



## **A Literary Analysis of Mark 10:42-45 and Its Implications for Church Leadership**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Within almost every natural man is a salient ambition for leadership and that ambition is expressed by the desire to be the lord and master, the leading man served by others. It is, therefore, not particularly bizarre that most people also get in the leadership of the church to rule and reign over church members in the name of shepherd-hood; however, this paper insists on Jesus' concept of "Servant Leadership" as an imperative for church leadership. Just how on earth can one really lead and serve at the same time, remains the contemporary dilemma? Jesus's leadership model of "servant-leadership" offers a timely and timeless salvaging response. Mark 10:42-45, specifically, is chosen to enunciate this nugget. A literary analysis of the chosen periscope, as briefly relayed in this paper, elucidates how and why "servant leadership" as modeled by Jesus is an imperative for church leadership which must follow the pattern of Christ and thereby fulfill the work and mission of the Church. Five recommendations, drawing from the literary implications of Mark 10:42-45, are noted for church leadership who must worth their salt even in the contemporary world; as to the amazement of secular thinkers and writers, the wisest and most effective way to lead is proving to be to serve. Thus, contemporary church leaders are reminded, cautioned, rebuked, counseled, encouraged and reassured of the unchanging principle of spiritual leadership: servant-hood and sacrifice.

**Keywords:** Literary, servanthood, Church Leadership

### **INTRODUCTION**

Quite profoundly, as in the world, everything rises or falls in the church with leadership. Leadership in the church, however, for all the similarities it may and does indeed share with leadership styles and patterns in the world system, is for all intents and purposes distinct. While the concept of leadership in the world, for instance, means authority and self-influence, leadership in the church means servanthood and divine accountability. The latter is something which does not agree with contemporary understanding of leadership for "Whereas a servant is submissive, obedient and generally accepts orders without question, a leader says what should be done." (Amukobole,2012:20). Often the puzzle is how can someone lead and serve at the same time?

Mark 10:42-45 is one of the biblical passages that present such paradox in Jesus' response to the disciples on what must be their own pattern of leadership. In that passage, Jesus is noted to have accentuated the fact that leadership for the disciples is antithetical to the pattern observed around them. For, henceforth, He (Jesus) would be their pattern. The "Jesus" pattern is what is, in contemporary parlance, called "Servant Leadership." This paper considers and insists that Jesus' pattern must be the primary preoccupation of church leadership since Jesus remains the eternal model for the church. Thus, it presents an exegetical analysis based on the literary content of the passage and projects the unequivocal implications of the passage (periscope) for church leadership. Meanwhile, a

brief historical background of the periscope is first of all explored to establish the historical reliability of the narrative and its contextual relevance to church leadership.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MARK GOSPEL**

Traditionally, the Gospel according to Mark is believed to be written by Mark who was an associate of Peter (Peter's Interpreter). He is believed to have written that Gospel based on what he hears Peter say. St. Jerome is quoted to have said, "St. Mark, the interpreter of the Apostle St. Peter, and the first bishop of the church of Alexandria, related what things he heard his master preaching, rather according to the truth of the facts, than according to the order of the things that were done." (Spencer and Exell, 2011: vii). With this apostolic authority backing Mark, the genuineness and authenticity of the account is validated.

The St. Mark, is notably also referred to in Acts as "John also called Mark." (Acts 12:12, 25). It is deduced that John was his original Jewish name while Mark, his Roman name was later added and eventually superseded the other name. The Latin name 'Mark' from 'Marcus' means 'strong hammer'- such that is able to crush flinty rock. The name, according to Spence and Exell (2011), is indicative of "the spiritual power wielded by the evangelist, and enabling him to break the stony hearts of the Gentiles and to rouse them to penitence and faith and a holy life" (iv). Understandably then, Mark wrote from Rome and to Gentile audience. His distinct purpose, according to Cranfield (1959), seems to be "to supply the catechetical and liturgical needs of the church in Rome, to support its faith in face of threat of martyrdom and to provide material for missionary preachers." (14-15).

Characteristically, Mark's narrative does not show exquisite literary creativity or even smooth grammar and so could read rough, dull and uninspired; nonetheless, of the other synoptic Gospels, it is considered historically reliable in the sense that it is said to be a product of "an extremely honest and conscientious compiler." (Cranfield, 16). Ben Witherington III (2001) expresses the foregoing, succinctly, thus "Mark's Greek is not elegant and his rhetoric not advanced, but we should not make the mistake of thinking that because of this the content of his Gospel and his arrangement of his material is not profound, powerful, and persuasive, for indeed it is." (19).

### **A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF MARK 10:42-45**

Literary analysis of Mark 10:42-45 will be explicated in terms of the Genre of Mark's Gospel, canonical context of the periscope, the book context, and the immediate context.

#### **The Genre of Mark's Gospel**

The literary kind observed in the Gospel of Mark is such that is biographic and Christocentric. Varieties of literary features within and around the narrative indicate this. The length of the narrative, for instance (different from what obtains with other Synoptic and John's Gospel) is distinctively close to the average length of ancient biographies.

Furthermore, the narrative is continuous and prose-like; a literary feature typical of history, biography or romance. Also, like ancient biography, Mark's narrative follows the conventional pattern of indirect portraiture of his central figure. The narrative is rarely intruded with authorial comments, rather the central figure, in Mark's case- Jesus, is allowed to express himself in words and deeds. In addition, as characteristically peculiar with ancient biographies, Mark's narratives contain short anecdotal stories that focus on a word or deed of Jesus (Witherington, 6).

On the other hand, the Gospel of Mark is Christocentric in the sense that Jesus is largely the focus of the narrative. Burrige (1992) notes that "Jesus or his teaching is the subject of over 44 percent of the verbs in Mark's Gospel." (271). In addition, Witherington (2001) notes that "the one thing to keep in mind is that ancient *bioi*, like modern biographies, center on a particular person and seek to present an adequate and accurate characterization of that person." (4). The apocalyptic nature of Mark's narrative is also accentuated. C. Myers (1988), cited in Witherington, observes that "When we speak of Mark's apocalyptic rhetoric, we are referring to the fact that he operates with an apocalyptic worldview that affects the way he casts some of his narrative and the shape of some of his characterizations, including that of Jesus." (7). Meanwhile, he notes earlier that "Mark chose realistic narrative over the more highly fabricated fictions of apocalyptic." (7).

Succinctly, the following literary features characterize the apocalyptic work in Mark narrative:

(1) Dualism- the new order is opposed to the old; (2) use of combat myth, in this case the contestants being Jesus and Satan; (3) the theme of lack of understanding unless there is revelation of the divine perspective on things; (4) a narrative that is bound spatially from above by the supernatural world and temporally from beyond by the climactic eschatological events, including final judgment by the Son of Man (Kee,1977:7).

In addition, Santos (1997), citing James Bailey (1985), notes that “the Gospel of Mark has been described as a paradoxical gospel, a riddle that teases its readers' response, and a narrative that possesses an enigmatic and puzzling character.” (452). Such paradox, according to Philip Davis (1989), “serves as a key Marcan rhetorical device that urges readers to show servanthood in their exercise of authority within the community of believers and beyond.” (3ff).

### **The Canonical Context of Mark 10: 42-45**

Mark's Gospel, in the Biblical canon, is categorized as one of the Synoptic Gospels. This is the case because of some apparent similarities and contradictions observed with the Gospels when viewed together. Mark 10:42-45, for instance, is also found in the synoptic counterparts; in Matthew 20: 25-28 and Luke 22: 25-27. While these accounts have some startling similarities, they are also remarkably different in background, order and literary presentation. In Mark 10: 42-45, Jesus was responding to the request of James and John and the vexation of the other disciples at the request. But in Matthew 20: 25-28, Jesus was responding, in exactly the same words as Mark 10:42-45, to the request of James and John's mother and the consequent displeasure of the other disciples at the request. Luke's account of the same narrative does not present Jesus response in verbatim as the other two. In fact, in Luke (Luke 22: 25-27) Jesus was not responding to anyone's particular request but the dispute that arose among the disciples as they argue about who was going to be the greatest among them.

The foregoing makes scholars raise questions concerning the literary relationship of the synoptic Gospels. Often the leading question is “who copied who?” Whose account is first and historically reliable? Almost ubiquitously, most scholars now agree with the Marcan priority; that is, Mark wrote first. This is arguably the case because its comparative shortness and poorer writing style yet hard readings. (Guy, 1968:36 and [http://www.ntgreekstudies.com/uploads/2/7/5/5/2755694/synoptic\\_problem\\_-\\_wallace.pdf](http://www.ntgreekstudies.com/uploads/2/7/5/5/2755694/synoptic_problem_-_wallace.pdf); 3-7). The implication of this is that it is more historically reliable and so on this basis, it is selected as the pericope for this paper.

### **Book Context**

Hutchison (2009:54) observes that the theme of servanthood permeates the Gospel of Mark, as reflected in Jesus' teachings and actions. Such servanthood as modeled by Jesus has its crux as living a life of sacrifice unto others. This was what Jesus meant by his response in Mark 10:42-45: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” And indeed, the passion narrative in Mark depicts just that- a fulfillment motif of the suffering servant as noted in Isaiah.

In corroboration of the foregoing, Santos (1997), in addition, explicates the paradoxical narrative pattern in Mark. Comprehensively, he notes that

In addition to the prologue (1:1-15) and epilogue (15:42-16:8), the Book of Mark may be divided into three major sections. The first major section (1:16-8:21) has key dramatic instances of the paradox. Though both motifs of authority and servanthood are present, this first major section highlights Jesus' authority...The second major section (8:22-10:52) features several verbal instances of the paradox within the narrative's three paradoxical discipleship discourses (8:27-38; 9:30-50; 10:32-44)...The third major section (11:1-15:41) highlights the servanthood motif (though it also has episodes that show authority), culminating in Jesus' passion and death, His highest expression of servanthood (45-56).

Mark 8:22–10:52, within which is the pericope of this paper (Mark 10:42-45), is considered by scholars and particularly Santos (1997) as “the major and central section of this Gospel” because of the concentrated references to the authority/servanthood paradox (8:35; 9:35; 10:31,45) (458). The structure of this major section may be illustrated in this way:

- A. Healing of a blind man (8:22-26)
- B. Discourse (8:27-38)  
(Verbal instance of the paradox, 8:35)
- C. Expressions of Jesus’ authority (9:1-13, 14-29)
- D.’ Discourse (9:30-50)  
(Verbal instance of the paradox, 9:35)
- E.’ Expressions of opposition, misunderstanding,  
and lack of faith (10:1-31)  
(Verbal instance of the paradox, 10:31)
- F." Discourse (10:32-45)  
(Verbal instance of the paradox, 10:45)
- G.' Healing of a blind man (10:46-52) (Santos, 459)

It is equally noteworthy to consider the background upon which the request of James and John (sons of Zebedee) was made within the context of the Book (Mark’s Gospel). Robert Russell’s thought on this would be paraphrased as follows. James and John made that request toward the end of the ministry of Jesus when, supposedly, they must have spent about three years with Jesus. Before the request, they had walked enough with Jesus to know that He was no ordinary man. They had seen Jesus heal people (Mark 2:1-12), raise people from the dead (Mark 5:37-43), exorcise evil spirit (Mark 5:1-13), feed multitude (Mark 6:30-44), transfigured (Mark 9:2-13). Through Peter, they knew Jesus was the Christ (Mark 8:27-29) ([https:// www. regent. edu/ acad/ global/publications/sl.../russell practical theology.pdf](https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/sl.../russell_practical_theology.pdf); accessed on April 24, 2017). With these, James and John knew Jesus has a seat of glory.

Furthermore, James and John must have made that request based on their conceived sense of specialty or prominence among the disciples. They were, for instance, apart from Simon and Andrew, the first set of disciples Jesus called (Mark 1:19-20). They were, alongside with others, appointed as apostles but distinctly called by Jesus “Boanerges- Son of Thunder” (Mark 3: 14 & 17). On at least two occasions, they were chosen from the twelve and taken on special excursions by Jesus. One, when Jairus’ daughter was to be raised (Mark 5:21-43), and at the transfiguration (Mark 9:2). So, immediately after Jesus began to talk of His betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection (in Mark 10:32-34), James and John must have perceived that it is all going to transit into Glory or an establishment of His kingdom; so they requested, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” (Mark 10:37). They had been enjoying that privilege in His earthly existence after all.

#### *The Immediate Context*

Jesus’ concept of greatness and leadership is best enunciated in His response to the request of James and John for positions of glory beside Him, and the consequent indignation of the other disciples (including Peter). For Jesus, greatness is sacrifice (Mark 10:38&39) and leadership is servanthood (Mark 10:43). He sets forth Himself as a model of servanthood and sacrifice in verse 45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The fact that the rest of the disciples were angry at James and John’s request reveal the silent desire of all of them to occupy positions of prominence. This is understandably so because they were all products of their Greco-Roman cultural influence and worldview on leadership and greatness. In the Greco-Roman world, the concept of Kingship and Patronage, as well as Honour and shame shaped their perspective of greatness and leadership.

#### *Kingship and Patronage/ Honour and shame*

Two primary expressions of this value system were in the family structure (kinship) and the public and private favours that patrons/benefactors bestowed on recipients in society (patronage). In both Greco Roman and Jewish society, according to David De Silva (2000), a person’s “merits begin with

the merits (or debits) of their lineage, the reputation of their ancestral house. Greeks and Romans receive a basic identity from their larger family” (158). And an apt description of the value system of patronage in the first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman world is woven around the assertion, “It is not what you know, but whom you know that counts.” (Hutchison,61). In addition, James and John, influenced by this cultural worldview, made the request based on their concept of honour. De Silva (2000) describes it thus:

Honor is a dynamic and relational concept. On the one hand, an individual can think of himself or herself as honorable based on his or her conviction that he or she has embodied those actions and qualities that the group values as “honorable,” as the marks of a valuable person. This aspect of honor is really “self-respect.” On the other hand, honor is also the esteem in which a person is held by the group he or she regards as significant others—it is the recognition by the person’s group that he or she is a valuable member of that group. In this regard, it is having the respect of others (23).

It is understandable from the foregoing why the other disciples felt so indignant at the attempt of James and John to distinguish themselves as more honourable and significant than them. But Jesus responds that, on the contrary, “In the Kingdom, greatness is characterized by the degree of service to others.” (English 1992:182) and that the paradox of leadership and greatness in the Kingdom of God is that “Instead of being lords, its great ones become servants, and its chiefs the bond-servants of all” (Gould 1961:202).

While the Gentile rulers like Caesar, Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa, and other Roman magistrates truly lord it over them, Jesus leadership pattern, on the contrary, is servant leadership such that culminate in sacrifice if, when and where necessary.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

The preceding sections in this paper established and enunciated Jesus’ concept and model of leadership as servanthood and sacrifice- a leadership paradigm temporarily tagged “Servant Leadership” (and will be so referred to henceforth). In the passage analyzed, specifically, Jesus emphatically elucidated the fact that leadership in the Kingdom of God is antithetical to leadership in the first century Greco-Roman world. And since that world shares a lot in common as regards leadership style and practice with the contemporary world, and Jesus remains the model for the contemporary church, Jesus’ response to the disciples hold sway for contemporary church leadership: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. NOT SO WITH YOU. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:42-44).

Jesus knew and understood the concept of leadership in the world system but He insists that for church leadership: NOT SO WITH YOU. Like the disciples would have struggled with the paradox of leadership and servanthood, especially that being a slave is a mark of dishonour and shame while being a leader is a mark of honour, royalty, power and influence; the truth is, most contemporary church leaders also conceive their leadership the same way. To them, leadership position is a means to wealth, affluence and power rather than a platform to serve and essentially be a sacrifice. That is the cultural norm or worldview- A successful leader rules by influence and affluence, while an unsuccessful one, the poor one, begs for survival and consequently just has to serve his followers if he must survive. Jesus insists that for church leadership, the paradigm is different.

Most contemporary church leaders, nonetheless, find it puzzling just how they could effectively lead and serve at the same time because it has already been engrained in their human nature and cultural fiber that the two are opposites. You either lead and rule or you follow and serve. Maxwell (2003:85) reveals that the confusion lies in people’s concept of servanthood. Servanthood, according to him, is not about position or skill. It is about attitude. The attitude of servanthood puts others ahead of his own agenda, possesses the confidence (self-security) to serve, initiates service to others, does not focus on rank or position, serves out of love and is not motivated by manipulation or self-promotion. Greenleaf (2002) describes this concept, succinctly, thus: “The servant-leader is servant first, it begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, as opposed to, wanting power, influence, fame, or wealth.” (352).

Furthermore, in Greenleaf's book, *The Servant Leader*, cited by Stephen R. Covey (1998), servant leadership begins with:

The natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: DO those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (3).

The foregoing is the attitude Jesus intended by His model for the church when He says: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45; Maxwell, 89). Contemporary church leaders should realize that the foolishness of servanthood in leadership is wiser than the wisest innovation of autocracy in leadership. Alluding to the eternal wisdom of Jesus' concept of leadership, Maxwell (2003) asserts (referring to leaders who must be worth their salt) that "If you want to become the kind of leader that people would follow, you will have to settle the issue of servanthood. If your attitude is to be served rather than to serve, you may be headed for trouble. It is true that those who would be great must be like the least and the servant of all" (89). Albert Schweitzer submission is particularly challenging. He says, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: The ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." (Maxell, 89). Maxwell crowns it all by saying, "If you want to be successful on the highest level, be willing to serve on the lowest." (89).

Unfortunately, Henry and Richard Blackaby's (2001) lamentation about the confusion among church leaders as they seek to conform to the world system of leadership still remain contemporarily the vogue. "Incredibly, as secular writers are embracing Christian teachings with the fervency of first century Christians, Christian leaders are inadvertently jettisoning many of those same truths in an effort to become more contemporary!" (11). The sordid implication of this on churches is succinctly expressed by Greenleaf (2002), a foremost renowned expert and writer on servant leadership, thus: "Churches are needed to serve the large numbers of people who need mediative help if their alienation is to be healed and wholeness of life achieved, but I regret that, for the most part, churches do not seem to be serving well." (231). Greenleaf maintains that the distinguishing trait of true leadership is service, and until this becomes the pragmatic goal and pursuits of leaders, more so church leaders, institutions like the church cannot achieve its goal which is essentially service.

The Blackabys insist that Jesus has established the model for Christian leaders and to that model church leadership must return if the contemporary church must be revitalized to fulfill her divine intent. Comprehensively, the Blackabys note that:

If Jesus provides the model for spiritual leadership, then the key is not for leaders to develop visions and to set the direction for their organizations. The key is to obey and to preserve everything the Father reveals to them of his will. Ultimately, the Father is the leader. God has the vision of what He wants to do. God does not ask leaders to dream big dreams for him or to solve the problems that confront them. He asks leaders to walk with him so intimately that, when he reveals what is on his agenda, they will immediately adjust their lives to his will and the results will bring glory to God. This is not the model many religious leaders, let alone business leaders, follow today, but it encompasses what biblical leadership is all about (29).

Jesus' instruction for church leaders remain: NOT SO WITH YOU. And the task of church leaders is one- to adjust their lives and leadership practice to the will of God and watch the results bring glory to God. Pragmatically, Greg Orgden (2007:184-185) notes that when servant leadership is incarnate in the church, the following characteristics should describe church leaders and leadership:

1. *Church leaders and leadership should be secure, knowing that God values them*

Indeed, servanthood will be impossible without a deep conviction of one's worth and dignity; yet the true test of one's understanding and conviction of his worth and dignity remains servanthood. Jesus, in John 13:3-4, for instance, demonstrated servanthood freely because He knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so, taking the role of a servant, washing the disciples' feet was not going to change that. Church leaders are, therefore, challenged to take time to periodically rediscover and reaffirm their worth and dignity in God so they can be secure to serve others without feelings of threat.

2. *Church leaders and leadership should exude joy as they serve others through their encouragement, support and counsels.*

Indeed, by asking leaders to serve, Jesus only gave leaders the key or secret of joy. It is just as Albert Schweitzer submits earlier: ...The ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

3. *Church leaders and leadership should not need credit for their ideas or visions*

This will be incredibly so because they will now glory in the growth of the kingdom of God and not in men whom they serve after all.

4. *Church leaders and leadership should be more relational and involved in the life of the parishioners.*

Realizing their equality with others before Christ and shunning trappings of authority and status, Church leaders and leadership would achieve more for God and with the people as they become more relationally involved in love and care for the parishioners.

5. *Church leaders and leadership should base their greatness on sacrifice and not their position or status; and their eternal reward on God's sovereign decision, not on their works (even of sacrifice)*

Jesus pointed out the ignorance and misconception in James and John. Truly, they had some special status with Jesus as earlier noted in the literary analysis, but that does not automatically qualify them for a seat with Jesus in His glory. Jesus redirects them to sacrifice; He said to them "You don't know what you are asking...Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (Mark 10:38-40). By extension to the rest of the disciples, Jesus said "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom to many." (Mark 10:45). Diana Fassel (1998), however, raises a matter of germane concern to servant leadership. He retorts, how can the concept of servant leadership be pragmatically, yet astutely, adopted in a workaholic society? This is important as some naïve individuals (even pastors), indeed, become workaholics in the name of servant-leadership. Being a workaholic, as conceptualized by Fassel, means "an addiction to incessant internal and/or external activity with the belief that if I were not active, I would have no right to be or exist." (219). People with this syndrome (Workaholics) "measure self-worth in terms of accomplishment of tasks and suffers from the sense that there is never enough time to do all that needs doing and so one always come up short." (29). Fassel, citing Erik Erikson, says to be servant-leaders at heart, pursue work, love and play in equal measure. (223). "When we put our work before ourselves, we lose ourselves to work. Ultimately we lose the work." (229). And finally, Greenleaf, cited by Fassel, advocates withdrawal without feeling guilty. He says:

The ability to withdraw or reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important- and the important from the urgent- and to attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else (228).

Servant leadership can be all joy and stress-free even in a workaholic society. Church leaders should learn to withdraw and pursue love and play in equal measure.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus has instructed and modeled leadership by servanthood and sacrifice for the church as elucidated in the literary analysis of Mark 10:42-45. The historical background to that passage and its literary analysis established its historical reliability and contemporary relevance to modern concept of leadership. And it remains true and contemporarily relevant, even to the amazement of secular thinkers and writers, that the wisest and most effective way to lead is to serve. To serve does not denigrate a leader neither does it produce weakness in leadership; "Servant leaders still do the things leaders do - direct, organize, envision. But with servanthood qualifying Leadership, the kingdom of God - not one's personal fiefdom-becomes our motivation and shapes our style of leadership" (Maxwell, 185). Church leaders are, thus, challenged to embrace this time-tried, tested and proved Biblical principle as their primary preoccupation in church leadership. Only then can the church be the church and do the work she is purposed to do in the world.

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