPTIST HERITAGE

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*T. J. VILLERS, D.D., LL.D.*

**A**rtemus Ward used to talk about the time when the Mayflowers came over in the Pilgrim and brought Plymouth Rock with 'em. When that frail craft dropped anchor off New England, she carried a cargo more enduring than stone and more precious than gold. "She was freighted with principles, convictions, institutions, and laws." Her passengers were few; but they were tall men, sun-crowned. In all that constitutes true soul-greatness, despite their poverty of purse, they matched our high mountains and broad plains. They were men with empires in their bosoms and new eras in their brains.

As the Mayflower was laden with merchandise richer than her British owners ever dreamed, so are we the heirs of other and better things than acres or dollars. Our fathers bequeathed to us a heritage of principles, convictions, institutions, and laws; a heritage which we cherish because its price was their blood; the heritage of soul-liberty, the new world's distinct and priceless contribution to political science and

the church universal; the heritage of a regenerate church-membership, a notion scouted for centuries, but now so commonly held that few know it to have been a conviction once peculiar to us; the heritage of culture, mind according well with soul, the sacrifices of primitive years being supplemented by ever-increasing benefactions till now our educational plant has leaped beyond the eighty million dollar mark; the heritage too, of world evangelism, for to us belongs the inextinguishable glory of Carey, the father of modern missions, and of Judson, the first missionary in these latter days to set foot on an unmixed heathen soil. Let me rehearse these facts a little more in detail.

The words of Bancroft are familiar to us all: "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists." In this he agrees with Skeats, the English historian, who declares that "It is the singular and distinguished honor of the Baptists to have repudiated from their earliest history all coercive power over the consciences and actions of men with reference to religion. They were the protoevangelists of the voluntary principle."

For the first three hundred years, Christianity was a forbidden religion. Imperial power sought to suppress it as a depraved and immoderate superstition. Christians endured a great fight of afflictions from Jew and Gentile alike. They were publicly whipped. They were dragged by the heels through the streets. Their limbs were disjoined. Their noses and ears were cut off. Their eyes were dug out. Sharp knives were run under their nails. Melted lead was poured over their bodies. They

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20TH, 2009

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- *Preaching by Jeff Faggart - President of the Baptist History Preservation Society*
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