

**PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND MORAL FAILURE IN 1 SAMUEL 2:12 – 26:
A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL IN THE CONTEXT OF
ANGLICAN CHILDREN AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES.**

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ABSTRACT

The world is full of several challenges which are peculiar to the end-time. Several practices such as bribery and corruption, stealing, sexual sin, child trafficking, hooliganism, cultism, kidnapping, fraudulent acts, sorcery, ritual killing, etc happen in Nigeria every day, and sad enough, the children and youths of our generation are either involved or are the most targeted group. The Anglican Children are not also exempted; they live in the age of moral decadence but they are expected to live exceptionally for God. Using historical and theological interpretative approach, this manuscript explores the biblical narrative of Eli and his sons (1 Samuel 2:12–26) and attempts to relate it to contemporary challenges faced by children within the Anglican Church, especially in the context of “end-time” moral crises. The study is devotional, theological, and partly socio-ethical in orientation, aiming to draw lessons for parenting, child upbringing, and church responsibility. The topic is relevant, particularly within African Christianity, where issues of youth moral decline, parenting, and religious formation are pressing.

Key Words: Morality, Anglican, Parents, Responsibility, Failure.

Introduction

Eli was the priest of the Lord in charge of the tabernacle worship at Shiloh in Ancient Israel. He has two sons, Hophni and Phinehas who were also married. Eli was a fat-elderly man in his old age. There was no mention that Eli the priest has a wife in the story, perhaps she was long dead, hence, the role of parenting Hophni and Phinehas was solely laid on him. The biblical narrative in 1 Samuel 2:12 – 36 portrays the two sons as wicked, insolent, disobedient, un-teachable, unruly, uncontrollable, rebellious and arrogant. They also practiced adultery and forcefully take meat from the worshippers. They neither listen to their father nor hearken to the warnings from the man of God who prophesied the judgment of God against them. The young Samuel in contrast to the sons of Eli's amoral lifestyle also grew in the same environment but as a good child serving the Lord and that was why God revealed himself to him. The result of Hophni and Phinehas' immorality was the announcement of their death that happened on the same day along with the death of their father, the death of one of the wives who had premature birth delivery, the death of many soldiers of Israel and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant of God by the Philistines who were the enemies

of the Israelites. Similarly, the problem of immorality persists continually among the children and youths of our generation. Factors like poor parenting, environmental influences, peer group influence, modernism, quest for position, power and authority, etc contribute a lot to poor morality among our children and youths. The Anglican Children and youths also live in this part of the world where moral deterioration has become part of the system. But they need to live above the standard of the world by doing what is biblically right, just and true without subjecting it to relativism. But how can this be achieved? How can youths and children of nowadays live in the world without necessarily compromising good ethical values and principles or having affinity with the world system? These are some of the questions that this paper opines to address. The paper is therefore suggesting that moral agencies like the church, parents, guardians, teachers, etc should intensify in their efforts in curbing the youths and children excesses through discipline, sound teaching in “developing a personal relationship with God, understanding and applying biblical principles in their daily lives, cultivating values such as kindness, empathy and compassion, growing in their understanding of the Christian faith and tradition: (Ndukuba: 2026)”.

Methodology

This paper adopts the historical and theological interpretative approach. The paper explores the exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 2:12 – 26 where the parental responsibility of Eli and his sons' moral failure were discussed. Notably, while Eli bears partial responsibility for his sons' moral failure, individual moral agency and environmental influences are equally decisive, with implications for contemporary child formation. The relevance of this text is therefore analysed from the exegetical findings.

Literary and Historical Context of 1 Samuel

According to Danny (2002, p. 107), “the books of 1 & Samuel were originally one but were divided by the translators of the Septuagint.” Field & Alexander (1973, p. 107) assert that “They provide a history of Israel from the end of the Judges period to the last year of King David, roughly 100 years (about 1075 – 975 BC.” The books contain the story of God and His people, the Israelites. Although scholars contend the authorship of the books and concluded that it was not known, however, the two books gained their names not because Samuel wrote them but that the books were centered on the leadership acts of Samuel. Thomas (1997, p. 114) noted that “the book of 1 Samuel has been called the book of the people's king, the organization of the kingdom, and a book of great beginning and tragic ending.” Thomas (1997, p. 114) also opines that “the book of 2 Samuel has been called the book of God's king and Israel comes of age.” The two books are about God, Samuel, the Israelites and their kings in Ancient Israel. David added that, “the books of Samuel tell how Israel suffered at the hands of the Philistines and how Samuel helped the people to choose a king. The books tell how the first king, Saul failed to fulfill his responsibilities and was eventually replaced by David: (Hinson: 1992).” They also tell how David conquered his enemies and made Israel a powerful nation.

Grammatical and Linguistic Analysis of 1 Samuel 2:12 – 36

i. Characterization (vv. 12 – 17)

- a. **Worthless Men/Sons of Belial:** The Hebrew phrase $\text{לְיָסוּרִים} + \text{לִב. יָנֵעֵב}$ (v. 12) is usually translated as “worthless,” “wicked,” or “scoundrels.” This shows that they lack moral value or moral worth.

- b. **“Did not Know the Lord”:** The phrase $\text{`hw")hy>Â-ta, W[\beta d>y" al\{i}$ Shows that, despite they are priests, beyond intellectual knowledge of God, they lack personal, experiential and covenantal acknowledgement of his authority.
- c. **Sinful Acts (vv. 13 – 16):** The practices of Hophni and Phinehas were stated in cruel words. They forcefully collect meat before the fat is burned in disobedience to the Law of Moses (Lev. 3:3 – 5). They took advantage of what belongs to God which was described as treating the offering of the Lord with contempt.
- ii. **Contrasting Figures (vv. 18 – 26)**
 - a. **Samuel's Service (v. 18):** Samuel lived together with the sons of Eli but his character was different. He was portrayed as ministering before the Lord.
 - b. **Hebrew Verb Usage:** a particular verbal structure was used in the passage to show contrast in behaviours. Eli's sons “continue” in their wickedness, while Samuel “continues” to grow in service.
 - c. **Eli's Weakness (vv. 23 – 25):** Eli's weak scolding of his sons shows his poor leadership style and his failure to control their insolent attitudes.
- iii. **The Prophecy of Judgment (vv. 27 – 36)**
 - a. **The “Man of God”:** There was a shift in the narrative to divine oracle when an unknown prophet $\sim\text{yhiPl\{a/\hat{A}-vyai}$ emerged.
 - b. **Hebrew Parallelism and Rhetoric:** The prophecy uses rhetorical questions (v. 29) to express Eli's failure and how he loved his sons above God.
 - c. **Reprobation (v. 25b):** The text $\sim\text{h,êybia] IAqâ\hat{A}l. 'W[m.v.yl al\{Ü\hat{A}w> Al=\hat{A}-lL,P;t.yl}$ shows that they did not listen because “the Lord desired to kill them.” This indicates serious divine retribution because of their persistent rebellion.
 - d. **The Promise (v. 35):** God promised to raise for himself in the prophecy a “faithful priest” $\text{!m'êa/n< !hEâKo 'yli ytiîmoyqih]\hat{A}w$: which many scholars referred to Samuel, a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.
- iv. **Key Linguistic Contrasts**
 - a. **Sons of Eli:** Known as “wicked,” “stealing,” and “rebellious.”
 - b. **Samuel:** Described as “ministering,” “serving,” and “growing.”

5.1 Exegetical Analysis of 1 Samuel 2:12 – 36

The story of Eli the Priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas is popularly read and interpreted as though Eli was a failure because of the ill-practices of his two sons. Some took the position that the leadership style of Eli was poor because he was weak in rebuking them thereby placing them above God. Many have also interpreted the text as though Eli supported his children's acts. Many claimed that his negligence to discipline and train his children is the basis for his failure in the pastoral ministry. Many had blamed Eli's negligence of

his children's parental discipline on his size and old. There are those that opine that in Africa, the failure of a child is equivalent to the failure of the parents and that is why many parents are to be blamed for their children act of immorality in Africa. In Africa, many factors could be responsible for the child's poor moral conduct. It could be as a result of poor parenting and negligence of responsibilities, peer influence, environmental influence, modernism, etc. This paper does not defend or justify Eli for his sons' moral failure rather, while Eli bears partial responsibility for his sons' moral failure, individual moral agency and environmental influences are equally decisive, with implications for contemporary Anglican child formation.

Samuel was Raised Along with Hophni and Phinehas by Eli the Priest (1 Sam. 2:11, 18 – 21, 26)

1 Samuel 2:11, “then Elkanah went home to Ramah. And the boy ministered to the LORD in the presence of Eli the priest: (English Standard Version, ESV).”

From the preceding chapter and verses, it was clear that Samuel came from a polygamous home. His father Elkanah married Hannah and Peninnah. While Peninnah had children, Hannah had none, so “Peninnah constantly mock her: (Guthrie et al, 1979)” until she cries to God at Shiloh and God gave her Samuel, and in return, Hannah brought him back to the Lord to serve before him forever as earlier promised. So Samuel served continually before the Lord in the presence of Eli the Priest. So Samuel had a very rough and tough family background experience. He grew up in such environment and experience but it does not affect him adversely. Samuel also grew without the presence of his biological parents in the picture yet he lived uprightly. His feelings, experiences and background did not stop him from becoming a good child. Being guided by the parenting of Eli, he was determined and chooses to be a child of good moral value. He was raised by Eli along with Hophni and Phinehas who were older than him. Ordinarily as a child, it would have been easier for Samuel to be influenced by the poor moral conduct of Hophni and Phinehas and perhaps the depravity of his environment but he chooses to live uprightly. The youths and children of nowadays can also learn from the example of Samuel and choose to be morally upright irrespective of their experiences. So, whatever anyone is passing through in life should not be the reason for moral failure.

1 Samuel 2:18 – 21, “but Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod. Moreover his mother made him a little robe, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which was lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD: (English Standard Version, ESV).”

From the text above, the fact that the parents of Samuel, Elkanah and Hannah decided to give him to the Lord does not make them to forget or abandon their parental roles and responsibilities to him. They still visited him and bought him nice clothes including lining ephod. Because of the fulfillment of the vow that Hannah made by returning him to the Lord and because of his parent's love for him, God remembered Hannah and gave her more children in replacement of Samuel. Parents of nowadays can also learn from it. They should never forget to visit their children, occasionally buy gifts for them, pray for them, encourage them and give them parental counsel and guide not minding how far is their locations apart until they become responsible and successful adult.

1 Samuel 2:26, “now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man: (English Standard Version, ESV).”

The verse explicitly explains that the young boy, Samuel has accepted the fact that he was no longer living with his parents at Ramah but with Eli the Priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas at Shiloh. He coordinated himself well and continued to grow well in the presence of the Lord before Eli the Priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He was growing in stature, that is, physically and in favour with God and man. Similarly, the two sons of Eli the Priest, Hophni and Phinehas were also supposed to enjoy such growth in favour with God and man as Samuel but their growth was stunted by sin which eventually brought the fulfillment of the threatened retribution of God against them and the kingdom of Israel.

The Sons of Eli the Priest were Worthless (1 Samuel 2:12)

1 Samuel 2:12, “now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD: (English Standard Version, ESV).”

The two verbs in verse 12, “worthless” and “know” were used derogatorily. Worthless from the Hebrew translation, noun common masculine singular absolute, could mean worthlessness or wickedness. Contemporary translators interpreted worthless as valueless, insignificant or useless. This “worthless” was used to describe the character of the two sons of Eli. Though Samuel also lived with Eli the Priest like an adopted child but his behavior was not described as worthless or wicked like the sons of Eli. Samuel did not behave like them, he lived a distinctive life that distinguished him for excellence among his contemporary. “Know” [dy] verb qal perfect 3rd person common plural. “They did not know the Lord.” This does not literally mean that they did not know the Lord; rather, it suggests that the two sons of Eli lack the knowledge of God. They did not recognize him as Lord or acknowledge his sovereignty. They claimed to be working for God but they choose not to abide by his teachings and principles, so they lost their sense of morality and that was why they were described as worthless or wicked men.

The Custom of Priests Regarding Sacrifices in Shiloh (1 Sam. 2:13 – 14)

1 Samuel 2:13-14, “The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there: (English Standard Version, ESV).”

As Moses was instructed by God, the custom of the priests in treating the sacrifices that would be offered to God in Ancient Israel has not changed. They usually use three-pronged fork to collect meat while it was still boiling in the pot. Whatever the pronged-fork is able to collect belongs to the priest. They do not acquire properties or accumulate wealth like other tribes in Ancient Israel. The practice has therefore become part of the tradition of priests in Ancient Israel. The two sons of Eli were familiar with that tradition, yet, in rebellion against God, they choose to act contrary and that incurred the anger of God against them.

The Acts of the Sons of Eli the Priest that Angers God (1 Sam. 2:15 – 16, 22)

1 Samuel 2:15 – 16, “Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but

only raw." And if the man said to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force: (English Standard Version, ESV)."

The above text affirm that Hophni and Phinehas have been dealing with the Lord's holy things recklessly by taking meat forcefully from the people at Shiloh apart from their own legitimate right anytime sacrifice is offered to God in Ancient Israel. The text describes what was meant for the priest and the portion that was meant for the people. Hophni and Phinehas often violated God's principles, abuse their own right and privilege and also disrespected the people of God in Ancient Israel; that made God to be angry with the family of Eli and the kingdom of Israel.

1 Samuel 2:22, "Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting: (English Standard Version, ESV)."

The text made it clear that the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas have no regard for the Lord and their father. Sexual sin in Ancient Israel is a grievous offence against God and humanity. Eli's sons knew that and they still choose to forcefully sleep with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Verse 22 acknowledged that Eli was fully aware of his children's evil practices against the people of God and the way they treat the offerings of God with contempt, yet, he was not able to provide sufficient parental discipline to curb their excesses. Perhaps he over loved them or they were so grown and spoilt that nobody could correct them again. The fact that Eli was a priest does not make God to spare him or overlook his sons' act of immorality. Since he was fully aware of their acts, God threatened judgment against his sons and that affected his entire family and the kingdom of Israel.

God's Offerings Treated with Contempt (1 Sam. 2:17)

1 Samuel 2:17. "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt: (English Standard Version, ESV)."

The text says that the sin of the young men, Hophni and Phinehas was very great. "Great" here describes how big, weighty or terrible the sins of the two sons were. Treating the offering of the Lord with contempt was the height of it. Contempt here could mean disdain, disrespect, scorn, etc. Offerings and sacrifices to the Lord in Ancient Israel are considered holy to the Lord. The animal for the sacrifice must be without blemish or sickness and the priest must ensure that the sacrifice is offered according to the directives of Yahweh, if not, it will be rejected. The animal must be pure and those who bring it for the sacrifice must obey God's law as instructed to Moses so that the offering would be acceptable by God. However, the sons of Eli were convicted of the sin of treating the offering of God with contempt, so God would punish them.

Eli's Style of Discipline and his Sons' Response (1 Sam. 2:23 – 25)

1 Samuel 2:23-25. And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. ²⁴ No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. ²⁵ If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can

intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.

The text made it clear that Eli was fully aware of the sins of his sons. He tried as a father and as a priest to correct them but his style of rebuking them was too weak so much that God concluded that he loved them more than him. This suggests that Eli has poor leadership style. The sons became uncontrollable, insolent and unrepentant, so God has no other choice than to punish the father alongside with his sons. This punishment also affected the Israelites as many of them died in battle and the Ark of the Covenant God was captured by the Philistines. Contemporary parents should not restrain their children from receiving discipline. True discipline that is carried out in love will produce sober reflection and godly sorrow which will shape their character.

God's Warning and Imminent Retribution (1 Sam. 2:27 – 36)

Before God eventually punished Eli the priest and his family, he showed him the nature of the judgment that will come on him and his family if his sons would not repent. God had earlier told Eli that he was not pleased with the behavior of his sons through the prophecy of the man of God and the revelation to Samuel. God also made it clear to him that he would reject the establishment of his family lineage as priest forever and pass it to another. Eli demonstrated no sense of seriousness to those warnings and his sons did not pay attention to their father's soft rebuke. He simply says, "He is the Lord; let him do as he pleases." That angered God and he did not relent in accomplishing the threatened judgment.

Theological Evaluation of Eli's Parenting

"The story of the priest, Eli and his sons (1 Samuel 2:12 – 36) is a difficult but cautionary story for parents. Eli was a man who knew God, served him, and failed to properly disciple his sons. In the end, he lost them and himself to the judgment of God: (English Standard Version, ESV)." Contemporary parents should draw lesson from the parenting of Eli and his sons' moral failure so that as much as it depends on them, they may bring their children up in the fear of the Lord.

Contemporary Application (Anglican Context)

There had been different historical records, facts and views concerning the formation of the Anglican Church from the earliest times which this paper will not be bothered about. However, it should be noted that the Anglican Church is a Bible based, wholistic, dogmatic, doctrinal based, self sufficient, self existing, self governing, self supporting, self propagating, Episcopalian, orthodox, charismatic, "catholic, apostolic, evangelistic, missionary: (Igbari, 2007, p. 21)," pragmatic, loving, caring, and disciplined congregation of Christians who have common faith, teachings, doctrinal practices and principles universally, therefore, it is called the Anglican Communion. Ogungbangbe (2009) asserts that it is "the divine formation, organization and administration of the human body, which is self-built and self-controlled as made by God is perfect." Peter (2011) infers that "this is the story of the receiving people; people who though are often exploited, mistreated, and enslaved by Euroamericans were able to hear and respond to a message that Euroamericans did not always live by. It has seldom been easy for African Christians to stand for Christ. But it is the

magnificent dedication and perseverance of the Africans, plus the increasing demonstration of the ability of Africans to lead creatively, that is primarily responsible for the success of Christianity in Africa.”

The Anglican Church and the Children Ministry

Although the Anglican Children Ministry is now rooted in the Anglican church, but it appears to be a recent development of not too many decades ago. Many churches up till now have not yet accepted the Anglican Children Ministry because of the belief that rather than contributing to the financial strength of the church, they have been demanding from the church. While the Anglican Children Ministry is still struggling with her survival in some of our local churches and parishes, in some other places, the ministry is fast growing and developing to the glory of God.

Some Opinions about the Anglican Children Ministry

It is indeed so sad to note some of the following wrong opinions and impressions about the children ministry. Many church leaders and members have been seeing the children ministry as a disturbance to them any time they make a list of their request. The Anglican Children Ministry is often seen as a dumping ground of children in some churches to prevent them from distracting the adults during worship. Many often say that they are fond of demanding from the church rather than giving in support of the church, they are therefore denied the love, care and attention that they essentially required from the mother church. Many parents blamed the children teachers for the wrong doings and the poor performances of their children while some parents will always push their stubborn children to the children teachers forgetting that the children stay longer with them as parents than being with their teachers in the school, etc. In some cases, there had been negligence to the needs of the children like building their place of worship, training their teachers, giving the children ministry enough teaching and visual aid materials, etc, but we really need to rise up and bridge the gap before the children drift away to other churches or are found engaging contrary to biblical norms and principles.

The Anglican Children and the End-Time Challenges

The Bible has never been quiet about the end-time challenges which Christians would face and of course, the Anglican Children Ministry will not be exempted. The Anglican Children Ministry must “strive for survival in the hostile world everyday just as David was working in using musical instrument to relieve Saul whenever the attack of the evil spirit came upon him, but Saul considered him as a threat to his reign and so made his environment hostile for him: (Ossai, 2014, p 2 – 4).” The Bible speaks of war among nations, hatred, persecutions, menace, acrimony, animosity, rancor, betrayer of trust, fight among parents and children, sickness, disease, death, earthquake, famine, lover of money, modern philosophies and ideologies, the effect of post modernism, science and technology, terrible happenings and some other unmentioned happenings evidenced in our daily living. The most significant is what was said in Matthew 24:12 that, “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of many will grow cold.” All those foretold end-time ordeals and challenges have started happening and the question is how should the Anglican Children Ministry, parents and the church see those challenges and also what should they do in times like this so that those end-time challenges would not affect their faith adversely but rather lead to the growth and development of the body of Yahweh. Today, as part of the challenges, Satan has introduced disobedience, many wrong signs, wrong styles of dressing and fashions, teachings, fetishism, immorality, ungodliness, wickedness, atrocities, fraudulent acts, sorcery,

cultism, hooliganism, peer group pressure, etc into the hearts and lives of the children of nowadays. The Anglican Children Ministry, parents and moral agency should remember that though they are in the world, but they are not of the world, so they should not get entangled with the things and systems of the world. Bates (2011) had an extensive discussion on “my enemy, the world and concluded that Satan has a world system, God condemned it and found another new world system and that only people who do not love the, who are separated from satanic world system, who learn to say 'no', make Christian friends and always remember that Jesus is always with them can ever be victorious while living in the world.” Ndukuba (2026) asserts that, “as children grow and develop, they need guidance, support, and encouragement to navigate life's complexities.” We should also continually aspire to keep doing the will of Christ the Master as we also combat the challenges of the end time with the word of God, prayer, fasting and deliverance as we aspire to grow maturely in Christ every day.

The Effect of the End-Time Challenges on the Anglican Children

Amidst of many adverse effects, there had been lukewarm, complacency, apostasy, backsliding, compromise, etc. among our Christian children. Many Christians have because of hunger, challenges, hatred and unpleasant situations giving up their great and glorious hope, faith, calling and confidence, yet, the Scripture is saying that, “Anyone who puts his hands on the plough and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God”. Whereas, those who are able to travail in prayer and fasting and through the word of God had lived strongly like one who is said to be “more than conquerors,” they are also strengthened in the faith and are encouraged to grow and develop wholistically through those challenges unto maturity through Christ that strengthens them.

The Anglican Children Growing and Developing through the End-Time Challenges

This paper is an eye opener and an encouragement to those who are going through challenges that God is able to make them overcome if they trust in Him to the end by making Him their Lord and personal Saviour. The challenges are meant to toughen, strengthen and increase the hope, courage and faith of the children and youths if they will not give up in times like this. Eventually, they will enjoy spiritual and physical promotion, strong faith, growth, breakthroughs, victory, blessings, prosperity and crown of glory that await the faithful victors in Christ at the end of the world.

As Anglican Christian children and youths, there is a need to patiently tolerate and endure hardships and be prayerful, being watchful, they should continually rejoice in their glorious hope and anchor their faith on God. They should always meditate on God's word to help reshape their morality.

Conclusion

1 Samuel 2:12 – 36 conclude with a severe divine judgment on Eli's house, contrasting his wicked sons with the faithful Samuel. Due to the corruption of Hophni and Phinehas and Eli's failure to restrain them, God declares the end of Eli's priesthood lineage, promising to raise a faithful priest to serve him forever. Contemporary parents and Anglicans should learn from the mistakes of Eli and his sons' failure and rebuke our youths and children as much as possible so as to cultivate good moral values and potentials in them for a better tomorrow.

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