

Annotated Encyclical Series

***On
the
Christian***



Immortale Dei



***Constitution
of the
States***

Christ the King Books

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Cover image:

Here we see the Vatican and the Capitol Building of the United States in Washington D.C., where its highest laws are framed. Would to God that the United States were a Catholic nation, working in close cooperation with the One, True Church. But alas, the United States has never been officially Catholic, and in fact, has very anti-Catholic foundational principles.

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A Short Introduction

About Pope Leo XIII...

Pope Leo XIII was the 256th pope of the One, True, and Catholic Church. His name was Vincenzo Pecci, was Italian (like most popes), and was born in 1810. Elected pope in 1878, he reigned until his death in 1903.

Pope Leo XIII wrote a record-breaking number of encyclicals – 88 of them, each of which being well worth studying. He lived during a time in which many modern errors began to rapidly grow and spread, affecting the thinking of many even within the ranks of the Church.

This encyclical is not only valuable for its anti-liberal teachings, but is also useful for Catholic civics classes. Catholics wishing to know the Church's timeless teachings about how governments should operate and interact with the Catholic Church will find this encyclical a goldmine of information.

The encyclical you are about to read

In particular, during and before Pope Leo XIII's lifetime men had begun forming and holding false ideas about the *natures of authority, government, liberty, as well as on the relation between the Church and the State*. These errors were greatly promoted by some of the usual enemies of the Catholic Church – Protestants, atheists, liberals, freethinkers, and Freemasons. However, a relatively new movement in his time also favored these errors – the Communist movement.

“But what does this have to do with me? Is this not just some dusty old document about problems that no longer exist?”

If you think this, we heartily wish you were correct! We wish it were that men now think properly about the above matters. Unfortunately, however, this encyclical is more pertinent than ever because these errors affect us all, and live in modern man's bloodstream without him even realizing it. Yes, all of us – especially we Americans – are more or less affected by the errors condemned in this document. We live and breathe them, and thus this document has everything to do with you and me, as well as our country. For example, the Founding Fathers of the United States were especially fond of 'preaching', as if they were as true as the Gospels themselves, many of the very ideas condemned in this document (as you will can in our *United States History – a Traditional Catholic Perspective* textbook).

So put on the armor of God, because Pope Leo battles these errors in the beautiful and critical encyclical you are about to read. He sets our minds straight not only by setting forth true Catholic doctrines but also by feeding us with solid philosophy, much of which comes from the great Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Please read our annotations in the right column!

There is much good information to help you better understand and learn additional things. **We also will test you on some of those annotations.** We strongly suggest the following method of reading: read a paragraph from the pope, then read the corresponding annotation on the right, if any exists, before moving on.

IMMORTALE DEI

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON THE CHRISTIAN CONSTITUTION OF STATES

*To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates,
Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and
Communion with the Apostolic See.*

The papal encyclicals have been traditionally named from their first few words in Latin. Here, this means “The imperishable [work] of God”

How should States (i.e. governments) be ordered according to the teachings of Christianity?

To whom did he write this encyclical? Does this mean nobody else can or should read it?

SECTION ONE: Catholic Teachings About the Christian State

Note: At the time this document was written (1885), there were still some Catholic States left – that is, states whose constitutions made the Catholic Religion the State religion, or at least, gave great privileges and special protections to the Catholic Faith, as the popes have traditionally taught the states to do. These States included Spain, Columbia, Ecuador, and some others.

Lesson 1: Some Basic Principles About Authority and Government, in General

Paragraph 1. The Catholic Church, that imperishable handiwork of our all-merciful God, has for her immediate and natural purpose the saving of souls and securing our happiness in heaven. Yet, in regard to things temporal, she is [also] the source of benefits as manifold and great as if the chief end of her existence were to ensure the prospering of our earthly life. And, indeed, wherever the Church has set her foot she has straightway changed the face of things, and has attempered¹ the moral tone of the people with a new civilization and with virtues before unknown. All nations which have yielded to her sway have become eminent by their gentleness, their sense of justice, and the glory of their high deeds.

Paragraph 2. And yet a hackneyed² reproach of old date is levelled against her, that **the Church is opposed to the rightful aims of the civil government, and is wholly unable to afford help in spreading that welfare and progress which justly and naturally are sought after by every well-regulated State.** From the very

The primary purpose of the Catholic Church is the eternal salvation of souls. However, She also bestows huge temporal (i.e. in time) benefits as well. History proves over and over again what the pope teaches here: the Catholic Church has civilized countless nations, and made them great not only in Faith and morals, but also in culture.

The Church has been accused of being a hindrance to society and the spread of progress. She is also accused of not being able to help the State, even if she DID have good intentions.

¹ **attempered:** softened, mitigated

² **hackneyed:** lacking significance through having been overused; unoriginal and trite.

beginning Christians were harassed by slanderous accusations of this nature, and on that account were held up to hatred and execration,³ for being (so they were called) enemies of the Empire. The Christian religion was moreover commonly charged with being the cause of the calamities that so frequently befell the State, whereas, in very truth, **just punishment was being awarded to guilty nations by an avenging God**. This odious calumny [namely, that the Church was responsible for the problems], with most valid reason, nerved the genius and sharpened the pen of St. Augustine, who, notably in his treatise, *The City of God*, set forth in so bright a light the worth of Christian wisdom in its relation to the public wealth that he seems not merely to have pleaded the cause of the Christians of his day, but to have refuted for all future times impeachments⁴ so grossly contrary to truth. The wicked proneness,⁵ however, to levy⁶ like charges and accusations has not been lulled to rest. Many, indeed, are they who have tried to work out a plan of civil society based on doctrines other than those approved by the Catholic Church. Nay, in these latter days a novel⁷ conception of law has begun here and there to gain increase and influence. It is claimed that **this new conception of law is the outcome of an age arrived at full stature, and the result of progressive liberty**. But, though endeavours⁸ of various kinds have been ventured on, it is clear that no better mode has been devised for the building up and ruling the State than that which is the necessary growth of the teachings of the Gospel. **We deem it, therefore, of the highest moment, and a strict duty of Our apostolic office, to contrast the novel theories now advanced touching the State, with the lessons taught by Christ**. By this means We cherish hope that the bright shining of the truth may scatter the mists of error and doubt, so that one and all may see clearly the imperious⁹ law of life which they are bound to follow and obey.

The next paragraph is exceptionally important, for it provides the philosophical premises which the Pope will join with theological premises; this combination of philosophy and Divine Revelation will serve as the foundation for his arguments in this great work.

Paragraph 3. It is not difficult to determine what would be the form and character of the State if it were governed according to the principles of Christian **philosophy**. Man's natural instinct moves him to live in civil society, for he cannot, if dwelling apart, provide himself with the necessary requirements of life, nor procure the means of developing his mental and moral faculties. Hence, it is divinely ordained that he should lead his life – be it family, or civil – with his fellow men, amongst whom alone his several wants can be adequately supplied. But, as no society can hold together unless some one be over all, directing all to strive earnestly for the common good, every body politic must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and has, consequently, God for its Author.

Even the Catholics in the first few centuries after Christ were accused of being against the Roman Empire.

But the great St. Augustine refuted all their errors and false accusations, yet even now wicked men still try to bring up much the same nonsense.

Many, if not most nations have non-Catholic governments. It may work for a while, but **always** ends in failure.

In fact, during these modern times, new and false principles concerning government have appeared. The purpose of this encyclical is to contrast these false principles and systems with those of Christendom. **This bold sentence can be considered the “thesis” statement (i.e., main purpose / idea) of this encyclical.**

Notice that the pope begins by talking about **philosophy**, which is a different science from **theology/doctrine**. Philosophy asks deep questions on the natural level such as, “What is the nature of knowledge? Of reality?” Philosophy does not use Divine Revelation, just natural reasoning. Yet, without good philosophy underneath, good theology soon crumbles in men’s minds.

He lays out these principles of sound philosophy: 1. Man’s nature is such that he needs to live in a group with other men; he is a social creature. 2. But every group must have a leader – an authority, whose source is in the nature of man. 3.

³ **execration**: a cursing, a wishing for great harm

⁴ **impeachment**: in this sense, an accusation of treason or some other crime against the state.

⁵ **proneness**: inclination, tendency

⁶ **levy**: to impose, to charge with, to bring down upon

⁷ **novel**: new

⁸ **endeavor**: an attempt to achieve a goal

⁹ **imperious**: normally this is a negative word, but here, it means pertaining to the life-giving Law of God

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Lesson 3: The One, True Religion And Church

Paragraph 7. Now, it cannot be difficult to find out which is the true religion, if only it be sought with an earnest and unbiased²³ mind; for proofs are abundant and striking. We have, for example, the fulfilment of prophecies, miracles in great numbers, the rapid spread of the faith in the midst of enemies and in face of overwhelming obstacles, the witness of the martyrs, and the like. From all these it is evident that the only true religion is the one established by Jesus Christ Himself, and which He committed to His Church to protect and to propagate.

Notice: one does not need the *supernatural* gift of Faith (given by Baptism) to see these proofs of the One, True religion. Rather, anyone with honesty and average natural intelligence can see that of all the world's 'religions', only Catholicism can be true.

In the brief paragraph above, the pope used historical arguments ("Do you want to know which is the true religion? Go look at history books. And Sacred Scripture itself, even if just viewed as a mere historical document, is trustworthy."). He showed that there is overwhelming evidence that Christianity is the True religion (as opposed to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism).

But what about the further claim that there is One, True, Church? After all, even if Christianity (the system of beliefs itself) is true, how do we know that Christ also established a teaching and authoritative Church?

Paragraph 8. For the only-begotten Son of God established on earth a society which is called the Church, and to it He handed over the exalted and divine office which He had received from His Father, to be continued through the ages to come. "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you." "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."²⁴ Consequently, as Jesus Christ came into the world that men "might have life and have it more abundantly,"²⁵ so also has the Church for its aim and end the eternal salvation of souls, and hence it is so constituted as to open wide its arms to all mankind, unhampered by any limit of either time or place. "Preach ye the Gospel to every creature."²⁶

The Church instituted by Christ was intended to not die when Christ left the earth; His power is passed on to men.

The Church is a society with a divine purpose: the salvation of souls.

Paragraph 9. Over this mighty multitude God has Himself set rulers with power to govern, and He has willed that one should be the head of all, and the chief and unerring teacher of truth, to whom He has given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven."²⁷ "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."²⁸ "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."²⁹

The Church is ruled by bishops and the pope; but the primary ruler on earth is the Pope.

What kind of arguments did he use in the previous two paragraphs? Did he use arguments from philosophy? Check out some of the footnote source references below.

The next few paragraphs are critical, as they show that the Church is a perfect society, and that Her exalted purpose, methods, and authority are greater than any mere civil power on earth.

Paragraph 10. This society [*the Church*] is made up of men, just as civil society is, and yet [*the Church*] is **supernatural and spiritual, on account of the end for which it was founded, and of the means by which it aims at attaining that end.** Hence, it [*the Church*] is distinguished and differs from civil society, and, what is of highest moment, it is a society chartered from a divine right,³⁰ perfect in its nature and in its

Why is the Church *supernatural*?

The Church's superior qualities over civil societies.

The Church is higher than civil societies, certainly not inferior, or dependent

²³ **unbiased:** not unfairly prejudiced in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another

²⁴ Matt. 28:20

²⁵ John 10:10

²⁶ Mark 16:15

²⁷ Matt. 16:19

²⁸ John 21:16-17

²⁹ Luke 22:32

³⁰ "Divine right" is a right based upon the Divine Law, the highest of the several kinds of laws that St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes.

title, to possess in itself and by itself, through the will and loving kindness of its Founder, all needful provision for its maintenance and action. And just as the end at which the Church aims is by far the noblest of ends [the salvation of souls and glory of God], so is its authority the most exalted of all authority, nor can it be looked upon as inferior to the civil power, or in any manner dependent upon it.

Paragraph 11. In very truth, Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles unrestrained authority in regard to things sacred, together with the genuine and most true power of making laws, as also with the twofold right of judging and of punishing, which flow from that power. "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth: going therefore teach all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."³¹ And in another place: "If he will not hear them, tell the Church."³² And again: "In readiness to revenge all disobedience."³³ And once more: "That... I may not deal more severely according to the power which the Lord hath given me, unto edification and not unto destruction."³⁴ Hence, it is the Church, and not the State, that is to be man's guide to heaven. It is to the Church that God has assigned the charge of seeing to, and legislating for, all that concerns religion; of teaching all nations; of spreading the Christian faith as widely as possible; in short, of administering freely and without hindrance, in accordance with her own judgment, all matters that fall within its competence.

The authority, legislative, executive and judicial, was given to the Church by God, through Jesus Christ, for one supreme purpose, the salvation of souls. There was once a time when civil princes acted according to this truth.

Paragraph 12. Now, the Church has never ceased to claim for herself and openly to exercise this authority, which is perfect in itself and plainly meant to be unfettered.³⁵ Yet this same authority has so long been assailed³⁶ by a philosophy that truckles³⁷ to the State. The Apostles themselves were the first to uphold this [Church] authority, when, being forbidden by the rulers of the synagogue to preach the Gospel, they courageously answered: "We must obey God rather than men."³⁸ This same authority the holy Fathers of the Church were always careful to maintain by weighty arguments, according as occasion arose. The Roman Pontiffs [the popes] have never shrunk from defending this authority with unbending constancy. Nay, more, princes (and all invested with power to rule) have themselves approved this authority, in theory alike and in practice. It cannot be called into question that in the making of treaties, in the transaction of business matters, in the sending and receiving ambassadors, and in the interchange of other kinds of official dealings these rulers have been wont to treat with the Church as with a supreme and legitimate power.

upon them. They really are two distinct societies, differing according to their end, though each are made up of men. The spiritual society, having a higher end, deserves the submission and support of the civil society.

Here the Pope makes passing reference to the Ages of Faith, especially the glorious Middle Ages, which evil men call the "Dark Ages."

The Church has a perfect and complete authority in her domain, but that authority has been under attack by ridiculous philosophies that claim she should be subject to the (lower) authority of the State.

Whenever there is opposition between God's commands and those of men, it is clear Whom we must obey.

All the Ages, the Church has shown that she is a real society, a real kingdom – with all the typical marks of a kingdom. In fact, She is a supremely powerful society / kingdom.

God has wisely decided that the Church should, besides her spiritual power,

Mere *civil* societies are based, in general, upon the Natural Law and Human Law. But the Church has a right to exist from the very command of God Himself!

³¹ Matt. 28:18-20

³² Matt. 18:12

³³ St. Paul, Second Epistle to the Corinthians 10:6.

³⁴ St. Paul, Second Epistle to the Corinthians 13:10

³⁵ **unfettered:** not controlled or limited

³⁶ **assail:** to attack, criticize

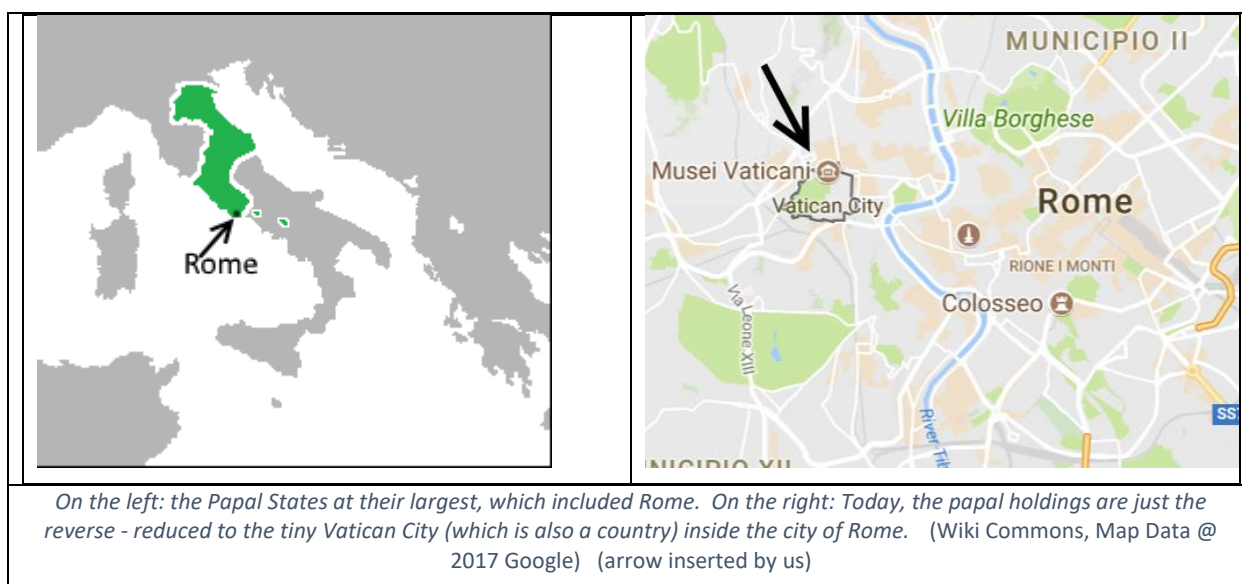
³⁷ **truckle:** to be servile; cringe, submit

³⁸ Acts 5:29

And, assuredly, all ought to hold that it was not without a singular disposition of God's providence that this power of the Church was provided with a civil sovereignty as the surest safeguard of her independence.

also have her own civil power to protect herself (actual physical possessions, land, buildings, money, and even a military force).

Did you catch that last sentence? The pope is both the leader of the Church (a worldwide spiritual society), but he is also the king of his own country. We would like to briefly tell the sad story of the ancient, stolen Papal States. From about 750 to 1870, the popes were temporal kings of large areas called the Papal States. The Church, mostly through generous donations given to Her, had come to own a large amount of land, the size of which eventually grew until it became a considerable portion of what is today Italy (see diagram below). In the 1800s, however, various tyrants invaded and stole these territories from the Church, leaving the pope with no land whatsoever. In the following years, the popes were virtual prisoners, governing the Church from inside the Vatican buildings. Yet, the Popes continued to claim the stolen property as the rightful property of the Church. It was only in 1929 that Pope Pius XI finally renounced the Church's claim to most of the Papal States by signing the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini, the dictator of the then-unified Italy. This treaty created the tiny papal state of the Vatican City – the area inside the city of Rome which we see today as the headquarters of our Church. It is the smallest country in Europe, consisting of only 109 acres.



Complete the Exercises for Lesson 3

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Lesson 6: The Destruction of the Middle Ages and the Rise of Terrible Errors

The Rise of Protestantism

We left off in the last section with the Pope saying that the beautiful and fruitful relationship between Church and State would have lasted for centuries more. But let us see what happened to destroy it. The next paragraph of the encyclical is absolutely critical. Read it at least twice. For your good, for your (someday) children's good, understand this next paragraph well. Pope Leo briefly summarizes the 1500s – 1700s for us. His summary gives us the key to understanding the disaster we are in today. It began when the arch-heretic Luther shattered the peace of the Middle Ages (even though it is true that some of the Church clergy were immoral/corrupt). Luther was soon followed by others with even more wicked heresies, such as Calvin and Zwingli. These three men created false religions which included the erroneous idea of “private interpretation” – that is, one can interpret the meaning of the Bible as he wishes, with no regard to any Church authority. Of course, men soon refused to listen to the authority of the Church whatsoever – why would they need a teaching, authoritative Church, when they can read the Bible and “decide for themselves”?

But the rebellion did not stop there: **It eventually broadened to include non-religious (philosophical) errors.** For example, the very natures of authority and ruling came under attack: “I can also think what I want about morals, politics, power, etc. The civil leaders are here to represent what I think about morality, and what I want. The power is from us, the people.” Such falsehoods would have been laughed at before the mid-1500s. But in the 1700s, such errors began to be given great respect across society's highest ranks, thanks to smooth-talking ‘philosophers’ such as Voltaire and Rousseau, who boasted: “To pray to God is to flatter oneself that words can alter nature”; “The Bible is what fools have written, what imbeciles command, what rogues teach, and young children are made to learn by heart.”; “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the **general will.**” Notice, not God's will, nor even the will of the ruler, but the will of the people is the supreme force. These errors eventually burst forth in the bloody, Masonic-inspired French Revolution.

CRITICAL PARAGRAPH: Paragraph 23. But that harmful and deplorable⁵⁶ passion for innovation⁵⁷ which was aroused in the sixteenth century [i.e. beginning with the early 1500s, the Protestant Revolt and its consequences] threw first of all into confusion the Christian religion, and next, by natural sequence, invaded the precincts⁵⁸ of philosophy, and from there, it spread amongst all classes of society. From this source, as from a fountain-head, burst forth all those later tenets⁵⁹ of unbridled⁶⁰ license.⁶¹ These tenets, in the midst of the terrible upheavals of the last century [i.e. the 1700s], were wildly conceived and boldly proclaimed as the principles and foundation of that new conception of law which was previously unknown, and contradicted many points of not only the Christian [law], but even the natural law.⁶²

This is critical! The Protestant Revolt did not just create false religions; eventually, a whole new spirit of rebellion, individualism, false liberty, and false philosophies arose which took root across society!

⁵⁶ **deplorable:** deserving of contempt, wretched

⁵⁷ **innovation:** the introduction of something new

⁵⁸ **precinct:** a sphere of thought

⁵⁹ **tenet:** principle, belief

⁶⁰ **unbridled:** unrestrained, unchecked

⁶¹ **license:** irresponsible/sinful use of the human will, falsely called “liberty” [True liberty is to only use the will for the good.]

⁶² **natural law:** the laws God has implanted on the consciences of all men, including basic tenets of morality, such as “Give to each man what is due to him. Do not steal others' goods. There is a God and He deserves worship. Do the reasonable things to keep your health/safety. Sexual relations are between man and woman only.”

The Protestant errors eventually gave rise to terrible revolutions. For example, in 1649, Cromwell in England led the Puritanical bloody revolution overthrowing the Anglican King Charles I. In the 1700s we see the French Revolution [1789-1799].

On June 17, 1689 the Sacred Heart of Jesus manifested to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque His command to the King of France (at the time, King Louis the Fourteenth) that the King was to consecrate France to the Sacred Heart. It is not certain why King Louis Fourteenth did not do so. Perhaps he did not believe the nun.

The Kings of France continued to not honor Our Lord's request for the Consecration of France.

So on June 17, 1789 - 100 years to the day after Our Lord first made the request in 1689 - the King of France (at that time, King Louis Sixteenth) was stripped of his legislative authority by the revolutionaries.

Four years later in 1793, the soldiers of the French Revolution threw the king in prison, where he attempted to do the Consecration of France, but it appeared to be "too little, too late." The bloodthirsty French Revolutionaries executed the King as if he were a criminal. Notice the sharp blade at the top of the guillotine, ready to fall. They also executed his wife the same way, and murdered most of the royal children likewise. The bloodshed continued with the murder of countless religious and laymen.

From the Glorious Catholic Middle Ages just a few centuries before, to this scene!



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ca/Louis_XVI_-_Execution.jpg Public Domain, author unknown

Philosophical Errors Which Infect Modern Man

The pope will now list some of the errors which arose during the 1500s to 1700s. We list them in red. Afterwards, the pope will refute them all. We warn you that the next few parts of this encyclical are probably the hardest in this work. Do your best to follow because it is important to try to understand these errors.

Paragraph 24. Amongst these [false] principles:

1. the main one lays down that since all men are alike by race and nature, therefore in like manner all are equal in the control of their life;
2. that each one is so far his own master as to be in no sense under the rule of any other individual;
3. that each is free to think on every subject just as he may choose, and to do whatever he may like to do;
4. that no man has any right to rule over other men.

Particular erroneous principles - equality, false freedom, false definition of law, denial of external authority.

Government is nothing other than the will of the people, receiving its right to power from the people.

The Catholic Church has always held that men are *not created equal* in the sense of different levels of

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