



# connect

A Newsletter for High School Religion Teachers, Campus Ministers, and Principals  
Compliments of Saint Mary's Press • October 2002

## featuring

### “Our Millennials, Our Children, Our Future”

Gloria Thornburg



In *The Old Hermit's Almanac*, Edward Hays declares one day to be “Ain't Today's Youth Bad?” Day. He suggests it might be a time to mourn the sad state into which our modern youth have fallen and asks the reader to reflect on this quotation: “Our youth love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders, and love to chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not servants of their households. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, gobble up their food, and tyrannize their teachers.” Sound like the youth

of America in 2002? Perhaps you've recognized these words already: they were written by Socrates in 400 B.C. For some, the message is that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Or perhaps the message is that educators have always worried about youth; we have always seen them as our best—yet somewhat uncertain—hope for the future.

Someone once said that adolescence is more than a life stage; it is a predicament we all live through. Today, approximately seventy million people born between 1980 and 1996, the largest group of teenagers in American history, are living through this predicament. They are called Generation Y (preceded by Generation X, now in their twenties), the Echo-Boomers (children of the original Baby Boomers), or the Millennials (because they are coming of age at the beginning of the new millennium). Those who have studied them tell us that they are confident and expressive of their own individuality, traditional yet leery of institutions, altruistic, civic-minded, and concerned about the environment.

### Defining Event

It seems clear that any discussion of high school students today must take into account the events of September 11, 2001, the day, it has been said, that one world ended and a new one began. That was the day that the vast ocean separating us from the rest of the world and insuring our freedom shrank away to nothing as the headlines from Israeli and Palestinian cities were being enacted right in our own backyard. The huge black cloud enveloping the streets of New York City enveloped our psyches also.

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## in touch

Right about this time in the school year, you may be starting to ask yourself, “Why do I do it?” A month ago, your pencils were newly sharpened; now they're beginning to dull. The crisp, clean pages of your grade book are beginning to look just a bit dog-eared, and your desk drawer, so tidy on the first day of school, is becoming a jumble. This is the time when you may need to remind yourself why you teach. For most of you, it's the kids. They're your focus, and they're our focus in this issue of *Connect*.

In our feature article, Gloria Thornburg explores what makes this particular crop of students different from those you've taught before, and she proposes ways to meet their unique needs. “From the classroom” author Kat Crawford shares some wisdom about classroom management gleaned from her own experience as well as that

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## “Our Millennials”

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September 11 has forever changed our society, and unquestionably it is a day that had a tremendous impact on the youth of America. Whether they express their feelings or not, most teenagers, like most adults, have been deeply affected. The world seems less secure, life seems more fragile, and there is less certainty that there will even be a future. As a campus minister, I see the impact of September 11 in various ways: our students seem more reflective about life and death, about right and wrong, about America's role in the world, and about the role God plays in events like this. Our students seem to have a greater awareness, perhaps a greater appreciation, of everyday things now that they have seen how much can be lost in a moment. So when I consider today's teenagers, everything I say about them is colored by the events of September 11. When I look at today's high school students, I see young people who accept diversity, who are idealistic, group-oriented, and technologically advanced.

### Diversity

On September 11, the world became much smaller. So as educators we must reverence diversity. Catholic high schools, by their very nature, are somewhat lacking in diversity: economically because the cost of tuition is prohibitive to some, racially because they tend to be heavily weighted with students and faculty of European ancestry, philosophically because they are Church-supported institutions. But our call is to mirror the world at large and teach our students to live in it. A comparative religions course can offer an opportunity to do this. By inviting adherents to other faiths to teach about their own religions, and by visiting the sacred places of other faiths, we can emphasize

all that unites us as human beings rather than what divides us.

The young people we teach have been encouraged to accept diversity since childhood, and this generation is characterized by tolerance. Yet much of the school violence in the recent past has been perpetrated by students who felt isolated and rejected. As Catholic educators, we must be vigilant in monitoring and promoting authentic tolerance. By adamantly insisting that students who do not fit the norm in dress or ability or preferences are treated with the utmost respect, we can live Gospel values as well as teach them.

### Idealism

Another characteristic of the Millennials is their idealism. In spite of September 11 and global unrest, they still see their future and themselves in the best possible light, transcending the reality of America at war against terrorism and the reality of the unsettled state of the world. These students seem to have higher self-esteem than students in the past. On retreat, I hear fewer stories about pain in family relationships than in previous years, and when asked who their heroes are, most teenagers name their parents immediately. The decline nationally in smoking and alcohol usage among teenagers, in the suicide rate for teenagers, and in teen pregnancies attests to an increase in self-esteem and to a willingness of teenagers to accept the values of their parents. In Catholic schools, retreat programs can promote self-esteem and idealism. In an exit interview at the end of senior year about what lasting value retreats had on the student's life, one student said: “I loved my retreats, and the general impression for me was that I was cared for, that I can make a difference and do things, and most of all that I can be

## in touch

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of teachers around the nation. Christine Schertz Navarro has been digging up resources that you'll want to use to help your students learn about Christian vocations and reflect on how God may be calling them.

“Why do I do it?” It's a great question to bring to prayer. I wouldn't be surprised if your reflections include some of the topics in this month's issue: a new batch of young people, classroom dynamics, vocation. Continued blessings on your work as you settle into a new school year.

Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever!

Lorraine Kilmartin  
Editor in Chief



forgiven. The general impression for me was to be ME. It taught me to shape myself the way I want.”

I find that this sense of self, the ability to be, know, and accept oneself—even love oneself—guides the students as they ask the big questions in life, such as: “Why am I here?” “What does it all mean?” “What does it mean to be fully human and fully alive?” This sense of self as “born to manifest the glory of God” serves as a cornerstone for decision making and planning for the future, and the students recognize that. In a class at the College of Mount Saint Joseph, in Cincinnati, Sr. Clare Fitzgerald cited a study conducted by the Jesuit Secondary Education Association that gathered input from students in Jesuit schools nationwide. Students were asked what they thought was most important to learn in the twenty-first century. You might

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## “Our Millennials”

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expect technology to be the number-one answer, but it came in third. Instead, students placed ethics and morality at the top of the list, followed by more retreats that would help them develop a deeper relationship with God. This seems to attest to an idealism and a belief in a world beyond the here and now.

### Community

Another defining characteristic of the Millennial Generation is their group orientation. Many young people were deeply touched by the heroism, tenderness, and community spirit elicited by the September 11 attacks. This generation has been focused on group experience since pre-school. They are perhaps the generation that began organized sports earliest, with T-ball and soccer teams. I see this group orientation now reflected in many areas of their lives: the high number of youth who are actively involved in church youth groups, the willingness to be a cooperative team player in athletics and in classroom situations, the renewed sense of belonging to a school community, the sense that together their generation can change the world. The Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, conducted a survey of teenagers in Catholic schools in which only 9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “What I want counts most.” Likewise, only 24 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “Faith is personal only.” In recent national surveys, teenagers blamed selfishness more than anything else for the problems facing the world.

Service opportunities abound in Catholic schools, and we should make every effort to see that students experience service as integral to the mission of the school and the development of the person. Concern for the community is a concept that is alive and well, familiar and

acceptable to this generation; we can build on this by teaching that a life rooted in community and caring for others is a sign that we are followers of Christ.

### Technology and Media

Perhaps the most recognizable characteristic of the Millennials is their technological expertise. They have even been called the “cut and paste” generation. For them, research is both harder and easier than ever before due to the vast amount of data on the Internet and the profusion of media available to them. Millennials want concrete, specific information, and they need clear, well-established guidelines for uncovering it themselves. Instruction in any class must integrate task and content. This means covering skills as well as content. Faith becomes as much a “doing” as a “believing” for these young people. In religion classes, we can help them “do” faith by focusing on spirituality, the life of the spirit, the life lived with God.

Millennials are additionally accustomed to visual images as a primary means of communication, and they crave stimulation. According to some theologians, imagination is becoming a lost art, which may weaken the impact of the Jesus story and of religion in general because the mystery of faith hinges on using the imagination. Our task must be to call these students to visualize themselves as better than they are, to see themselves as saints. We must assure them that they are capable of making a difference in the world. At my school, first-year students learn the mantra: “I am a valuable person. I have dignity and worth. What I do makes a difference.” It is one thing every graduate remembers. I find that students may forget facts, but they invariably remember this saying. We can

enlist the media to help us feed the imagination of our students. Films, television shows, and news coverage about heroes and helpers can all be our allies in this.

### Implications

The Millennial Generation, so like teenagers of the past and yet so very different, challenges us as teachers to be nothing less than authentic. The knowledge available to them, the depth of life experiences they have shared, the truly global village that they inhabit, and the passion for living the moment that makes sense of all the chaos they have seen combine to create a generation that hungers for more than textbook answers and traditional approaches. “We’re hungry to know God in a deeper way,” says Elisa Fryling, the twenty-five-year-old editor of Shaw Books (“Gen-X Marks the Spot,” *Publishers Weekly*, January 14, 2002, p. 30). She explains that authenticity is more important than credentials: “My generation sees authority that comes from your experiences, from the stories you tell. It’s about whether authors are living out what they believe, whether they have spiritual passion” (p. 30). Our students might say the same about their teachers. This is a generation of smart teenagers who take ownership of their intelligence and expect competence and passion from others. They learn best when teachers share their experiences, not just their expertise. Quite often, this means that we must have the courage to trust them, to connect with their emotional side, to let them express their fears and confusion. It also means that even amid our own confusion about the state of the world, our society, and our Church, we must continue to be role models who make good moral choices and believe in the goodness

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## from the classroom

### The Three Rs *by Kat Crawford*

What does it mean to manage a classroom? I asked teachers across the country to send me their thoughts about this topic, and the responses spoke to discipline, expectations, motivation, and student behavior. There were also comments about how some teachers struggle with this and others seem to just naturally have “it”—a presence that inspires, encourages, and nurtures a positive climate in the classroom. In a Catholic school, this healthy environment can also be a holy environment, a faith community. After sixteen years of teaching, I am convinced that classroom management really comes down to creating a faith community by means of the three Rs: respect, responsibility, and reverence.

**Respect.** An atmosphere of respect in the classroom is important for both teachers and students. In an interview for a teaching position, I was asked, “Do you believe respect is given or earned?” I still think about that question today and realize that my response is different now than it was twelve years ago. In a faith community, we do not wait for others to earn our respect: respect is a given. We are created in God’s image. The dignity we all possess is the basis for respect, and it also provides us with a challenge to look again and see with eyes that celebrate goodness and uniqueness in the young people sitting in our classrooms.

By the time young people are in high school, they already know what respect in the classroom looks like. For example, they know to speak one at a time; to listen to people and avoid engaging in side conversations; and to use good eye contact, appropriate body language,

and constructive language. Every day in the classroom, we have the opportunity to discuss, name, and reinforce these behaviors. As teachers, we model these behaviors and call them forth from our students. Respect is given, earned, and celebrated each day in the classroom.

**Responsibility.** It is critical to establish responsibility as a core value in the classroom. Responsibility starts with the teacher, in the care and preparation we take in planning our lessons. Of all the ideas from various classroom management courses, this was the most helpful piece of wisdom passed on to me: a well-planned lesson is your best strategy for discipline in the classroom. When a lesson includes meaningful and active learning that engages the students, there is no time for anything but learning.

Along with preparation, there are procedural needs that can range from requiring students to raise hands and type all papers to requiring them to take turns watering plants and leading prayer. Establishing classroom procedures and routines enables students to participate and be responsible. Education is a two-way street, and students must be responsible for their learning. Naming the behaviors for which students are responsible, such as bringing the needed materials to class and turning in work on time, is good practice and can easily be done at the beginning of a new course in a syllabus or handout. There is no one right way of managing a classroom and transforming it into a faith community. Rather, a teacher needs to know his or her own style and needs for success in the classroom.

**Reverence.** Every classroom can be a faith community. One way to make this happen is to nurture a climate that honors and deeply respects that Christ is indeed in our midst as we teach and learn. Discerning God’s presence and responding in prayer are wonderful ways of leading students to value reverence. They can also encourage reverence by embracing wonder, curiosity, and creativity themselves. Teachers can be alert to the sacred in their classroom and can invite their students to do the same.

Providing opportunities for reflection and evaluation can be an effective classroom management strategy. Teaching can incorporate questions into a test or an assignment that lead students to evaluate their own growth in the areas of respect, responsibility, and reverence. This gives students an opportunity to personalize and affirm their progress as well as to challenge them to continue growing.

Classroom management in a Catholic school can combine the best of educational practices with what we know about building faith community. Fostering a collaborative and celebratory environment where learning is centered in Christ can happen in any number of ways. But I would speculate that whenever our students experience the classroom as a faith community, the teacher has nurtured the three Rs—respect, responsibility, and reverence—and each of them is present in real and tangible ways.

*Kat Crawford, a former development editor and writer for Saint Mary’s Press, has taught for seventeen years. She is now teaching drama in the Louisville public school system.*

## resource reviews

by Christine Schmertz Navarro

### Teaching About Vocations

#### A CD-ROM for You and Your Students

*God's Design*, a CD-ROM produced by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, offers tools that both you and your students will find useful. The "Getting to Know Me" section gives students the opportunity to reflect on their own vocational call. The "Information Central" section contains a glossary that includes a number of terms about religious life and the priesthood as well as information about other relevant matters. The "Getting to Know God" section presents prayer in different styles, and the "Church Vocations" section shows video clips of people in different religious vocations who witness to their own call. The "Family and Friends" section presents more clips about how people have shared their calling with loved ones. This CD-ROM is attractive because of its diversity of vocations, age groups, and ethnicities. Available from the National Coalition for Church Vocations, 5420 South Cornell Avenue, Suite 105, Chicago, IL 60615-5604; phone 800-671-NCCV; Web site [www.nccv-vocations.org](http://www.nccv-vocations.org); e-mail [nccv400@aol.com](mailto:nccv400@aol.com).

#### Three Videos from the USCCB

The following videos are available for \$29.95 each from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 3211 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194; phone 800-235-8722; Web site [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

*To Last a Lifetime* (1999, 58 minutes). This video is an engaging window into the lives of several couples. The first couple is preparing for marriage; the second couple is newly married, and the third

couple is recommitting to their marriage after a period of separation. With personal reflections, clips from well-married couples, and presenters, the video does a good job of looking at the challenges and rewards of marriage.

*Answering God's Call, the Experience of Priesthood* (1997, 57 minutes). This video responds to the question "What is the life of a Catholic priest really like?" through the experiences of two priests. One priest has two parishes, traditionally Irish and German, in downtown Baltimore, while the other is the first African American priest in a historically African American parish in rural Maryland. The video takes viewers through the discernment process of these priests, introduces them to the parents of the priests, and exposes them to the joys and challenges of priests' parish ministry. Both priests are very approachable and are men whom many teens would easily respect and like. They enjoy being priests and convey that joy in this video. If the video is too long for your class, selected clips could give the students a good feel for who the priests are and why they like their ministry.

*A Different Path* (1996, 60 minutes). This video portrays the lives of religious women in two very different communities. The Sisters of Saint Joseph in Brooklyn actively work for social justice in their community and in the world by welcoming homeless women and their children to live in their convent. The Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri, is a contemplative community; the sisters pray for justice in the world. The video shows interviews with women in both communities, allowing them to share their sense of

call, as well as the struggles and joys they encounter in living their profession. Use this movie in two class sessions, pausing to discuss the active role of the sisters in Brooklyn in the first session, and then watching the section about the Benedictine sisters as part of a conversation about contemplative communities.

### Free Information About Students' World for Parents

*RETROspective: A Parent's Guide to Youth Culture* is from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. This free twenty-seven-page publication is designed to immerse parents in expressions of youth culture by giving them a guided tour through American youth culture from the 1950s to the present. The pamphlet offers a variety of things from a list of slang terms for illegal drugs to activities parents can do to build bridges with teens to a section on media literacy. Order from SAMHSA; phone 800-729-6686.

“ . . . ”

Teaching is a quest to help the young discover truth, beauty, and human community. It is a determined attempt to help each person, no matter how young or old, know her or his absolute value and discover a place of dignity and service in a larger community.

—S. Kevin Regan,  
*Religion Teachers:  
Your Mission, Your Message*  
(Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third  
Publications, 2000), page 1.

## from the press

### Vocations

The Vocations series helps your students consider the various Christian lifestyles and find one that best fits their personal-ity and talents.

The series helps them discern the vocation to which God is calling them. A married couple, a priest, a sister, a brother, and a single person help young

adults answer the fundamental questions “Who am I?” and “How am I uniquely called to live in the world?” Each of the five books in the series is priced at \$6.95.



### **An Inside Look: A Leader's Guide to the Vocations Series**

by Claire vanBrandwijk, offers you resources to facilitate the discernment process by offering discussions of vocational themes, reflect and respond questions, an interview guide, activities, imaginative role-plays, and case studies. The guide also provides ideas to promote vocational awareness in schools and parishes, prayer and retreat suggestions, and ways to evaluate cultural messages about

vocations. The guide covers all five books in the Vocations series and sells for \$16.95.



### From the Voices Series

**Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls**, by Janet Claussen, is the latest book in the Voices series, a

collection of resource manuals all about nurturing the spirituality of girls. *Biblical Women* offers you resources for helping girls discover new perspectives about both the familiar and the hidden stories of their biblical sisters. Journaling, prayer, handouts, and other materials highlight ways that women's and girls' lives of the past can be

relevant to girls' lives today. An appendix, “Voices of Biblical Women,” tells more than seventy first-person stories. This manual is available for \$24.95.



### News About the Good News!

You're probably familiar with *The Catholic Youth Bible* in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Did you know that *The Catholic Youth Bible* is now available in the New American Bible (NAB) translation too? Here is a brief summary of the differences:

#### NAB Translation

The translators of the NAB aimed to “convey as directly as possible the thought and style of the inspired writers.” The NAB is the official translation for use in the lectionary in the United States, and it has extensive footnotes and cross-references.



You may wish to use the NAB translation if

- you already own the NRSV and would like to compare and contrast translations
- you are engaged in lectionary-based study and reflection
- you are in an academic setting or study group that would make use of the extensive footnotes and cross-references

#### NRSV Translation

The translators of the NRSV aimed for a literal translation following the maxim “As literal as possible, as free as necessary.” The translation is also “sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism.” The NRSV is one of the primary translations cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English edition, and it is the official translation for use in the lectionary in Canada. You may wish to use the NRSV translation if

- you already own the NAB and would like to compare and contrast translations
- you wish to use the Bible with Christians of another denomination
- you wish to use a translation with greater gender-inclusive language in the Old Testament

The *Teaching Activities Manual for “The Catholic Youth Bible”* has been revised to allow for easy use with either translation!

## Bring Tom Zanzig to Your School!

Tom Zanzig, author of *Jesus of History, Christ of Faith* and *Understanding Catholic Christianity* as well as numerous parish education resources, has developed two new programs, a workshop and a retreat, for high school faculty.

In "Nurturing Catholic Identity in Teens: A Workshop on the Religious and Spiritual Formation of Adolescents," your high school faculty will explore such powerful questions as these:

- How does a sense of religious identity evolve through the life process?
- What does adolescent conversion look like?
- Were we ever their age? What does a Catholic teen look like today?
- What vision and skills do we need to effectively teach, guide, or minister to young people today?

In "Rhythms of the Spiritual Life: A Retreat on the Dynamics of Lifelong Conversion," the

group process is designed to enhance community and offer support for personal and community spiritual growth. Faculty will have an opportunity to ponder and pray together about questions like these:

- How does our understanding of the spiritual life hinder our growth as people?
- Can we discover the grace of God active in all the creases and corners of our life?
- Who might be our models and mentors for the journey of the spirit?
- What spiritual principles and practices might lead to health, wholeness, and happiness?

The cost for each program is \$995, plus Tom's travel, food, and lodging. To schedule a workshop or a retreat, contact Penny Koehler at [pkoehler@smp.org](mailto:pkoehler@smp.org). If you wish to speak with Tom directly, you can call him at Saint Mary's Press, 800-533-8095, or e-mail him at [tzanzig@smp.org](mailto:tzanzig@smp.org).

## "Our Millennials"

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of life and the love of God for all life.

The Millennial Generation hungers for someone to be the personal face of God, perhaps because their view of the Church has changed from previous generations. Cameron Strang, the twenty-five-year-old founder of Relevant Media Group, says, "There's lots of spiritual hunger among my generation, but traditional church has largely been irrelevant to them" ("Gen-X Marks the Spot," p. 29). God is, rather, very personal and very close: "I've always questioned the existence of God and the importance of religion; but I've learned how to be a spiritually healthy person and how to be gentle with myself. I don't think I'll ever be a

church person, but I know and understand myself better . . . seeing God in a different light and also seeing myself as a better person." These words, written by a member of my school's class of 2002, reflect the very individual faith expressions of teenagers today.

In summary, to teach Generation Y is to rely less on established doctrines and rituals but to become a more active part of the process, to share our own personal stories as well as elicit the sharing of theirs, to be authentic manifestations of the values, traditions, and beliefs we cherish while challenging these young people to be the same. I believe the deepest spiritual hunger for this generation is to feel that life

is meaningful and that each individual is significant. Rev. Robin Landerman Zucker says, in a sermon published on the Web site of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading, Massachusetts: "They are our Millennials, our children, our future—together, we can listen to their bright, thoughtful, expressive voices; believe in them; hold them close; set them free. . . . And watch them rise. Amen".

*Gloria Thornburg has an M.S. in Education and an M.A. in Spiritual and Pastoral Care. She has been a campus minister and teacher at Assumption High School in Louisville, Kentucky for twenty-two years.*

### Acknowledgments

The quotation on page 1 is from *The Old Hermit's Almanac*, by Edward M. Hays (Leavenworth, KS: Forest of Peace Publishing, 1997), page 160. Copyright © 1997 by Edward M. Hays.

The information on pages 2–3 about the Jesuit Secondary Education Association's study of what is important for students to learn in the twenty-first century was cited in a class called Spirituality of the Educator, which Sr. Clare Fitzgerald taught at the College of Mount Saint Joseph, in Cincinnati, in June 2002.

The statistics on page 3 are from a survey distributed by the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, in 2001, to Catholic high school students.

The quotations from Elisa Fryling and Cameron Strang on pages 3 and 7 are taken from "Gen-X Marks the Spot," by Heidi Schlumpf, in *Publishers Weekly*, January 14, 2002, pages 30 and 29.

The first quotations on page 6 is from the "Preface to the New American Bible: The Old Testament," in *The Catholic Youth Bible*, New American Bible translation (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2002), page xx.

The second and third quotations on page 6 are from "To the Reader," in *The Catholic Youth Bible*, New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), page xxiii.

The quotation on page 7 is from Rev. Robin Landerman Zucker, "Millennials Rising: Our UU Youth and Their Future," a sermon delivered February 3, 2002, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading, Massachusetts. Accessed at [www.uureading.org/sermons/sermon40.htm](http://www.uureading.org/sermons/sermon40.htm), July 15, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by Rev. Robin Landerman Zucker. All rights reserved. Material may be quoted with proper attribution.

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