

Christian in the modern world: S. S. Averintsev's mission

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Abstract. The methods of study and presentation by S. Averintsev Orthodox Christian tradition were considered. The role of the semiotic method in the study of Christianity by Averintsev was defined and the relationship of this method and content of the results of his research was revealed. The identified errors in the presentation of Orthodox theology are considered as the result of ignoring a number of significant texts of the Orthodox tradition. Methods: description, comparison, analysis, contextual and semiotic analysis. It is established that semiotics is an actual direction of study in modern science, and the semiotic method was used by Averintsev in the study of early Byzantine literature. In particular, the scholar used diffusive and functional approaches when considering texts, paying attention to the context of the use of a language unit, which is a sign of the semiotic method. Errors of S.S. Averintsev in the presentation of Orthodox theology (in sophiology and mariology) are the result of incorrect application of the semiotic method, ignoring the essential texts that create the context of the studied tradition. The analysis of the semiotic approach used by S. S. Averintsev in the study of culture, presented in this article, has not been carried out before. It is concluded that all essential texts of the tradition must be taken into account for authentic presentation of Orthodox theology, which is facilitated by the use of the semiotic method.

1 Introduction

When we talk about a modern man, we are not interested in an abstract concept, we are interested in a specific real person in the modern world. Since a man is not only a biological species, a body, but also a person with a worldview and cultural identity, it is important to study this aspect of personality. It is the worldview that determines in many ways the life of a person and the history of society.

In the history of European civilization, Orthodox Christianity is of significant importance. A person who wants to correlate the phenomena of modern culture with the Orthodox worldview is faced with the task of authentic interpretation and translation of the content of the Orthodox tradition.

In Soviet Russia, a state policy of militant atheism was pursued, which was covered by the wording about the separation of Church and state and freedom of religion. Those who did not share the state ideology were subjected to repression (Rupova R.M. (2016) Religious and

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philosophical ideas and ecclesiastical education of the Russian émigré community). The most difficult time for the Church – the 20s and 30s of the XX century-is stained with the blood of many new martyrs and confessors of The Russian Church, who were oppressed and killed for their Orthodoxy and faith in Christ. Later, after Second World war, the persecution was not so severe, but in secular universities the discipline "scientific atheism" was officially taught, and young people were tried by all means to prevent them from making any steps towards the temple. The state tried to prevent men with higher education from entering Orthodox seminaries, spiritual educational institutions, which at that time were only three in the entire country.

However, even during this period, a person interested could touch the heritage of Christian spiritual culture. Sergey Averintsev made a great contribution to the Christian mission and the development of interest in theology on the territory of the USSR. In 1969, at the Department of art history of Moscow state University, he began teaching Byzantine aesthetics. There is a lot of evidence that when Averintsev taught, the classrooms were full. Some students even stayed indoors overnight to be able to listen to these lectures the next day. Two years later, he was forced to stop this activity, as the management of the faculty banned his lectures for "religious propaganda". Speaking about the beauty of the culture of Byzantium, Sergei Averintsev could not help but talk about what this culture was inspired by, and what made up its semantic content – about the Christian faith, about Jesus Christ. Thus, the scholar interpreted and translated the content of the Orthodox tradition in soviet times and was one of the first to have experience in analyzing Orthodox culture using the semiotic method. Of course, this is his great contribution to the cause of enlightenment and mission, and many have learned the beauty of Christianity through him. In fact, he was a missionary. It is proposed to consider the methods that he used in the study of Christianity, and their impact on the interpretation of the Christian cultural heritage by modern man.

In modern Russia, there is a completely different attitude to religion: theology is studied in universities. Now scientists recognize the defining and positive role of religion in the emergence of human culture (Melikov I.M., Gezalov A.A. (2014) Dialogue of cultures and culture of dialogue: conceptual basis). Theology studies precisely religious doctrines. There was a need for specialists, experts in the field of Christian theology. They talk about the need to study traditional religions and promote the development of traditional religious organizations [1]. How well the content of the theology course in higher education corresponds to the actual spiritual tradition depends on the methods used by its researchers. The lectures of high school teachers and the writings of modern theologians do not always fully reflect the theological content of the Orthodox tradition. Russian Orthodox Church's Synodal theological commission's response to A.I. Osipov's incorrect presentation of the Orthodox doctrine of the Eucharist, published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church's Educational committee, is an example. Let's consider the literature devoted to the analysis of the methodology of S. S. Averintsev's research of texts affecting theological problems.

The method of S. S. Averintsev researched Sedakova O. A., Dobrokhotov A. (article 2008), Kvitkov G. G. (thesis, 2013), the Kovelman A. B (article 2017) and Y. V. Balakshin (article 2019). English-language authors practically do not mention Averintsev's surname at all. It should be noted that none of them mentions the semiotic aspect of Averintsev 's methodology. The author of this article is interested in this aspect in its connection with the results of the scholar's research, his theological conclusions in the first place.

The question of the theological authenticity of the works of S. S. Averintsev was first raised by Professor of the Moscow theological Academy N. K. Gavryushin (1946-2019) in his book "In the footsteps of the knights of Sofia".

The first volume of the Orthodox Encyclopedia does not address this issue. It is stated that S. S. Averintsev was awarded the L. Lukas Foundation prize (1995) "for efforts aimed

at returning to the Christian heritage and mutual rapprochement of peoples", analyzed early Byzantine literature in its connection with the heritage of the Christian fathers of the Church (i.e., theological thought), and headed the group for the study of Christian culture at Moscow state University.

The theological aspect of S. S. Averintsev's works is also highlighted by O. A. Sedakova, candidate of Philology, honorary doctor of theology of the European University for the Humanities (b.1949). however, she does not examine how correctly Averintsev expounded Orthodox theology. However, it is important to note that Sergey Sergeyeovich's lectures prompted many to accept the Christian faith, and many of his listeners chose the path of monasticism and the priesthood.

A review of the literature devoted to the works of Averintsev revealed the absence of any works devoted to the analysis of the semiotic aspect of his methodology for studying cultural phenomena. There are also no studies of the influence of this method on the theological conclusions of Averintsev. On this basis, the **aim** of this study is formulated as follows: it is necessary to consider the methods of study and presentation Orthodox Christian tradition by Averintsev, to define the role of the semiotic method in the study by the scholar of Christianity and to evaluate the application of this method with the contents of the results of his research.

2 Tasks

- describe and analyze the semiotic method used by Averintsev in the study of the Christian tradition;
- identify some of the theological topics addressed by Averintsev;
- analyze the theological texts that it refers to;
- analyze the interpretation of these texts by Averintsev;
- to compare his interpretation with the doctrine of the Orthodox Church.

3 Hypothesis

Errors of S.S. Averintsev in the presentation of Orthodox theology (in sophiology and mariology) are the result of incorrect application of the semiotic method, ignoring the essential texts that create the context of the studied tradition.

4 Materials and methods

The material for this research is S. S. Averintsev's works on early Byzantine literature and the history of Christian culture, since he covered theological issues in the course of teaching Byzantine aesthetics at Moscow state University from 1969 to 1971.

Methods: description, comparison, contextual, semiotic analysis.

5 Subjects

Averintsev's texts on early Byzantine literature and the history of Orthodox culture, which explore and expound Christian theology.

6 Results

It was necessary to consider the methods of studying and presenting the Orthodox Christian tradition By S. S. Averintsev, to find out how the semiotic method influenced the study of Christianity by the scholar. To this end, they were analyzed.

It is established that semiotics is an actual direction of study in modern science, and the semiotic method was used by the researcher in the study of early Byzantine literature. In particular, S.S. Averintsev used diffusive and functional approaches when considering texts, paying attention to the context of the use of a language unit, which is a sign of the semiotic method.

As a result of this research, it was found that Averintsev's statement that in the Orthodox tradition the most Holy Mother of God is the center of being, concerning which there is self-determination and division of good and evil, and the judgment of God is carried out, contradicts the Orthodox faith in Jesus Christ, Who in Christianity is called the judge and separates good and evil beings from each other at the Last Judgment. There is a shift of emphasis from christocentricity mariocentricity, which is not characteristic of Orthodoxy.

It is revealed that S. S. Averintsev inconsistently applied the semiotic method when analyzing the figure of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, since he ignored important texts of saints Basil the Great and Gregory the theologian on this topic, resulting in statements about the Orthodox tradition that do not correspond to reality: Averintsev claimed that the image of Wisdom cannot be identified with the Logos, and the mentioned Holy fathers, whose works are a model of Orthodox Tradition, did exactly this. The influence of the semiotic method on Averintsev's judgments has also not been previously considered. The author states that the above-mentioned statement of S. S. Averintsev is the result of imperfect application of the semiotic method, and not a direct consequence of the very fact of using this method.

7 Discussion

7.1 Semiotic method in the works of S. S. Averintsev

The word "semiotics" itself comes from the Greek word *σημειον* – sign. This science is relatively new, the word itself was first used by J. Locke, and a powerful impetus for its development was given by C. S. Pierce. The semiotic method involves the study of any cultural phenomenon as a text, that is, as a set of signs. Modern researchers reveal semiotic aspects in completely different fields of knowledge, so we can say that semiotics claims to be the metalanguage of science. We can mention the works of the following authors that demonstrate the interdisciplinary level of semiotics: Gilles Merminod , Marcel Burger (2020) [2], Gabrielle Hodge, Lindsay N. Ferrara, Benjamin D. Anible (2019 article) [3], Hamed Goharipour (2019 article) [4], Valerio Targon (2018) [5], Marianne Nabil Guirguis, Khaled M. Dewidar, Shaimaa M. Kamel, Maged F. Iscandar (2018) [6], Søren Brier (2017) [7], Oana Culachea, Daniel Rareș Obadă (2014) [8], Kirsten L. Ellison (2014) [9], Nelly Shafik Ramzy (2013) [10], Gabitov Tursyn, Kulsariyeva Aktolkyn, Sultanbayeva Gulmirac, Zhanabayeva Dinara, Zhumashova Zhuldyz Amanbaevna (2013) [11], Bengu Batua (2012) [12], Tetsuo Sawaragi (2010) [13].

The phrase "semiotic method" can be considered a general term that denotes both a separate application of such methods as functional or diffusive, and a set of approaches that reveal the symbolic nature of a cultural phenomenon. The functional approach allows you to identify the function of a sign unit in the system, in the general context of other sign units. The diffusion method detects external influences and borrowings in the text under consideration.

S. S. Averintsev applied the mentioned method in his works on early Byzantine literature. Considering the Areopagite corpus, he explains what is the function of certain techniques used in this theological treatise, in particular, he demonstrates that the author of the Areopagite corpus created such phrases that, when interpreted literally, show the reader their antinomianism, inconsistency in order to bring his consciousness to understand the fact of the ineffability of the deity, "going beyond the word".

Using the diffusion method, S. S. Averintsev traces the influence of ancient culture on the patristic writing of the fourth century when analyzing the poem of St. Gregory the theologian " Oh, Exceeding all!..". As S.S. Averintsev writes, St. Gregory of Nazianzus borrows the ancient form, filling it with a completely new, Christian content.

7.2 S.S. Averintsev's interpretation of the biblical concept of Sophia and its criticism by professor N.K. Gavrushin

S. S. Averintsev in his research of early Byzantine literature and its influence on Russian culture paid special attention to the biblical concept of Sophia the Wisdom of God and its role in the culture of Byzantium and Ancient Russia. He wrote about this in detail in the collection "Sophia – Logos", partially touched on this topic also in the work "Poetics of early Byzantine literature". Let's consider the available texts of Averintsev dedicated to the Wisdom of God.

The researcher reflects on the following words of the Holy Scripture: "the Lord had me ("creating me" in Church Slavonic – P. K.) as the beginning of his path... I was an artist with Him, and I was joyous every day, rejoicing before His face " (Proverbs 8). Here are his thoughts on this: "What we read here is neither transcendence as Such nor immanence as such, but the meeting point of both; the joy of the Creator is shared with His creation and received by it" (Averintsev S.S. Sofia-Logos. Dictionary. Second, revised edition. – Kiev: Duh i Litera,).

Elsewhere Averintsev writes: "So it was not a simple re-creation of pagan mythologies and Gnostic heresies, but rather the internal need of the Christian experience for the symbolic figure of Sophia to be closely associated not only with Christ incarnate, but also with the personal instrument Of his Incarnation, representing in this instrumental function the Creation as a whole, i.e., with the Virgin.

A 12th-century Latin inscription in the roman church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, which belonged to those Greeks who revered icons and were exiled by the iconoclasts, openly names the Virgin the Wisdom of God. In the same era, the reading of chapters 8-9 of Proverbs was liturgically associated with the feasts of the mother of God both in the East and in the West.

In the Russian manuscript of the XVII century, Sophia is defined as "the soul of unspeakable virginity", i.e. the essence of the purity that is necessary for the creation, once created immaculate, so that it remains open to its Creator and was thus accepted into communion with Him" (Averintsev S.S. Sofia-Logos. Dictionary).

However, the Christological interpretation not only did not exhaust the essence of Sophia for patristic figures, and later for Byzantine scholars, but could not have a completely literal meaning. Before we are convinced of this from the texts, let us consider two a priori proofs of this. The first dogmatic: after all, the Wisdom of the old Testament says that God "created" it "a beginning of His ways," and if Origen in the ante-Nicene era through its unorthodox Christology might relate these words to the second Person of the Trinity, after the Arian disputes to speak of the created Logo was unthinkable. If there is even a shadow of "created" nature in wisdom, then It can be equated with the Son in a certain system of relations, but not identified with Him in the proper sense of the word. Christ "is" Wisdom, but the Wisdom is still not "there" Logos. The second proof refers not to the dogmatic, but to the figurative

level: from the ancient Judeo-Hellenic figure of Wisdom – the all – conquering mother's womb of being, the caring mistress of the cosmic "house-building" - it is impossible to exclude its feminine features. Of course, we should be careful not to see in Sofia "Eternal Femininity" in the modernizing-sentimental sense that was assigned to this symbol by Gottfried Arnold or Vladimir Solovyov: Sophia is feminine in just such a way that this cannot in the least prevent her from symbolizing Christ. An example will help explain the case. The Byzantine exegesis saw the figure of the Wisdom of God in the woman from the gospel parable, searching for the lost drachma" (Averintsev S.S. Sofia-Logos. Dictionary).

It is impossible not to mention the view of the bright memory of Nikolai Gavryushin, professor of the Minsk and Moscow theological academies, on the correlation of S. S. Averintsev's theses with Orthodox dogmatics. It seems that here it is necessary to compare the positions of S. S. Averintsev, N. K. Gavryushin and Orthodox Tradition and doctrine.

The work of N. K. Gavryushin, which mentions S. S. Averintsev and his sophiology, is called "In the footsteps of the knights of Sofia". In chapter «"...and the Greeks seek after wisdom" – Notes on sophiology" the thinker writes about Averintsev: "as the main premise, he unconditionally accepts the Arian interpretation of the famous verse of Proverbs. VIII, 22." After all, - writes S.S. Averintsev – the Wisdom of the Old Testament says that God "created" it "as the beginning of His ways" – and if Origen in the pre-Nicene epoch and within the framework of his unorthodox christology could refer these words to the Second Person of the Trinity, then after the Arian disputes to speak about the creation of the Logos was unthinkable. If there is even a shadow of the created nature in wisdom, then It can be equated with the Son in a certain system of relations, but not identified with him in the proper sense of the word. Christ "is" Wisdom, but the Wisdom is still not "there is" Logos".

With this simple logical move, S. S. Averintsev determined that the Orthodox tradition, which for almost two millennia identifies Wisdom with the Logos, should be considered nonexistent... It is difficult to believe that S. S. Averintsev, who apparently passed all the degrees of philological initiations, was mistaken because of ignorance of the texts. Apparently, the created Sofia demands victims... "(Gavryushin N.K. In the footsteps of the knights of Sofia).

Thus, Gavryushin saw here a discrepancy in Averintsev's interpretation of the mentioned passage in the book of Wisdom of the orthodox exegesis tradition. Of course, it should be noted at once that N. K. Gavrushin points out that Averintsev agrees with the Arian interpretation of only this fragment of the text, no one attributes to Averintsev the Arian denial of the consubstantiality of the Son of God to God the Father. In his dictionary "Sophia – Logos" in the article "Heresy", S. S. Averintsev mentions Arianism as one of the main deviations from Orthodoxy. The article "Logos" the scholar writes that Christian dogma asserts "substantial identity" of the Logos to God the Father. S. S. Averintsev well aware that the Orthodox tradition holds the doctrine that the Word is the Second person of the Trinity and that the Word became incarnate for our salvation. And he does not dispute this tradition.

Does the quotation mentioned by N. K. Gavrushin reveal the problem of correlation between the semiotic method used by Averintsev and his theological conclusions? Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (as well as Saint Basil the Great (Saint Basil The Great, Archbishop Of Caesarea Of Cappadocia. Compositions. vol 1: Dogmatic and polemical compositions. Exegetical works. Conversations) refers this phrase from the Book of Proverbs both to the divine essence of the Logos and to its created human nature. Saint Gregory the Theologian writes: "So, who will argue that Wisdom is called creation by earthly birth, and being born – by birth the first and more incomprehensible?" (Compositions of our Holy father Gregory the theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople) it would seem that the commentary of S. S. Averintsev quite fits into the framework of the Orthodox tradition.

However, in triadology and christology, the concepts of essence and person are distinguished. Saints Gregory the Theologian and Basil the Great refer this quotation about

Wisdom to both the Face and the two essences of Christ. And they explain that The same Person, which is called Wisdom, is uncreated according to the deity and created according to humanity. Averintsev writes clearly: "if Origen... could refer these words to the Second Person of the Trinity, then after the Arian controversies to speak of the creation of the Logos was unthinkable." In other words, according to the scholar, these words of Scripture are not applicable to the Face of the Son of God. And here he comes into conflict with the mentioned Holy Cappadocians. In fact, they correlated the figure of Wisdom with the Second Person of the Trinity.

If we consider how S. S. Averintsev applies the method of semiotic analysis in the study of the figure of Wisdom, and compare it with the fact of contradiction of the Christian tradition of interpretation of Scripture, which is mentioned by N.K. Gavryushin, it becomes clear that this error of Averintsev against historical truth is not the result of his application of the semiotic method, namely, the lack of consistency in its application. The professor compares the sign-word and the sign-visual image "Wisdom" with various meanings in which it was used in Christian culture, but did not take into account some of them, and interpreted the rest according to his hypothesis. He states that the figure of Wisdom had significance not only for the Second Person of the Trinity, and this is part of the procedure of semiotic analysis. But then Averintsev makes a factual error and makes a conclusion based on it.

7.3 S.S. Averintsev's interpretation of the Akathist to the Mother of God and orthodox theology

Let us consider how S.S. Averintsev's theological theses relate to the Orthodox Tradition in his analysis of the Akathist to the most Holy Mother of God. Then we will find out whether the semiotic method used by the scholar influenced his conclusions.

The researcher writes that the most Holy Mother of God in the Akathist dedicated to Her is placed in the center of the universe for the implementation of Divine judgment over it. Good – on the right, evil-on the left. The Mother of God Herself is the wonder of Angels and the sting of devils.

He compares the phonetic, logical and syntactic structures of the Akathist to the Mother of God, noting their semantic relationship. The Professor draws our attention to a fragment of icos:

"Rejoice, wordy wonder of angels!

Rejoice, many-tearful wounding of demons!"

In this text, the sound system shades the logical one. Each word of the first verse is consonant with the word of the second, which occupies the same place in the order of the sentence, but the opposite of it in meaning.

However, in all these cases, Averintsev considers not just the structure itself, but the context in which it is used. This context is first indicated by comparing the various structures of a single couplet, and then found in their comparison with the theological and philosophical meaning of the entire work. The symmetry of hyretisms places the figure of the blessed Virgin in the center, with good and evil located on the right and left. "Center and given as a guide to the right identified itself as right and left – as left to be done "the court" that the good was in some kind of ritual separated from evil and set in front of him. Being is dissected strictly along the axis of symmetry, and this is "judgment"" (Averintsev S.S. *The Poetics of Early Byzantine Literature*).

The researcher draws the reader's attention to the symmetry of hyretisms, which emphasizes this division of good and evil in the face of the Virgin Mary. One might say that Averintsev here attaches too much importance to the figure of the Mother of Jesus. He is not talking about Jesus Christ, but about His Mother. But the fact is that the professor only comments on the text of the hymn, the author of which writes about the most Holy Theotokos.

And this does not contradict the christocentricity of Orthodoxy. First, when we open the gospel, we see that God's judgment is carried out through his servants: "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (Matt. 13:49), says Christ. Of course, these angels are not the axis of judgment. And the judgment is ultimately made by the Lord Jesus Christ, but His angels, his creatures, are the servants of this Judgment. Not only disembodied spirits are such servants, but also people. In another place of Scripture we read: "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil " (Rom. 13: 4).

A special reverence for the Mother of God is characteristic of Orthodoxy, as evidenced by the text of the prayer, which is performed every day in the Orthodox Church and in the home of believers: the virgin Mary is magnified as "the most reverent than Cherubims and the most glorious than Seraphims without comparison" (Mother of God // The Orthodox Encyclopedia / under the general editorship of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and all Russia. - Moscow: church-scientific center "The Orthodox Encyclopedia", vol. 5: Bessonov-Bonvech), that is, having more honor than the Cherubims, and glory incomparably greater than the Seraphims, angels who are flaming with love for God, standing before His throne and calling to each other "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Sabaoth." Seraphims and Cherubims are the highest angelic orders.

The very idea of judgment and the separation of good and evil is quite typical of Christianity, which is confirmed by the words of the Saint Apostle Paul: "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

On the other hand, it is still possible to see in the above interpretation of S. S. Averintsev a certain excess in the assessment of the role of the most Holy Mother of God in this Court. In the Gospel, we see that Jesus points to Himself as the center of this Judgment on humanity, and not to His Mother. The compiler of the Akathist, as we can interpret in turn, meant that the virtues acquired by the most Holy Mother of God and Her concern for Christians are the cause of the joy of angels and the sorrow of demons. The author of the Akathist does not use the word "court", does not resort to legal terminology (at least in the places quoted by Averintsev), so we can conclude that using objective data analyzed using the semiotic method, the scientist interpreted according to his personal worldview, although not contradicting the facts. Strictly speaking, logically, the thesis that the mother of God is the axis of the universe, relative to which the judgment of God is carried out, does not follow from the symmetry of the heresisms quoted above. It is difficult to say whether Averintsev's philocalism affects here, but we can definitely conclude that the scholar's idea of the special role of the Mother of God is repeated here. It is she Whom he identifies with Sophia the Wisdom of God, and not only the Second Person of the Trinity, which was criticized by the late N.K. Gavrushin, and it is the mother of God in his interpretation of the Akathist that Averintsev calls the center, relative to which good and evil are divided. Some offset from christocentricity mariocentricity in the Catholic spirit, it is possible to see.

This leads to the conclusion that, like any tool, semiotic inference does not guarantee the absoluteness of conclusions. Semiotics allows us to consider texts and cultural phenomena in a more comprehensive way, but interpretation always inevitably depends on the subject, who puts the facts under consideration, like a LEGO constructor, into his own concept. According to U. Eco the reader creates the text itself in a way (Eco Umberto. The role of The Reader. Researches on semiotics of the text).

8 Conclusion

It should be concluded that when studying and presenting the Christian heritage, the researcher should try to distinguish the text that reflects the worldview of a particular tradition from his own interpretation of this text, without identifying them. In modern culture, there is such a phenomenon as a change in the semantic content of terms [14], words and concepts, which makes it difficult to adequately understand and present traditional theological texts. Here it is also important to consider that theology is precisely the control of meanings, and the understanding of Christian dogmas in its entirety is not available to the human mind. The task of the theologian is to convey knowledge about the theological positions and moral precepts of Orthodoxy as authentic as possible to a modern man. It is necessary to take into account Averintsev's experience. The semiotic method as a consideration of cultural phenomena as a set of signs [15] can serve for this work when it is consistently applied.

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