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## FREEDOM AND DIALOGUE

**Abstrakt:** Współczesny świat jest zróżnicowany pod względem etnicznym, kulturowym, religijnym. Tworzenie społeczności, opartej na harmonii, z poszanowaniem różnorodności, wymaga dialogu w kontekście wolności.

Artykuł ukazuje wzajemne relacje między wolnością a dialogiem. Ukazuje trudności związane z określeniem pojęcia wolności, jej istotne komponenty, płaszczyzny, w jakich powinna realizować się. Prezentuje dialog jako spotkanie, wspólne dochodzenie do prawdy, kompromis i consensus w przestrzeni wolności.

Dialog jest rzeczywistym sposobem komunikacji międzyludzkiej, w której podmioty dążą do wzajemnego zrozumienia, zbliżenia i współdziałania. Zakłada on wolność jako wartość fundamentalną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wolność, dialog, prawda, kompromis, consensus.

**Abstract:** The modern world is diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Building a community based on harmony and respect for diversity requires dialogue in the context of freedom.

The article shows the mutual relations between freedom and dialogue. It shows the difficulties associated with defining the concept of freedom, its essential components, and the levels in which it should be realized. It presents dialogue as a meeting, common investigation into the truth, compromise and consensus in the space of freedom.

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KS. HENRYK SKOROWSKI – prof. dr. hab.; socjolog, pracuje na Uniwersytecie Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie. Pełni funkcję Koordynatora Międzynarodowego Centrum Dialogu Międzykulturowego i Międzyreligijnego UKSW. W latach 2010–2012 sprawował urząd rektora tej uczelni. Jest znanym na arenie międzynarodowej i krajowej specjalistą w dziedzinie socjologii, politologii i katolickiej nauki społecznej oraz jednym z najlepszych znawców teorii regionalizmu oraz problematyki praw człowieka. Posiada bogaty dorobek naukowy, dydaktyczny i organizacyjny. Wypromował 78 doktorów oraz ponad 400 magistrów.

Dialogue is a real mode of interpersonal communication in which actors strive for mutual understanding, rapprochement and cooperation. It presupposes freedom as a fundamental value.

**Key words:** freedom, dialogue, truth, compromise, consensus.

Without a doubt, we live in a world today: multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious. We live in a multi-diverse world. The building of community unity and the harmonious functioning of such diverse communities, both local, national and international, as well as denominational and religious, requires a great deal of effort on the part of both the leaders of individual communities and these social entities themselves. One of the essential elements of unity and harmony of coexistence and cooperation among multiple socio-cultural-religious entities is undoubtedly dialogue. Today, dialogue is the basis of unity with the preservation of multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity or multi-religion. In terms of dialogue, in turn, the fundamental element is the values on which it should be based. And about dialogue as the basis of social unity in the context of values, especially freedom, we want to talk today.

The Catholic Church first stated the principles of dialogue in the Instruction *De motione oecumenica* of December 20, 1949. However, a special sensitivity of the Church to the need for dialogue was revealed during the pontificate of John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra, Pacem in terris*) and Paul VI (*Ecclesiam suam*) and the Second Vatican Council (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Decree on Ecumenism, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions). In these documents, so to speak, the Church made a serious proposal for her dialogue with the world and all its civil and religious communities. Since then, dialogue in the space of freedom has become not only an element of the Church's social teaching, but also a method of its practical action and conduct within the framework of its contemporary reality.

### **Around the concept of freedom**

The basis of dialogue must be freedom. This means that any dialogue must proceed on the plane of freedom. It is then the keystone of all the values on which dialogue should be based. At this point, therefore, it is necessary to recall the Christian understanding of freedom.

In the light of Catholic social teaching, man is an ontologically free being. This means that freedom is not only a value of man, but a constituent element of his nature<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, man must be given the opportunity to realize and exercise freedom in the totality of everyday life. How should freedom be understood as the foundation of any dialogue?

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read: “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility” (CCC, n. 1731). This rather general statement calls for a deeper interpretation.

In the most general terms, it can be said that the very essence of freedom cannot be strictly defined. However, it can be done by highlighting certain elements that constitute its essence. The first of these is the distinction between so-called freedom “to” and freedom “from”. Repeatedly, the essence of freedom is grasped from the purely negative side, i.e., as if its fundamental dimension were the absence of any coercion and necessity. Meanwhile, the deepest and fundamental dimension of freedom is the ability of a person to make choices, decisions, a certain action. This is the so-called freedom “to” – freedom in the positive aspect<sup>2</sup>. The emphasis is on the person’s initiative in the form of the ability to decide for oneself. Only the second dimension of the Christian concept of freedom is its negative dimension captured and defined as the absence of compulsion and necessity. This is the so-called freedom “from”.

The second element that is fundamental when trying to define the essence of freedom is the distinction between so-called internal and external freedom. Freedom in the internal aspect is simply the power of a person to give him or her the ability to make choices and decisions about the world of his or her own beliefs, opinions, worldview, and therefore everything that concerns the world of the human interior. We can say that freedom in this dimension ultimately amounts to the internal autonomy of the person<sup>3</sup>. This autonomy, of course, of itself implies both freedom “to” and freedom “from”.

The second dimension of freedom is its external aspect, or so-called external or social freedom. It “plays out” externally within the framework of a person’s daily existence as the choice of a certain conduct, behavior,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, Orędzie na XIV Światowy Dzień Pokoju *Chcesz służyć pokojowi szanuj wolność*, 1 I 1981, in: *Nauczanie społeczne*, vol. 4, Warszawa 1984, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, Kraków 1969, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 140.

action. It is this “to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility” (CCC, n. 1731) – about which the Catechism speaks emphatically. This aspect of freedom is always understood as concrete freedom, the realization under certain conditions by the individual man. It is understood that this dimension of freedom also includes the so-called freedom “to” and freedom “from”.

The third element in understanding freedom is the good. This means that the essence of freedom does not consist in doing anything. Its actual limit is always set by the good. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read: “There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom” (CCC, n. 1733).

It is clear from the quoted statement that freedom properly understood is not freedom from the good, but freedom to choose the good. This means that the very core of freedom is always the choice of the good. In other words, the moral good known by man determines the proper space of human freedom. The choice of anti-good (evil), on the other hand, is always anti-freedom. This can be illustrated by the following example: human life is a good – a value. Its affirmation in any form is the space of true freedom. For it is a choice of good, The choice and decision not to affirm life as good is always a choice of anti-good, and thus is anti-freedom.

In conclusion of these reflections, it should be said that the correct understanding of freedom is freedom “to” and “from”, having its internal and external dimensions, the essence of which is always the choice of good.

Freedom understood in this way is guaranteed to man by law, which derives from the very fact of humanity. John Paul II states: “Man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:27), is inseparable from that freedom of which no external force or coercion can deprive him, and which constitutes a fundamental right as an individual and as a member of society”<sup>4</sup>.

What then constitutes the substantive content of the right to freedom? The specific content of this right concerns many dimensions and planes. The first is the religious plane, Taking into account the concept of freedom presented above, which is understood as freedom “to” and “from”, in the internal and external spheres, and whose essence is the choice of good,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, Orędzie na XIV Światowy Dzień Pokoju *Chcesz służyć pokojowi szanuj wolność*, p. 11.

the object of freedom in this plane is: the sphere of personal religious beliefs in accordance with the requirements of one's conscience, the cultic attitude expressed in private and public practices, daily existence based on the relevant principles derived from one's faith, the freedom to raise children in accordance with the principles of one's religion, to proclaim one's religious beliefs, to communicate them in word and written form, educational activities, etc.<sup>5</sup> The limit of freedom on this plane is always the good.

The second plane of detailed human freedom is the cultural plane. On this plane, the human person has a wide range of freedoms: his own beliefs and opinions, the possibility of expressing them outwardly, artistic creativity, choice of literature, scientific pursuits, words, etc.<sup>6</sup> It is again about a whole range of detailed freedoms "to" and "from" on the internal and external planes. The limit also of these freedoms is the good.

The third plane is the marriage and family plane. Within its framework, a person has the right to the freedom to choose a certain state, to marry and start a family, to raise a child according to one's own convictions, to plan offspring, not to be interfered with in marital and family affairs, such as the state's attempt to limit the number of offspring, etc.<sup>7</sup> And this includes the whole sphere of detailed freedoms "to" and "from" on the internal and external planes. The limit of these freedoms is also the good.

The next plane is the socio-economic plane, which specifically realizes that man is the goal of economic and social life, and as a subject of this life, he is entitled to the freedoms of choosing and undertaking work, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of movement, freedom from unlawful detention, arrest, imprisonment, etc.<sup>8</sup>

The last plane of freedom that the law guarantees is the political plane. Within its framework, one can speak, for example, of freedom of political opinion, membership in political parties, political participation, etc.<sup>9</sup> This sphere, too, like the others, is about freedoms, the object of which is always the choice of the good.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sobór Watykański II, Deklaracja o wolności religijnej *Dignitatis humanae*, in: Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucje. Dekrety. Deklaracje*, Warszawa 2002, p. 412.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. Skorowski, *Prawa człowieka w służbie wolności*, „Collectanea Theologica”, 58(1988), n. 4, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 36.

The understanding of freedom and the right to freedom on the basis of Catholic social teaching, presented above, indicates the real dimension and limits of freedom of man as a person. In other words, man as a person has a wide range of detailed freedoms “to” and “from”, on the internal and external planes in the following dimensions: religious, cultural, marital-family, socio-economic, political. The limits of freedom in these dimensions are always good.

Only in the context of freedom and the human right of freedom defined in this way can freedom itself be shown as the space of any dialogue.

### **Dialogue as an encounter in the space of freedom**

What is dialogue in its deepest essence? In the most general terms, it means a conversation whose purpose is to exchange thoughts and views. In this sense, dialogue is synonymous with conversation, as opposed to monologue, which is a longer speech by one person. Thus, dialogue is a way of interpersonal communication, in which subjects, either individual or collective, strive in a special way through the word to understand each other, come closer and cooperate<sup>10</sup>. Understood in this way, dialogue conceals several essential and fundamental elements.

The first indispensable element of dialogue is the establishment of mutual contact by specific – individual or communal – subjects, their mutual rapprochement and encounter. It is difficult to give a uniform precise definition here. It is simply about this element, which in its deepest essence results in the elimination of the isolation of the subjects, i.e., their remaining at a distance from each other. For subjects – man as an individual or a community of persons – who remain in the world of their own beliefs only, enclosed within the walls of their own truth, inaccessible in the sphere of their own decisions, isolate themselves in the world of their own selfishness breaking off any contact between themselves. In dialogue, therefore, there must be mutual contact. For a reliable dialogue grows out of a certain assumption, which must be accepted – explicitly or tacitly – by both subjects of the dialogue, that they are unable to know the truth about themselves and the truth towards which they are striving if they remain in the world of their beliefs, i.e. in a world of mutual isolation from each other. For one can only know the truth in direct contact. Meeting and establishing contact

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, Spotkanie z młodzieżą w Parc-des-Princes, *Ewangelizacja jest dialogiem z człowiekiem*, 1 VI 1980, in: *Nauczanie społeczne*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1984, p. 439.

should therefore be considered, as it were, a prerequisite but at the same time an indispensable condition of any dialogue<sup>11</sup>.

If we assume that the first indispensable element of dialogue is the establishment of mutual contact by the various subjects, and their mutual proximity, then the basic element of the dialogue must be an authentic meeting in these discussed issues and beliefs. Here we touch on the first fundamental value in a genuine dialogue. It is the value of man himself. The essence of dialogue is determined by the very concept of man as a fundamental value. It is man as a person who is the first and fundamental value of any dialogue. It is therefore necessary to always keep in mind the true vision of man with his unique dignity.

In turn, an authentic meeting person to person is possible only in the space of freedom. No one can be forced into a genuine encounter. This would be a violation inflicted on man. Freedom therefore conditions the authenticity of this encounter. In the space of this freedom, we also ultimately touch the value of man himself.

### **Dialogue as a joint attainment of truth in the space of freedom**

The second fundamental element of any dialogue is the attainment of truth. At this point an important addition should be made that it is about the joint search for and attainment of truth. For in essence, dialogue is always about truth, that is, the pursuit of an image consistent with reality, that is, the truth<sup>12</sup>. This element in any dialogue is the most difficult. This is due to the obvious fact that none of the subjects is fully in possession of the truth, but only approaches it each from his position. The point is that this attainment of truth from different sides should be accomplished not in isolation and separation, but by joint effort<sup>13</sup>. For as long as the subjects of dialogue try to reach the truth from their isolated positions, including yet with the conviction that they already possess this truth, they are subject to a partial illusion. For there is no doubt that the full truth is always the fruit

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Tischner, *Etyka solidarności*, Kraków 1981, p. 15–16. See: Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na XVI Światowy Dzień Pokoju Dialog na rzecz pokoju – wyzwaniem dla naszych czasów*, 1 I 1983, in: Paweł VI, Jan Paweł II, *Orędzia papieskie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju*, Rzym – Lublin 1987, p. 151–153.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Tischner, *Etyka solidarności*, p. 15–16.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 16–17.

of joint experience, reflection and transformation of the viewpoints of both subjects. However, this real and at the same time common search for truth is conditioned in many ways. Two conditions seem to be indispensable.

The first is the freedom of the dialogue partners. This is a fundamental condition. For there is no joint search for and attainment of truth in a relationship of dependence of one dialogue partner on the other. It is about the kind of dependence that has the character of domination. That is to say, freedom in this sense conditions the attainment of truth, so that neither partner forces the other to submit absolutely to his views and beliefs, but on the contrary leaves him the independence of his decisions. Thus, in the communal search for truth, and this is the essence of dialogue, one subject cannot let the other feel that he is superior to him in the possession of truth. Freedom as an indispensable condition for the search for and attainment of truth makes it possible, as it were, to “empathize” with the other dialogue partner’s point of view. John Paul II states: “Dialogue must aim at recognizing the specific characteristics and distinctiveness of individual people and groups with the space of freedom preserved”<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, it is not just a matter of politeness, but of recognizing that the other partner in dialogue is also always somewhat right from his point of view. In this way, both parties rise above each other as it were, striving towards a community of one and the same point of view on the issues and things that the dialogue concerns. Partners entering into dialogue are thus ready to make the other partner’s truth a part of their own truth<sup>15</sup>.

The second condition for the joint search for and attainment of truth is the authenticity of the dialogue partners. Authenticity here basically means taking the partner honestly and seriously. Neither of the dialogue partners can simply “play” their role to the other partner. Such behavior in its very essence breaks all dialogue, the essence of which, as mentioned, is the search for truth<sup>16</sup>.

There are also other conditions for the attainment of truth. Examples include justice, fairness, interpersonal solidarity, etc.<sup>17</sup> Freedom, however, is the primary conditionality. All the others can also be reduced to it.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 16–17.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na XIX Światowy Dzień Pokoju Pokój jest wartością, która nie zna podziałów na Północ-Południe, Wschód-Zachód: jest tylko jeden pokój*, 1 I 1986, in: Paweł VI, Jan Paweł II, *Orędzia papieskie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju*, p. 186–190.



## Dialogue as compromise in the space of freedom

The third element of authentic dialogue, which is directly related to the previous one and, in a way, grows out of it, is a willingness to compromise repeatedly described as a willingness to self-correct one's views and beliefs<sup>18</sup>. At this point an important addition should be made. Dialogue in itself, and thus in its deepest essence, cannot be equated with compromise and thus in some sense with relativism. Compromise is only one element of dialogue. This element, too, must be considered essential and fundamental to any dialogue. It is the honest and authentic and joint search for and attainment of truth that repeatedly requires compromise. Compromise thus becomes the principle of the joint attainment of truth. At its deepest essence, it is simply the proper behavior of a dialogue partner who, at a certain point in the discussion, agrees to give up some of the requirements of his decision in order to take into account certain requirements of the decisions of other dialogue partners<sup>19</sup>.

However, in the context of compromise as an essential element of dialogue, some important additions should be made. This is due to the question that must be posed at this point, namely; whether it is possible to speak of compromise in terms of truth. Truth, or to be more precise, its search for and attainment of truth, is the very essence, or core, of dialogue. And compromise, after all, in its deepest essence, is a resignation, at least in part, of one's own views and beliefs. Is it ethically justifiable, then, to give up one's beliefs in terms of truth?

At this point it must be emphasized in no uncertain terms that compromise in dialogue is not only justified, but necessary. For this compromise is a consequence of the joint search for truth. It is the joint search for and attainment of truth that means that when the dialogue begins, none of the participating partners owns it to the end. This situation, in turn, requires what is referred to as compromise. Compromise as an element of dialogue shows not only attention to other partners, but above all respect for them. Although one of the partners, when making decisions, is aware that he was guided by serious reasons, he cannot be absolutely sure of the rightness of his beliefs and views on a particular issue that is the subject of dialogue. This is because refuting a partner's arguments does not mean refuting

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. idem, Orędzie na XVI Światowy Dzień Pokoju *Dialog na rzecz pokoju*, p. 151–153.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 155–157.

them. And this has its consequences – it must take into account that the partner may also have a particle of truth. In this sense, in the dialogue there remains some residue not fully read, which from honesty alone can demand a compromise. In other words, dialogue partners must agree to partially concede to other partners. Compromise is therefore a necessary part of dialogue. It can be said in this way that if a particular individual or community subject of dialogue were to attainment of truth on his own, he would not necessarily have to reckon with the opinions and beliefs of others. However, in dialogue, the essence of which is the communitarian search for and attainment of truth, compromise is a constitutive element of the very concept of dialogue.

It seems obvious, therefore, that compromise, however, in dialogue must have its limits. And here we touch for the first time on the limits of dialogue. Yes compromise in dialogue must have limits. It is difficult to establish them a priori in the form of strict rules. However, it is clear that the boundary of any compromise should be the fundamental values. It is they that set the limits of compromise. In dialogue, it is possible to make concessions up to a certain point, as long as the dialogue partners are in an ambivalent zone, in which the “pros” and “cons” of the issue under discussion are considered. For at that point, these partners are still in the realm of a communal search for truth. However, there comes a point at which, for a particular subject, the truth is self-evident not subject to any concessions. And this is the limit of dialogue. Always the real limit of any compromise is the conviction regarding truth. At this point, to give up the truth would be to deny the very essence of dialogue. If this boundary were disregarded, the whole issue of truth-seeking would be reduced to nothing more than a merchant level. Truth would at this point become merely a bargaining and commercial element<sup>20</sup>.

If we assume that the third element of authentic dialogue, which is directly related to the previous one and, as it were, grows out of it, is a willingness to compromise repeatedly described as a willingness to self-correct one’s views and beliefs, then in dialogue we touch on another value. It is simply compromise as a value<sup>21</sup>.

It is the honest and authentic and joint search for and attainment of truth that repeatedly requires compromise. Compromise thus becomes the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Spotkanie z młodzieżą w Parc-des-Princes, Ewangelizacja jest dialogiem z człowiekiem*, p. 440–441.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. idem, *Dialog na rzecz pokoju*, p. 151–153.

principle of joint attainment of truth about facts. At its deepest essence, it is simply the proper behavior of a dialogue partner who, at a certain point in the discussion, agrees to give up some of the requirements of his decision in order to take into account certain requirements of the decisions of other dialogue partners<sup>22</sup>. And this time authentic compromise is also possible under conditions of freedom. For only free subjects – either a person or a community – are capable of genuine, wise and responsible compromise. For if the subjects are not free there will be no compromise but coercion or enslavement.

### **Dialogue as consensus in the space of freedom**

Another important element of dialogue, which is a simple consequence of the previous ones, is consensus or so-called “consensus”. This is, so to speak, the final element of dialogue<sup>23</sup>. This consensus is not always complete, especially when the partners in the dialogue are subjects diametrically opposed in the sphere of their beliefs and views on the issue of interest. However, given that the essence of any dialogue is the joint attainment of truth in the context of freedom and authenticity, given also that this is accompanied by a well-understood compromise, it is reasonable to conclude that the closing element of the entire dialogue process is at least a partial agreement. This agreement is, as it were, the creative element of dialogue. This is because every real dialogue is undertaken with the idea of creating something new (arriving at and finding the truth). This creativity is expressed in the fact that this agreement on the truth found is the basis for joint action. Action is understood here very broadly. This means that this action can also take the form of a departure from previously planned actions. In this sense, in a true dialogue, something new is created that was not there before<sup>24</sup>.

If we assume that another important element of dialogue, which is a simple consequence of the previous ones, is agreement, or so-called “consensus”, then it must have its important place in the dialogue. It is, as it were, the final element of the dialogue<sup>25</sup>. We touch on another value which is consensus. It too is a value inherent in any dialogue. Not always,

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 155–157.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na XIX Światowy Dzień Pokoju Pokój jest wartością*, p. 190.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

as mentioned above, this conciliation is complete, especially when the dialogue partners are entities diametrically opposed in the sphere of their beliefs and views on the issue of interest. However, given that the essence of any dialogue is the joint attainment of truth the fruit will be joint action. Action is understood here very broadly. This means that this action can also have the character of a departure from previously planned actions. In this sense, in a true dialogue, something new is created that was not there before. On the other hand, consensus and joint action is also possible only in the space of freedom. Thus, only freedom guarantees true consensus as the basis for joint action.

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The aforementioned values in the context of the various elements of dialogue constitute that it is a real way of interpersonal communication, in which subjects strive for mutual understanding, rapprochement and cooperation. However, it presupposes freedom as a fundamental value. Freedom thus becomes the foundation and condition of any authentic dialogue as a common attainment of truth.

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