



## Discussing the Church Mandate considering Matthew 28:19-20

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.228>

### Abstract

The relationship between the church and the world, the task of preaching the gospel and social care are still hot topics of discussion today. The purpose of raising this topic is so that the church can be reminded of the correct paradigm regarding the double mandate commanded by Jesus Christ the Head of the church in Matthew 28:19-20 and Matthew 22:34-40. The church's paradigm regarding the two mandates invariably influences and determines the practice of church life in its daily form. To describe the subject of this discussion, the author used a qualitative approach based on a literature study in which a range of relevant books and scientific academic articles were investigated and considered after which descriptive conclusions could be drawn. The results of the study indicate that Jesus through the mandate of evangelism, becomes an agent of spiritual transformation which ultimately results in needed social transformation. The mission of God is then for all of us to be involved in the spiritual elements of life and in considering the afterlife and of course also in striving to make the world a better place for all.

**Keywords:** Church mandate; spiritual, social transformation, Matthew 28:19-20.



## Introduction

The Indonesian nation is now facing big problems, not only the problem of the Covid-19 pandemic which ravaged the planet, but also the decline in the good character of society which is marked by rampant acts of corruption in the government, intolerance, radicalism, and also violence, which are very worrying for individual and social life and even for the nation as such. It cannot be denied that from the base of ordinary people at the lower social stratum all the way up to the elite upper stratum there are disturbing movements in which there is verbal and physical violence perpetrated in the name of 'religion' for certain political vested interests. This triggers social conflict in society. Observing the situation, must make all of us concerned and we need to try to overcome the challenges faced, because it is our collective responsibility as part of the Indonesian people to fight against such issues. The church in Indonesia, without exception, should participate in thinking about the struggles of the Indonesian people and on how to overcome the many social problems that occur on and plague the community where the church has a presence. All elements of society in Indonesia, regardless of their faith, creed, or religion, have a moral responsibility to strive to develop Indonesia in a positive manner according to their respective capacities (Simangunsong, 2022; Dwiraharjo, 2023; Putrawan & Eunike, 2021).

Indeed, churches in Indonesia, which are part of the community, are called to be involved in providing solutions to overcome the many problems that are currently manifesting society. The act of love for others or social care as an answer to making the gospel a reality expresses the love of Christ, that is loving others sincerely as Christ has loved His people (Stevanus, 2018b). As Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:13-16, the church is called to be a blessing and a witness to the world because the church was sent into the midst of the world to be the 'light' and 'salt' of the world. Even the church (whatever the denomination) is called to take part in alleviating social problems faced by the Indonesian people. Arifianto, Santorini, and Stevanus (2020) state that the social situation facing this nation is precisely an opportunity to implement God's mission, by presenting peace in Indonesia, which is needed to reach those who are suffering by paying attention to their diverse needs.

The great message of Jesus needs to be understood comprehensively so that the church is not trapped in an extreme or one-sided attitude, between the mission of saving souls and the mission of humanity. The church is not only preoccupied with 'spiritual' matters, which involve aspects of the spiritual transformation of the people. However, it is also necessary to intensify God's mission holistically where the church is actively involved in efforts to transform people's lives socially. Stevanus stated that the dualism understands that there is the separation between spiritual and physical or material affairs and all their implications is the cause of the church's mission in a crisis in understanding and practicing its mission which is one-sided and exclusive in nature, where the church only wants to deal with meeting spiritual needs (Stevanus, 2021a).

Woga quotes Caspersz's statement, that the total separation of the spiritual life and worldly (profane) affairs contradicts one's existence as a multidimensional human being, or temporal (natural/secular) and sometimes even trans-temporal (eternity/supernatural) being. And this therefore undermines the balance of life and human existence and the world (Woga, 2009: 184). It is also true that the church needs to integrate text, context and community so that the church's mission becomes relevant to the needs of the world. A one-sided emphasis on preaching the gospel for the saving of souls without regard to community-context tends to narrow mission practice (Lumintang, 2006: 44). In other words, the practice of the church's mission that ignores



the context of its recipients is considered to be a failure in carrying out the will of Jesus Christ, that is the church is called to be the 'light' and 'salt' of the world (Yunianto, 2021).

The urgency of writing this article is to inform that it is very important for the church to have a complete and biblical mission paradigm. Here the author intends to describe the dual aspects of the mandate of Jesus Christ, that is starting with the preaching of the Gospel as an agent of spiritual transformation towards social transformation. It is hoped that the churches in Indonesia as a community of believers can become agents of social change (social transformation) and become more active in the community and be able to carry out the mandate of Jesus Christ the Redeemer whose calls on the church as His bride to renew or transform the community.

## **Research Methods**

In an effort to explain the dual aspects of Jesus Christ's message to the church today, the writer opted to use a descriptive qualitative method (Holly, 2021; Tanasyah, et.al, 2022). The first step was to search for relevant literary sources, both books and scientific academic articles on the topic of the Church mandate in Matthew 28:19-20 to transform from not only a spiritual life but also to seek to transform the social life of people. Second, the author analyzed the theory put forward from the literature by looking at the biblical text as the main point of reference in order to determine the what the true attitude of the church should be towards the mission of Jesus. Finally, the author concludes with the concepts or theories stated in the Bible which are deemed to be the theological basis for the practice of the church's mission in its social milieu.

## **Church Mandate**

### ***Matthew 28:19-20 Command to Preach the Gospel to All Nations***

This text is often referred to as the great commission, that is the command to preach the gospel to all the peoples of the earth. This commandment can be said to be unique and exclusive because it is only given to the church or believers. The church is given the command to proclaim the message of salvation in Christ through the preaching of the gospel. This commandment was given before Christ ascended into heaven (Stevanus, 2020). Jesus Christ declared His commandment to His disciples, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them all that He had taught (Matthew 28:19). His command is clear, that the church is commanded to preach the gospel to all of mankind so that they may obtain salvation. In the pastoral letter written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, the reason for the work of preaching the gospel is explained as: "This is good and pleasing to God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Previously, Paul had explained in Romans 6:23 that salvation is only in Christ: "But the grace of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Stevanus, 2019: 5).

But for Kuiper, showing the 'way of salvation' as written in the Gospel of John 3:16 is only one of the motives of preaching the gospel (Kuiper, 2013: 87). On the other hand, the writer argues that preaching the gospel is 'the only way of salvation', because Jesus Christ himself said in John 14:6 that he is the only way that God has appointed. The church must continue to hold firmly to this belief in the supremacy of Christ until His return. Because today there are opinions that refute the supremacy of Christ as the only hope for the salvation of mankind (Stevanus, 2021b). Many Bible passages, especially in the New Testament, clearly proclaim the universal claim of Christ. He is the only way to salvation. Christ is the foundation of saving faith (Stevanus, 2018a: 23).

The Bible clearly points to the fact of man's spiritual state apart from Christ. No man is righteous before God (Romans 3:11). The fall of man into sin has caused destruction for man (Setiawan,



2019). This situation makes it impossible for humans to save themselves. This is because humans have been born in sin and died spiritually (Romans 3:23). The helplessness of a sinful man or woman necessitates the grace of God, that is the new birth (John 3). The new birth can only be experienced in faith in Jesus Christ. The new birth is complete freedom from punishment for human sins (Stevanus, 2017: 95–96). That's why Bosch defines the gospel message as preaching salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in Him, calling them to experience repentance by leaving the 'old' man, preaching the good news for people to be free from sin and receive forgiveness and invite them as part of the unity the body of Christ to become living members of the community of believers in Jesus on earth and to begin a life of service to God and others in the power of the Holy Spirit as 'new' people (Bosch, 2006: 16). Christian mission includes vertical aspects, that is the experience of being born again and saved, and horizontal, that is participating in serving the social needs of others and more especially those in distress.

Thus, faith in Christ is an absolute condition for the renewal of human life. Only through the Bible can humans find a solution to the problem of sin. This is the basis of the mission of the church, that Jesus Christ is the only basis for the salvation of mankind. This is to be preached to all nations: "And again: in his name the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, starting from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47; cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Man needs a gospel that can save him. He is the one appointed by God as the 'way of atonement' for the sins of mankind. And the church or believers, are called to be Christ's messengers to the world. Paul said, "...Christ has reconciled us to himself and has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. For God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ... He has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. So, we are messengers of Christ, as if God were advising you through us; In the name of Christ, we ask you be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

The mandate to preach the good news is part of the devotion and obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ himself before he ascended to heaven and is not a product of the church. Therefore, there is no reason to disobey the orders. The church must obey this commandment even though it faces difficult challenges. The church needs to introduce Christ as a God who loves everyone, and assert that everyone deserves salvation (Tanhidy et al., 2021). This should be the foundation of the worldwide Christian mission.

### ***Matthew 22:34-40 The Commandment to Love One Another as Oneself***

Preaching the gospel is not Christ's only commandment. There is another major commandment of Christ as written in Matthew 22:34-40. These two commandments are also found in Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28. When examined in the previous passage, that is Matthew 22:23-33, where a group of Sadducees holds the view that there is no resurrection of the dead. They debated with Jesus. And Jesus gave a clear answer, so that they were silent and could not argue with Him and did not dare to ask Him any more questions. Jesus said: "You are astray, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God! For at the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but live like angels in heaven" (vv. 29-30). When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered to discuss this. The Sadducees were at odds with the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection of the dead. In this case, the Pharisees seem to have the support of Jesus. Previously, the Pharisees had tried to frame Jesus with the question of paying taxes to the emperor (Matthew 22:15-22), but their efforts failed. Now, they turned to Jesus to try to trap Him again. One of them, a scribe, asked a new question, that is: "Teacher, which commandment is foremost in the law?" (v.36). The purpose of the Pharisees and scribes asking this was simply to find fault with Jesus. Jesus then replied that the first and foremost commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (vv. 37-38) and the second



commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (vv. 39). With this answer, then Jesus summarized all the law (cf. Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5).

In the text of Matthew 22:34-40 Jesus explained about the law of love (*agape*) as the most important law. Loving God as the first commandment is as important as the second commandment. In other words, loving God and loving others have the same important value. It means that loving God without loving others is a living a lie. According to Jesus, the relationship of love to God and neighbor cannot be separated. Ramli also argues that God not only requires humans to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, but He also commands humans to love their neighbors as themselves. Loving God and loving others are closely related and cannot be separated, because loving God must also be applied to loving others (Ramli, 2003: 2).

For followers of Christ, as He commanded, love for God must be manifested in the form of love for others. To love one's neighbor as oneself is a law as important as loving God. In John 13:34-35, Christ said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." So here Jesus has stated the essence or summary of God's commandments that have been conveyed by the prophets, that is to love God and neighbor. Jesus didn't mean to change the Old Testament commands, but He did renew them. Jesus emphasized that the commandment to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love one's neighbor still applies today. However, against the second commandment, Jesus renewed it, that is from: "love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39) now changed (updated) to: "that you may love one another; just as I have loved you..." (John 13:34). It also says in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you."

The proof of this teaching of love is the person of Jesus himself who sacrificed himself by dying on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind (John 1:29; Mark 10:45). Jesus said in John 15:13, "There is no greater love than the love of a man who lays down his life for his friends". In the Old Testament the standard used was 'self', but in the New Testament, it was updated by Jesus that now the standard in terms of loving others is 'himself', that is Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant by the new commandment. Thus, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are commanded to love our neighbor no longer by the standard as we love ourselves, but just as Jesus Christ has loved us. The law of love taught by Jesus Christ is the ethical basis for living and applied by Christians in the practice of daily life in the midst of a pluralist society. Loving one's neighbor is not based on religious commandments, but on the love of Christ. Love for neighbor is the fulfillment of God's law as well as the manifestation of life in the love of Christ.

### **Exemplary Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church as Role Models for the Mission of the Church Today**

Sometimes churches face confusion between the tasks of evangelism and social action. The church often creates a dichotomy between evangelism and social responsibility. Some emphasize spiritual safety, because spiritual needs are more important than social actions. On the other hand, there are also those who think that social action is equated with evangelism. In addition, there is another view that says that evangelism is a proclamation of the Kingdom of God, while social action is a manifestation (demonstration) of the Kingdom of God. How the church responds to these views appropriately and wisely is important. Mamahit states in his research on the social concerns of the evangelical church community that there is little interest which shows how little the community of believers is responding to social problems, such as poverty, crime, gender-based violence and others. Social action has not become a 'lifestyle'. On the one hand, the



evangelical church is still struggling with issues of insensitivity to social problems (Mamahit, 2005). Yet in his mission, the church was sent by Christ into the world to be the 'light' and 'salt' of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). In its interaction with the world where the church is present, it is faced with various challenges such as social, economic, political, educational, corruption, and health problems and so on. The church as part of society is called to try to be far more involved in fighting to overcome social problems that are manifesting in daily struggles faced in society in general.

Evangelicals are often seen as having no compassion for the environment (social) and appear to be only concerned with individual spiritual salvation. This accusation was denied by a well-known evangelical, that is Billy Graham. When asked about the relationship between social responsibility and evangelism, and if the two are closely related, he brought together the understanding between evangelism and social responsibility as being one at the first international evangelical congress in 1974. This congress became the forerunner of the Lausanne movement which discussed the development of biblical doctrine in order to understand a holistic mission. He added that evangelism was a top priority. The church must share the burden of human needs, and that burden must go beyond just 'paying attention'. It is a fact that the greatest social movement that has occurred in the history of the world is the result or fruit of evangelism. Missionaries are sent to any country where they go to preach love, and salvation by Christ who redeemed mankind, there are also hospitals, schools, orphanages, and hundreds of other services carried out for the love of souls in many countries (Graham, 1992: 41).

Stott, an evangelical theologian, also supports Graham's opinion. Social responsibility cannot be separated from the action of evangelism. Both are one package. More emphatically, Stott said that social action 'is not' to be seen as a means for evangelism, on the contrary it is a manifestation of evangelism action. Or in other words, social action is a manifestation of the Good News that is being preached. Through these social actions, the gospel message becomes a reality (Stott, 2013: 39). Stott quotes the Lausanne Covenant statement on behalf of evangelicals as saying that social action is not evangelism, political liberation is not salvation. However, evangelism and social involvement are 'part' of the church's work. Both are forms that must exist in the teaching of God and man (Stott, 2013: 131). Herlianto added, that in reality, the holistic ministry includes preaching the gospel both verbally and in actions and is aimed at reaching the whole human being, that is humans consisting of body, soul and spirit, and humans who have social connections, and so on (Herlianto, 1998: 123). Thus, the church's ministry should be holistic in that it not only tries to save sinners (spiritual transformation), but also helps them to begin to feel the blessings of the Kingdom of God (social transformation) in their lives today.

A strong example that forms the theological basis for the close relationship between the action of evangelism and social action exists, the first is the act of ministry of Jesus. His words (teachings) and His actions are interrelated, where His words interpret His actions, and His actions embody His words. He didn't just preach the Good News about God's Kingdom. He also displayed visible 'signs of the Kingdom of God'. That is why, He said if people would not believe His words, let them believe in Him "because of the works themselves" (John 14:11). In the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus identified himself as a difficult person, a stranger, marginalized both religiously and socially. When someone does something for others it is the same as doing something to Jesus himself. Jesus practiced holistic ministry. Jesus not only forgives human sins, but He also feeds the hungry, heals the sick, accepts those who are considered the scum of society.

Second, is the life of the early Church, making disciples not only for the ministry of the word but also for good works (Acts 2 and 6). The apostles carried out the preaching of the word and delegated social services to the deacons. An important purpose of the ministry of the word is to



discipline church members to work outside the church, to evangelize and to do good works. The early church (Acts 2:45) became a clear example, where those who owned, sold their land and property and then the proceeds were presented to the apostles to be distributed to those in need. These social actions overcome the social gaps that exist in the congregation. Paul in Ephesians 2:10, says that everyone who believes in Christ has received salvation.

Soesilo argues that in the life of the early Church there were two different types of action, that is signs and miracles performed by the apostles, and social action performed by the congregation. Based on this research on the text of Acts 2, it may be concluded that the two actions, as signs can also be called demonstrations of God's power that produce miracles and social action for the affected community. These two things must ideally exist in the church to be able to produce dynamic spiritual growth. The congregation becomes a dynamic person, who always moves in two aspects simultaneously and in balance. Congregations build themselves in a balanced way, both in vertical and horizontal relationships. They build vertical relationships by persevering in the teachings of the apostles, in prayers and praising God (Soesilo, 2018). Thus, it can be concluded that the way of life of the early Church balanced the relationship between the proclamation of the Kingdom of God (spiritual action) and the demonstration of the Kingdom of God through social action.

In all of Jesus' ministry and teachings, the double movement is evident, that is the revival movement (spiritual transformation) and social movement (social transformation). Both are one. Likewise, what was done by the early Church, the ministry of delivering the message of the Good News or evangelism was holistic (holistic). The early church did not only preach the gospel but also lived to witness and offer social action. That is why it is not an exaggeration to say that it is very important for the church today to review ministry or its mission by referring to what Jesus taught and did in His lifetime, as well as the example of the early Church so that the church is expected to be able to answer the problems faced in the context in which the church is presently existing. The church must not neglect its duty and vocation to build society, both spiritually and socially.

## **Spiritual Transformation Towards Social Transformation**

### ***The Urgency of Spiritual Transformation***

In the New Testament in particular, there are two words that have the meaning of transformation, that is ἀλλαγησόμεθα and μεταμορφοῦσθε (verb indicative future passive) comes from the word ἀλλαγησόμεθα is found in several verses, for example in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and Acts 6:14. The word ἀλλάσσω is the meaning of changing or making different. The word ἀλλάσσω denotes a physical change, that is when Jesus comes with His righteous people in the last days. Living believers will be 'transformed' (ἀλλαγησόμεθα /be transformed) in an instant. Thus, the word ἀλλάσσω means to change shape. The equivalent word for the transformation from a mortal body to a glorified body is in Philippians 3:21, that is μετασχηματίσει (verb indicative future active) from the word μετασχηματίζω (transform). While the word ἀλλάσσω in Acts 6:14 refers more to a change in behavior. While the word transformation found in Romans 12:2 is μεταμορφοῦσθε comes from the word μεταμορφώω (be transformed) that is to change. The change that this text means is clearly a change of mind.

Ismail clarifies the word μεταμορφώω in the text of Romans 12:2 is rooted in the word metamorphosis, a life and natural science term which means the process of changing existence. An example is the turning of a caterpillar into a cocoon and then into a butterfly. So, μεταμορφώω is a transformation or change of form to a higher stage (Ismail, 2011: 30). Sabdono explained the



stage that Paul was referring to when he said: "be changed by the renewal of your mind...". The Greek word for 'mind' is *νοῦς* which means mind or reason, reason or mindset. That is what transformation means, that is so that the mindset of Christians develops to higher and more mature stages (Sabdono, 2007: 11–12). Therefore, it can be said that Christianity is a process of life's journey to constantly experience changes in character towards Christlikeness. The Bible does not teach Christians to be like Christ, but commands Christians to wear the character of Christ. Change of character is the essence of Christian life, that is from sinful human character to Christ character (divine nature) as stated by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Furthermore, Paul said the result of this transformation is so that one may discern what God's will what is good and pleasing to God and perfect. Spiritual transformation has an impact on changing the direction of a Christian's life, which can be seen in the change in his or her character. Paul says that one cannot understand God's will without a daily process of renewing one's mind through the gospel. Of course, this renewal of the mind is also not a sudden and instant process, but a continuous growth of understanding of the truth until things are not the same as the norms of the world. The KJV translation says: "And be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). This change concerns the pattern of thinking and all its philosophies (*metanoia*). Salurante, Bilo, and Kristanto (2021) state that transformation is always related to an essential from something to something new in its era. The transformation is centripetal and centrifugal, inward and outward. The church as a community of new creations is the people called to transform. When a person believes and accepts the gospel of Jesus Christ, the direction of his or her life must be completely changed for the glory of God (Romans 12:1-2).

Thus, spiritual transformation begins with the work of the Holy Spirit in a person who accepts the gospel of Jesus Christ so that he realizes that he is a sinner and cannot escape the wrath of God (Romans 5:9). This awareness moves him to find a solution. Whoever accepts the gospel of Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins, be delivered from the wrath of God and now return to life before God. This explanation gives a clear conclusion that spiritual transformation is purely God's own idea in Jesus Christ, and man responds with the faith that is bestowed upon him (Ephesians 2:8-9). Without spiritual transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church will lose its essence and role as the 'salt' and 'light' of the world. Because the Holy Spirit is the source of the life of the church. That is why Spiritual transformation is very important and urgent. In essence, spiritual transformation is a process of life's journey of constantly changing character towards God's plan (Andrian et al., 2021).

### **The Gospel is the Path of Spiritual Transformation**

The gospel message is the Good News that God in His infinite love provided forgiveness for mankind through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Without the atoning work of Christ, there is no forgiveness of sins for mankind, so that humans live in sin and cannot escape God's punishment. Jesus alone is the only medium for spiritual transformation to occur.

Berkhof stated that the renewal of the Christian's life is the continuous and gracious act of the Holy Spirit by which He frees the justified sinner from the contamination of sin, renews his whole nature in the image and likeness of God, and enables him to do good (Berkhof, 2008: 265). We agree with Singgih's opinion, where ideally the church's job is to actively participate in transforming this world. Therefore, transformation efforts must be the main agenda of all people, all human beings from all world communities across nations, religions, sciences, and disciplines for the realization of a better world order. In this context, according to Singgih, church attendance has a purpose for one to become God's 'agent' in bringing transformation to the world and its





social problems (Singgih, 1997: 42). In other words, the church as an institution as well as a person has solidarity with the problems of human suffering.

From the description above, it can be concluded that the transformation is inward (centripetal) and outward (centrifugal). In the Bible or through the Bible, a person undergoes a spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation has an impact on all aspects of human life. Spiritual transformation has implications for the lives of Christians in their daily lives.

## Conclusion

The church must continue to hold fast to obey Christ's command to preach the gospel to all the peoples of the earth and only in or through the gospel of Jesus as the path to spiritual transformation. It is proven that spiritual transformation is able to have a positive impact on social transformation. The Bible does not only touch the spiritual aspect of humans, but also influences major changes in the social behavior of people who believe in it. The Bible is not just a matter of releasing humans from sin (spiritual transformation), but also releasing humans in all aspects of their lives (social transformation). All Christians are required to try to make a difference in world and we need to be salt and light. The first prevents decay, and the second overcomes darkness. There needs to a greater focus on the poor and their many social challenges. If any transformation is going to be workable, attitudes, the values, and ethics in society that generally have their fundamentals in the spiritual elements need to be focused on. Jesus calls all of us to serve Him in Spirit and in Truth. Christians as faithful servants of the Lord need to embrace people of all cultures and serve the needs others as best we can. We are called upon to 'do good to all people' (Galatians 6:10) and we must be faithful stewards of God's creation (Genesis 1:28).

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



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