

Notes from a former Charismatic to Christians in the Charismatic Movement



This is the next chapter of the book, [The Foundations Under Attack: The Roots of Apostasy](#) – By Michael de Semlyen

Epilogue

A. “Notes from a former Charismatic to Christians in the Charismatic Movement”

“God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” – Galatians 6:14

Calvary and Pentecost – the Balance Lost

Gradually, and without many appearing to notice it, the balance has been shifted away from Calvary and the accompanying crushing antagonism of *false* religion endured by our Lord and by His disciples ever since; and onto Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit. This makes for a gospel based primarily on happenings and feelings and on receiving from God rather than giving to Him. We are called to serve and suffer, not to reign and prosper. *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake:”* -Philippians 1:29

This shift of emphasis from Calvary to Pentecost, accompanied by the weakening of the Word and disregard for doctrine, has opened the floodgates to error and heresy on a scale not seen before, perhaps at any time in the whole history of the church. In a remarkably subtle way it has undermined the centrality of the death of Christ and His once and for all sacrifice and atonement for sin.

Turning to Ourselves

Personal testimonies of conversion and much new reading matter tend to be self-orientated and experiential rather than centered on sin, repentance, and the call to the cross. The great seduction is to turn us from heaven to earth, from the true God to the altar of self, from denial to esteem of self, from God’s truth to Satan’s lie. This ties in closely with the New Age teaching which has invaded the church with its message of man’s self-sufficiency drawn from Eastern religions.

Thus is the door opened for "the experiencing of the real presence" and other forms of extra-Scriptural activity to emerge. Many conservative evangelicals feel that this has been the legacy of the Charismatic Movement and are accordingly hostile to it and everything about it.

The Holy Spirit and His gifts tend to occupy center stage, and Charismatic Christians glory much in miracles and healings, signs and wonders. But, *"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ... ." - Galatians 6:14*

God gives His gifts as He chooses to give them, but there is also the massive counterfeit which claims to be renewal rather than heresy, and leads into so much error. The error so often relates to proportion. 'Without proper proportion, a medicine becomes a poison', and faith becomes folly. The Scriptures are added to in countless prophetic messages and "words from the Lord" which are not to be found in the Bible, not in any version. "But," protests the Charismatic enthusiast, "the God that I worship is a big God; he wouldn't limit himself to the contents of just one book." He certainly doesn't, but very understandably, He has limited us. *"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you. neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."* - Deuteronomy 4:2

The Bible can easily become a kind of "lucky dip" with Scripture used to confirm preconceived ideas and desires as well as to promote favoured theories and schools of thought. Clear guidance is not forthcoming from leadership, as so many preachers are afraid of offending their congregations or prejudicing their reputations.

The New Heresies

The Word of God is used in a selective and irresponsible fashion to justify "naming and claiming" and "positive confession", as well as the exercising of "dominion" over our circumstances through the "word of faith". Just how the interpretation of a single Scripture apparently unsupported in the rest of the Bible can form the basis for an entire movement or system of belief is difficult to understand. Yet this happens again and again as Christians who feel themselves enlightened by the renewal have gradually abandoned the old paths for the new. Examples of such derivative verses are Genesis 1:28 (*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*), the basis for "the Dominion mandate"; Isaiah 53:5 (*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*), the authority for universal healing; Romans 8:19 (*For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*), the "Manifest Sons of God" movement; Acts 3:20-21 (*And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*), restoration of the kingdom by the church; and John 14:13 (*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my*

name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.), "naming and claiming" and "prosperity". In support of these formularised expressions of faith, Psalm 105:15 is often cited, "touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm", meaning don't criticise anything taught by any recognised Christian ministry. This verse may have already come to mind for those readers who are unhappy with what is argued in this booklet.

Apart from the cults, which most Christians realise deny the divinity of Christ and His atonement, a plethora of heresies has been imported from the United States, where the mixture of moral majority and Kingdom Now theology, "televangelism", and right-wing politics has proved irresistible to so many sincere Christians. Among them and under the appealing veneer, it is not difficult to glimpse the familiar old heresies of Arianism and Gnosticism in new guise.

Constructing the Kingdom, Marketing the Gospel

The reclaiming and restoring of Christ's kingdom, "strategic evangelisation", and the Biblical reconstruction or Christianization of society are all on the agenda. Business groupings, many of them multi-national, are being set up to reorganise, equip, share skills, prosper, and pray for businesses according to "kingdom principles". In the United States experiments are being conducted for whole communities to be organised or "reconstructed" in this way. Before His scourging, Jesus told Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."* -John 18:36 The Charismatic church is taken up with "doing a new thing". Growth, strategy, planning, organisation, claiming territory, setting targets and goals, liberation theology, and the social gospel are all part of it. But how do we reconcile all of this with the Bible's instructions to *"walk in the old paths where is the good way"* and to *"remember the former things of old"*? -Isaiah 46:9

Praise marches and other ecumenical gatherings, which set out to claim the ground, the place, the town or country in the name of Jesus, have been part of the strategy for church growth as well as for inter-church unity. Many believers who have taken part in them question whether these marches really have Biblical warrant or whether they are just "a good idea." Songs like "We'll Take This Land for Jesus" inspire the marchers, and Scriptures out of the Old Testament, relating to gaining territory and marching around the city walls are often quoted, but it is hard to see how it can be squared with the teaching of the New Testament. In fact it doesn't seem to accord with the message of the Gospel at all. The great commission is the assignment of the church **to call believers out** of the kingdoms of this world **not to take back** the kingdoms of this world for Christ.

The wider strategy of claiming "half of the world for Christ" by AD 2000 and all the other projects for the Decade of Evangelism made an unscriptural presumption. In their zeal for mission, they placed so much emphasis on the decade ahead that they undermined the preparedness of the church for our blessed hope, the imminent return of The Lord Jesus Christ. There is a tremendous need for revival today, and all of us should long for and pray for this and for a great harvest of souls. But no revival was ever founded on our

own efforts or on a planned campaign. It can only be a sovereign work of God.

Counting Heads: Tares among the Wheat

Is the practice of numbering people any more acceptable today than when King David did it? David afterwards confessed to God, *'I have sinned greatly in what I have done.'* (2 Samuel 24:10) Statistics relating to "commitments" or conversions at crusades for projecting church growth or "marketing" the Gospel are gravely misused. It must ever be stressed that **only the Lord knows His own**. The inevitable result of a head-counting mentality is the undiscerning inclusion of tares among wheat in the Body of Christ. Some pastors justify this by pointing out that there is to be no separation until the time of the harvest. But the Lord's teaching on the parable of the wheat and the tares makes very clear that this parable refers to **the world** and not to the church.¹⁵ The Body of Christ is not supposed to have tares that resemble the wheat within the Body.

The modern church is thought to be filled with Christians who have stopped at conversion. They are seen as saved but not submitted—born again, but not "baptized in the Spirit". They are said to have decided for Christ, but are not yet ready to be in obedience to Him and all of His Word. Of course we cannot know or judge, but such are unconverted sympathisers. They call Him Lord, but they do not know Him. Without question the Gospel preached in awakening power will cause men to search the Scriptures, to hunger and thirst after righteousness and not to rest until they know that they have that blessed assurance that they are born of God. A pastor who insists that those who claim simply to love Jesus and affirm His Lordship are assuredly brothers in Christ is irresponsible before God. This "easy- believism" denies the Christ of the Bible who was nailed to the cross by false religion. *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* asks Jesus in Luke 6:46. We are called to obedience to the Scripture, to answering temptations as He did with *"it is written, we shall live by every word of God"*; (Luke 4:4 *"And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."*) to demonstrating love for Him by keeping His commandments; (John 14:15 *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*) to affirming that His Word is truth; (John 17:17 *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."*) and to contending earnestly for it. (Jude 3 *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you. and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."*)

The Importance of Doctrine

"Doctrine is the immune system of the church which is infected with spiritual aids. Diseases and afflictions, heresies and false teaching are rife. The patient is very sick." People have become so taken with "experiences" and "relationships" that they have tended to relegate the doctrine of the Word of God to a secondary position. There is a widely held belief that as long as you claim to "love Jesus" then you must be "one in the Spirit." The problem that the Scripture poses is that it reveals "another Jesus", "another Spirit", and "another Gospel". We must ever seek to discern the Spirit, as we

are warned that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14) Of course, experience and relationships are important, but they must flow from a correct understanding of doctrine, rather than provide the principles upon which we form our beliefs.

In today's climate, doctrine is out of fashion. Relativism rules, contributing to what Spurgeon called "the downgrade" of truth. "What is truth?" Pilate asked Jesus. (John 18:38) The certainty that used to be has been squeezed out by the world in the church with its liberal and "higher critical" approach to all things.

"This Bible version says this and that version says that." The definitive and final word is no more; and thus the manifestations of God's power—the phenomena—become the focus of faith. Crucial matters of doctrine that cause offence to some are suppressed or by-passed. Paul warned Timothy that *"the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap unto themselves teachers, having itching ears."* (2 Timothy 4:3) That time has come. Few Christian ministries are now being established with clear Statements of Faith; nor are congregations across the denominations today familiar with their own Articles, Confessions, and Creeds, as every assembly of Christians once was.

As the inter-Church process gathers momentum, few Christians are willing to face up to the question of ecumenical unity, searching the Scriptures as the Bereans did. Liberalism (or "has God said?" Genesis 3:1) among Church leaders and theologians has prepared the ground for this kind of unity, as the modern critical approach to the Scriptures questions the certainties and undermines the very foundations of faith. Although this is probably the single most important issue in the church today, it is rarely discussed and debated among the wider congregation, and little attempt is made to educate people about what is involved. Even churches that style themselves as reformed manage to avoid facing up to things. It is seen as so very much easier, and more loving, to find a formula, work out a compromise and concentrate on other things. But the issue will not go away. For the issue is that of the Gospel itself, of *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* (faith alone and Scripture alone), of Christ and only Christ. The alternative to this is idolatry. There is no middle ground, no neutral position, no fence to sit on. No ambiguity, half-truth, or compromise is acceptable to God. As the prophet Elijah said to the people before the great victory at Mount Carmel: *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: if Baal, then follow him And the people answered him not a word."* (1 Kings 18:21)

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." 2 Timothy 4:4

The Narrow Way

... "narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. " Matthew 7:14

The Scriptures are full of warnings and admonitions to keep us all on the narrow path. We are intended to guide one another accordingly; and by

Scripture to reprove, correct and instruct in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), *"that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive"*. (Ephesians 4:14) This is not "negative"; this is life as we are expected to find it and live it; it is the pilgrim's progress through our sinful world.

Un-Christian Practices

Nor are followers of Christ being given clear direction relating to un-Christian practices. It is encouraging that several denominations have now begun to tackle Freemasonry. However, few churches are prepared to deal properly with homosexuality or with Alternative Medicine including homeopathy and hypnotism. The issues of abortion and the sanctity of life are avoided from the pulpit. Many liberal "evangelicals" now favour abortions in principle, and an Archbishop of York was the leading advocate in the House of Lords in favour of experimentation on human embryos. Few Christians in the public arena will openly oppose abortion altogether and stand firm on the magnificent Scriptures that so clearly emphasise our human identity before conception, according to God's providence. *"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them."* (Psalm 139:16) The vote in The Commons, on the night of Monday, 23 May 1990, with a huge majority in favour of experimentation on embryos, was both monumental and shocking. One evangelical described it as "the greatest rebellion of man against God since the Garden of Eden." Graduating from the license we have awarded ourselves to **terminate** life, we have now chosen to play God to the extent that henceforward we shall actually **select** life.

The Word of Faith

The frequent preaching of John 14:13, "whatever you ask that will I do", and Matthew 21:22, *"whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"*, so easily can become an abuse of Scripture. Over emphasis may lead directly to "positive confession" and faith in faith as a power that we can direct. But *"Thy will be done"*, not mine, is the Lord's prayer. "Faith never knows where it is being led," said Oswald Chambers, "but it loves and knows the One Who is leading." "Faith in faith" within a church can also undermine individual freedoms and the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. For example, churches' expansion programmes are funded by "faith", just as are "televangelist" ministries in the United States. The claim is that "if the faith isn't properly exercised, God cannot or will not act."

The prophetic leading of those few privileged "apostles" or "prophets", who are the new elite who hear the Lord's voice or who "see pictures" or have had a special experience, very often determines the direction of the church and its resources. Disagreement may be seen as hostile, even as an attack on the "level of faith" exercised by the fellowship.

The "Toronto Blessing", which came out of the Word of Faith movement, was (and is) believed to be such a special experience. To obtain it, a pilgrimage to Toronto was (and is) necessary, reminiscent of a mystical experience

sought at Lourdes or Fatima. Many evangelical churches imported this very mixed blessing which proved to be divisive and disruptive.

God Must Heal

If someone isn't healed, under Word of Faith, there has been a failure in the exercise of faith. The alarming insistence on healing and the selection of Scripture to oblige God to heal, which seems to borrow from Christian Science, plays a major part in many tragedies and causes carnage in the Body of Christ. God is sovereign. He heals when He heals and provides us wonderfully with the faith to pray, believing we will receive even when sometimes we don't. To insist on formulae for health constructed somehow from the Scriptures is to cling to our earthly substance instead of our Christian hope. It also creates casualties. Guilt and failure of faith, which can be devastating, are laid on those Christians who have lost loved ones. Charismatic believers are encouraged, if not conditioned, to stand fast on a "word of faith", an isolated portion of Scripture that they feel certain the Lord has given them, which relates to their personal well-being. They may continue to "positively confess" or hold fast to this promise of health or prosperity, while their declining circumstances clearly demonstrate there is no possible reason for doing so. In this way sick dependants have been allowed to die without medical help and capable able-bodied businessmen have drifted into bankruptcy. To the outsider faith has become folly.

The "prosperity schools" and "word of faith" ministries have much to answer for in this regard, as have church leaders who fail to speak out clearly against such practices. The shepherds must guide the sheep. Christ's teaching calls for His disciples to bear hardship and persecution and accept the path of affliction and of suffering and to carry our cross. The New Testament and the history of the church reveal that God's servants spent little or no time concerning themselves with their earthly bodies, nor with their worldly possessions. Instead they were carried forward by their hope of heaven and their desire to share the Gospel and contend for the faith. Those men and women did not place their faith in their circumstances, in prosperity, or earthly reward; or in visions, miracles, or prophecies and isolated words from Scripture. They placed their faith in Him, *"the King eternal, immortal, invisible, only wise God."* (1 Timothy 1:17) They simply took Christ at His Word, which directs all of us to, *"take no thought, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on ... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:25, 33)

Faith in God or Faith in Man?

The totality of Christ's saving work on the cross; the fact that we did nothing, nor can do anything to contribute to our own salvation, and that our faith itself is a gift from Him; (Ephesians 2:8) the wonderful doctrine of justification by faith alone—all of this is under attack from many directions. The focus of faith has shifted away from preaching and from the Word onto the sacraments, onto gifts and signs and wonders, or onto both. In the United States *Charismatic Bible Ministries*, a major organisation founded and supported by many of the best known American Charismatic leaders, has had

as its motto, "Unity and love through signs and wonders". This is very far from *sola Scriptura* and "faith and faith alone."

Evangelism – Commitment and Compromise

Unquestionably the Lord has much used Billy Graham's gift of evangelism in the past. But for many years the Billy Graham Organisation's crusades, very much part of the ecumenical movement, were "re-dedicating" thousands of Roman Catholics alongside the many others who had gone forward in response to the invitation that is made. Many thousands of men and women, stirred by the Scriptures and responding to what they thought to be the call of God through the famous evangelist, have been sent back to Roman Catholic places of worship, having been "re-dedicated" to that faith, according to the organisers. Here is the demonstration that "Commitment to Christ" and obedience to His Word are not the same thing. Few would want to cast doubt on the sincerity of those who go forward to answer the call on such an occasion. However, only God knows whom He has called to discipleship. In his book, *You Call Me Lord*, John MacArthur sums up the problem very clearly.

"Listen to the typical presentation nowadays. You will hear sinners entreated with words like, 'accept Jesus as personal Saviour', 'ask Jesus into your heart', 'invite Jesus into your life', or 'make a decision for Christ'. It may surprise you to learn that none of these is based on biblical terminology. They are the products of a diluted gospel. It is not the Gospel according to Jesus Christ. The Gospel that the Lord Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer."

The Lord Jesus taught that the cost of following Him is high, and that we should weigh it carefully before embarking on the journey. (Luke 14:28) The way is narrow and few find it. (Matthew 7:14) He also makes it clear that there are those who call Him Lord, who perform signs and wonders, and who do wonderful works in His name, who are not destined to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 7:21-23)

Looking to Men rather than Christ

"Cursed be the man who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. "Jeremiah 17:5.

One of the most serious problems in the church is that men are looking to men, and not to Christ. Many of today's Christians are so impressed with the reputation of well-known preachers and evangelists and dazzled by their style, that they are inclined to drop their guard and abandon discernment. For example, when the teaching is given by one who may have a PhD in theology, an eloquent preaching style, an air of humility, and a considerable reputation, it can all too often be enough to convince most of today's Christians that the message comes from God. It very often does not. Gatherings organised around celebrities have the apparent merit of attracting large numbers. At such performances the message tends to be a weak one and references to the gospel come across almost inevitably as part of the entertainment, with Christ receiving the strong endorsement of the celebrity.

The impact of such an occasion is to send everyone away happy, but one wonders whether many or indeed any at such gatherings are challenged or troubled by the conviction of sin.

Nowhere in the Scriptures is the Gospel preached as an extension to other activities, organised to bring in the target audience. Such events, which include pop concerts and joyful celebratory services on TV, are readily justified in public relations terms as creating a positive witness or image for Christianity. It is recognised that no one is likely to be confronted with gospel truths that might cause offence, but it is felt that making church more attractive, loving, and welcoming is a worthy objective. But does the Creator of the universe, the jealous God of the Old Testament, really need the help of popular culture or the fame of men to reach His elect? The great danger in this form of evangelism is that it causes us to look to men and to compromise with the world. The popularity of the celebrity with Christians and non-Christians alike is seldom impaired and often enhanced on such occasions, and this gives us a guide. *“Woe unto you when all men speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets.”* (Luke 6:26)

Whatever happened to our Christian hope, our treasure in heaven? What became of the longing for his coming, the eager expectation for the day of the Lord? Where is the sense of the holiness of the Lord—the reverend fear and awe of the Almighty God, the creator and judge of the world? Where is the fervent prayer, the love of truth, the jealousy for purity in doctrine and the hatred of idolatry? What has happened to the urgent concern for the souls of more than a thousand million religious Anglicans, Orthodox, and Catholics in the world today without assurance of salvation, in bondage to the sacraments and to a system of works and ritual? Where is a heart of compassion for those who seek truth but are imprisoned by such deception? Where is the cry for the cleansing of the church and for deep repentance because we have failed them, our own kinsmen, by pretending not to see? Where are the preachers today who do not persistently avoid the clear message of Revelation 17? Where are the watchmen who sound the alarm? Why do they, who hear the sound of the trumpet, not take warning? (Ezekiel 33:3)

In the confused climate, perhaps the primary cause for failure in the church is the conspicuous absence of leaders who lead. There are many leaders who follow, many who look across one at another and lead by being led, by following the prevailing wind of change in the church. But few are the shepherds who guide the sheep onto and along the narrow path. Where are the men and women of courage to stand against the tide, men of boldness to preach the gospel of obedience and sacrifice, of integrity to stress the cost of discipleship and of humility who know the certainty of knowing that they do not know? Where are the Christian leaders scorning popularity who are ready to lay down their reputations and lose their lives? Where, too, are the pastors, responsible before God, determined to guide their flocks into green pastures regardless of the price that might be paid; shepherds who warn, as Paul did, of grievous wolves, of false brethren, and of the existence and prevalence of another gospel and a different spirit? Where are the leaders who know, as Matthew Henry has reminded us, that “evil abounds when good men stay silent”? Where are the men of faith like the reformers of old, like

Whitfield, Spurgeon and Ryle, fearless and constant, holding fast with their followers to that liberty in which Christ had made them free? "Controversy in religion," as Bishop Ryle reminded the church, "is a hateful thing."

"It is hard enough to fight the devil, the world and the flesh, without private differences in our own camp. But there is one thing which is even worse than controversy, and that is false doctrine tolerated, allowed, and permitted without protest or molestation. It was controversy that won the battle of Protestant Reformation. If the views that some men hold were correct, it is plain we never ought to have had any Reformation at all! For the sake of peace, we ought to have gone on worshipping the Virgin, and bowing down to images and relics to this very day!" (Bishop J.C. Ryle: sermon entitled, "Warning #6 to the Church – The Fallibility of Ministers")

The Apostle Paul was the most divisive and controversial character portrayed in the entire book of Acts. Because of this, he was beaten with rods, stoned and left as dead, chained and left in a dungeon, dragged before magistrates, and barely escaped assassination. Yet so pronounced in him were his convictions that it came to a point when the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonika declared: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." (Acts 17:6)

"God pity those pastors and Christian leaders whose main objective is the growth of their organisations and whose main concern lest their 'boats be rocked.' They may escape involvement in controversy, but they will not escape the judgement seat of Christ." (Ian Paisley: "Bishop J.C. Ryle First Anglican Bishop of Liverpool")

Were Ryle and other great men of faith alive today they would scarcely recognise the popular and comfortable Christianity which "celebrates" at every opportunity and merely seeks the world's approval instead of confronting its sin and need for the Saviour. They would be horrified by the accommodation with false religion, knowing that this must undermine and eventually destroy the foundation of our lives. "*If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?*" (Psalm 11:3) They would deplore the weak and equivocal leadership, which accommodates so much false doctrine and causes confusion for those who try to follow.

In an address to the British Evangelical Council in 1969, one among them, and truly a prophetic voice in his generation and beyond, expressed their likely reaction very powerfully, with a message as important today as then. Citing the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 14:8, "*For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself to the battle?*" Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones made clear that he believed that the enemy are not just present but rampant in the camp. "Sound the alarm," he thundered, "Sound the alarm."

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