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I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU SAY GOODBYE I SAY HELLO: PAUL'S
FAREWELL SPEECH AT THE CROSSROADS
(ACTS 20:17–38)

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Introduction: The Crossroads

This paper was given on April 1, 2008 as part of my installation ceremony into the position of Assistant Professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. My installation address was delivered with passion, laughter, and even some tears. In contrast, papers in journals, and for that matter, papers written for academic courses, are traditionally presented in the third person with an impersonal register as if they have a broad, almost universal context and were written with consummate objectivity. However, this address was subjective, embedded in a network of time, relationships, events, and experiences. I was tempted to remove some of the more personal history and remarks to render the article “more appropriate” for a journal. However, studies in linguistics have convincingly demonstrated to me that words have meaning in context, and the context of this article drove the content and contributes to its meaning without a doubt.¹ If I eliminated the personal information, the meaning of the article would be quite different, and not as effective, in my opinion. It is important that it is embedded in traditional events in the

1. The context of a given word or message consists of many layers: literary context, context of situation, and context of culture, for example. Here I am referring primarily to the context of situation. See Moisés Silva's discussion of “Determining Meaning” for an influential work in biblical studies that applies the principles of linguistics to the meaning of words, and relates meaning to context (Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 137–69).

academic culture of McMaster Divinity College. I also believe that it represents a model for the integration of New Testament scholarship with relevant and current issues in ministry studies, pedagogy and administration. It is an example of how the study of the text is relevant in specific aspects of my life journey.

The title of my address was “I Don’t Know Why You Say Goodbye I Say Hello.” It encapsulates much of the spirit around my installment.² The installment of a professor is an important celebration at McMaster Divinity College and benchmark of the official beginning of a career and a ministry in the city of Hamilton. But my symbolic beginning was placed at the end of the academic year (as is typical). The installment occurred after McMaster had already said goodbye to my close friend Dr. Joyce Bellous two weeks previously, who was retiring from her position as Associate Professor of Lay Empowerment and Discipleship. We had also already honored the graduating seniors at our Spring Banquet the past Saturday. Unlike most professors at the time of their installation addresses, I had been with many of the graduates during the entire course of their studies, and I had formed significant bonds with them. It was the end of four academic years of yearly appointment with McMaster Divinity College and the beginning of being on track to becoming regular faculty. So the title embraced the sense of the paradox of the day.

This installation service could be seen as a crossroads where people in our community are coming and going. It is a road of endings that is celebrating a beginning. At the end, it is a good time to look back at the beginning and evaluate the journey. When you are at the beginning you can anticipate the journey and plan to finish well at the ending. For those who are at the end, it is also a new beginning.

Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20:17–38 is a suitable text for a day at the crossroads. In the narrative of the Book of Acts, Paul had just spent about two

2. The title is relevant to my own classroom style—I regularly instruct my students to pick titles for their papers that interest me. The clever use of Beatles’ song titles and Jane Austin novels are always a hit.

years at Ephesus (Acts 19:1–10).³ His powerful and miraculous ministry reached a pinnacle of success⁴ when a number of believers who had practiced sorcery burned their scrolls publicly (19:11–19).⁵ The word of God had grown powerfully and prevailed (19:20). At that point, Paul made a plan to revisit the Macedonian and Achaian churches, and then go to Jerusalem and continue to Rome. He began to prepare for the journey (19:21–22).⁶ However, a city-wide riot broke out against Paul and Christianity in support of Artemis, the patron goddess of Ephesus (19:23–41). Paul apparently realized it was time to go (20:1).⁷ According to plan, he made a detour in a big loop in the opposite direction westward across the Aegean Sea to visit Macedonia and Achaia (20:2–3). He headed back south down the coast of Asia Minor, but sailed right by Ephesus and docked in Miletus because he was in a hurry (20:16).⁸ However, he sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus to travel about 50 kilometers, because he wanted to speak with them one last time, since he was afraid that he would never see them again (20:17). The elders walked the entire way to hear what he had to say and to spend time with him. Therefore, Miletus functioned as a

3. F. F. Bruce points out that during these two years the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea in the Lycus valley were planted. “The province was intensely evangelized and became one of the leading centres of Christianity for centuries afterwards” (Bruce, *Acts*, 389).

4. Witherington calls this point of his ministry in Ephesus “the climax of the account of Paul’s ministry as a free man” (Witherington, *Acts*, 582).

5. For a closer look at miracles and magic in Acts, see Witherington, *Acts*, 577–79. According to Witherington, Luke is interested in how miracles “punctuate the central message about the spread of the word and the conversion of various sorts of people that make up the Greco-Roman world” (579).

6. As Bruce says, “Paul’s activity could be transferred elsewhere, and he looked around for new worlds to conquer for Christ” (Bruce, *Acts*, 394).

7. The immediate connection between the riot and his departure is inferred. As Williams says, “He had already ‘decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia’ (19:21), but he may have set out sooner than expected, partly because of the riot, partly because of his anxiety over the situation in Corinth” (Williams, *Acts*, 344).

8. There is a debate about Paul’s motives in bypassing Ephesus on his journey to Jerusalem. For an overview, see Trebilco, “Asia,” 362 n. 319.

significant crossroads—a significant point of intersection—for the relationship between Paul and the Ephesians.⁹

At the crossroads at Miletus, Paul did four things:¹⁰ he reviewed his past ministry with the church at Ephesus (20:18–21), he embraced his own call for his future as they parted ways (20:22–24), he prepared the elders for their future without him (20:25–31), and finally, he committed them to God (20:32–35).¹¹ Paul’s review of his ministry to the Ephesian elders was the thing that drew my attention to this passage. We may observe how he cared for this group of leaders, and that he had done so from the beginning.

9. As Williams says, “Miletus was a natural stopping place for a coastal vessel in route for the south and near enough to Ephesus for Paul to summon the elders” (Williams, *Acts*, 351). Paul was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (Bruce, *Acts*, 410). Miletus was a point of intersection between the geography and Paul’s travel plans. Interestingly, it is also a kind of intersection in Pauline studies, as this is the only extended Pauline speech in Acts that was addressed to Christians—some look for parallels between the Paul in Acts and the Pauline epistles here. See Witherington, *Acts*, 610–11.

10. It should be noted that many scholars consider the farewell address to be a composition by Luke rather than Paul, with notable exceptions such as Bruce, Williams, Neil, Marshall, and Bock. For a summary of the dispute and other critical issues, see Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 117–18 and *idem.*, *Paul in Acts*, 115–16. While the Lukan style of the speech is acknowledged, the speech will be pragmatically attributed to Paul in this paper, and treated as a narrative text.

11. This outline does not reflect a widespread agreement on the structure of the passage, but is quite close to Dibelius’s and Soards’s four-part structures (Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts*, 155; Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 105). Barrett speaks of how difficult the speech is to outline (Barrett, *Acts*, 965). Marshall breaks the sermon into two parts, where in vv. 18–27 Paul looks back on his ministry, and in vv. 28–35, he prepares the leaders for the future (Marshall, *Acts*, 329). See Porter, *The Paul of Acts*, 116–17 for a more comprehensive overview of proposed structures. My sections are based on the shift from the description of the past in vv. 18–21, the temporal shift with “now” and the future in v. 22, the shift to the focus on the readers present and future with “now” in v. 25, and the formulaic commitment to God, marked again with “now.”

The Importance of Evaluating a Ministry

The faculty at McMaster Divinity College has adopted a culture where we engage in evaluation and review that is comparable to Paul's evaluation of his ministry in Acts 20:18–21. At the end of every term, and particularly at the end of the academic year, each one of us needs to ask ourselves: "Have I done what I set out to do?" "Have we done what we set out to do?" In order to answer this question effectively, we have to intentionally set out to do something specific in the beginning.

The discussion of the practices and disciplines of review and evaluation were particularly relevant in the Spring of 2008. The administration, faculty, and staff had been preparing a self-study of the College for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).¹² We must do this every ten years to keep our accreditation. It evaluates every conceivable aspect of the College in nine areas. Five committees met and produced nine chapters that explored where we had been during the last ten years, where we were currently, and recommendations for where we would go from there. We submitted the study to ATS and in the fall of 2009; a team from ATS visited MacDiv and the college underwent a rigorous examination for an entire week, which we passed successfully due to the hard work of the administration, staff, and faculty.

One of the distinguishing features of our self-study was the faculty adoption of an integrated "paradigm of pedagogy," requiring that each syllabus for every class should have learning outcome objectives in each of the areas of Knowing, Being, and Doing.¹³ That is, we are dedicated to developing the traditional

12. The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of more than 250 graduate schools that offer degree programs for ministry, teaching, and research in the theological disciplines. ATS determines the standards for accreditation, accredits the schools, and approves the degree programs they offer. ATS also offers research grants, training, and other support. Its website is <http://www.ats.edu>.

13. "McMaster Divinity College ATS Self-Study, 2008," 21. For further description of the three areas of Knowing, Being, and Doing as they relate to theological education, see Shulman, "Introduction," 5–15, which is the introduction to a comparative study of the classrooms and pedagogies of Christian

cognitive skills that involve knowledge and understanding in the core disciplines of biblical studies, theology, and ministry with the Knowing component. In addition, we are devoted to forming identity and purpose through all academic disciplines as well as spiritual formation and character development in the Being component. Finally, we promote engagement with the practice of ministry for the professional students and the activities and practice of scholarship for the advanced students in the Doing component. We have been committed to pursuing the integration of these objectives in the classroom.

I was asked to edit the self-study, so I read all of the ATS standards and sorted through how we were meeting them. There is an abundance of details and applications both in the ATS manual and in our own practices.¹⁴ All of the commitments, choices, and activities needed to boil down to the mission of McMaster Divinity College, which is:

Developing effective evangelical Christian leadership for the twenty-first century, through university-level education, professional training, and on-going support.

As I pondered what would be an appropriate message for the College in the Spring of 2008, I noticed that the College has similar objectives for Christian leadership in the twenty-first century that Paul had for himself, the Ephesian elders, and the Ephesian church in the first century. Therefore, I want to look at Paul's description of how he developed effective Christian leadership, and how it applies to the College in the different stages of our journey. I particularly want to look at the beginning and ending of the journey of the development of evangelical Christian leadership, whether we are board, faculty, staff, or students. As I analyzed Luke's account of what Paul said, I found that the speech actually reflected a "Knowing, Being, and Doing" paradigm for the evaluation of ministry—but Paul's speech provided

and Jewish Seminaries by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Shulman describes and fleshes out these three areas with additional terms, calling them "the Three Apprenticeships of Professional Education" (5).

14. The details and their applications remind me of how the one goal of losing 80 pounds involves a hundred thousand food choices.

Knowing, Being, and Doing objectives for himself as a mentor/teacher as well as for the leaders he was developing. For Paul, “his ministry was an act of worship, to be carried out faithfully.” His understanding of the gospel came from “great learning” (Acts 26:24) combined with identity and practice that encompassed his life experience, including a direct encounter with the living Christ. He was able to maintain a critical distance to re-interpret both Judaism and the cultures he reached in the light of the gospel. But he was able to hold that critical distance in tension with commitment, identity, and engagement. For him, teaching cognitive knowledge in leadership development was inseparable from what he modeled in terms of his own identity and character, and how he engaged with his churches in terms of what he practiced and the relationships he formed.

Being

Paul’s speech to the elders started with “Being.” He said, “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:17b–19). We may break down the qualities of Being that Paul emphasized into three character qualities:

- He was consistent from the first day although he was under enormous stress
- He had a Christ-like attitude of humility
- He was emotionally involved and invested

As Paul described himself and his ministry, there might have been an apologetic or defensive purpose, but there should be no question that he was offering himself as an example to imitate, as is common in the moral exhortation of the Pauline letters and particularly 2 Timothy.¹⁵ These three character qualities of

15. For the use of Paul as an example to imitate in 2 Timothy, see Westfall, “A Moral Dilemma,” 13–14, 18–39. The parallels between 2 Timothy and the farewell speech in Acts 20:17–38 have been noted by many, which has led some to maintain that the dating of Acts should be linked with the dating of the Pastorals. See, for example, Barrett, *Acts*, 965.

consistency, humility, and emotional involvement continue to be relevant to leadership development in the twenty-first century.

Consistency is always valued, and it is extremely difficult to maintain, particularly in times of stress.¹⁶ Reversals of fortune (such as in the stock market), academic pressure, and personal conflict can interfere with and detract from the core of what we do here. We don't want to be inconsistent about our priorities and our focus. Primarily, we want to be consistent in our care and our concern for the people that populate our lives and the College. Hopefully, this will not mean that we are static, but it involves consistency in growth and development—a consistency that responds to what God is doing in our time and in our location in Hamilton.

Perhaps humility and the kind of emotional involvement with our students or churches that moves us to tears need some further examination. Are these qualities relevant for professors who are providing university-level education, professional training, and on-going support? Are they relevant for leaders of the church in the twenty-first century? Humility and sentiment would seem to be the exact opposite of what is valued in traditional training and models for professors and the pastorate. I would suggest that they were similarly considered strange qualities for leaders in the first century, but these are the qualities that Paul repeatedly embraced, exhorted, and identified as Christ-like (e.g., 2 Cor 10:1; 11:7; 1 Thess 2:6; Phil 2:1–11). Interestingly, these are qualities that communicate better to an iconoclastic post-modern culture in the twenty-first century than they did to a twentieth-century modern culture.¹⁷ But in style or out of style, I would suggest that these two qualities should characterize biblical leadership development even at the graduate level and in all other areas of ministry, and they should cut across practices or stances that communicate inappropriate pride, privilege, entitlement, or an objectivity that is careless and uncaring. A

16. Bock refers to this quality as “faithfulness” (Bock, *Acts*, 627–28).

17. I recall in the 1980s, the students in a pastoral care class I attended were advised not to have any friends in their congregations, which is the polar opposite of Paul's involvement.

commitment to humility and emotional investment may lead us to conscious choices of changed behavior and new paradigms and symbols for leadership and authority.

Knowing

“Knowing,” which is traditionally thought of as most central to education for a profession, was not emphasized in Paul’s farewell speech. However, Paul claimed to know and effectively teach the full counsel of God. He particularly modeled knowing Jesus Christ, and the content of the gospel. However, what is most evident in his speech is that he knew the Ephesian church, and consequently he knew what they needed to know. He said, “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you . . . I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:20a, 27). Therefore, the Knowing element in Paul’s speech may be summarized as:

- He discerned what was effective and helpful
- He mastered and transmitted the full counsel of God

As mentioned above, Paul had been with the Ephesians for two years; he could not and did not provide them with a comprehensive and exhaustive theology. What was meant by this is that “Paul had preached the gospel in every particular; he had dealt with the whole of God’s plan of salvation.”¹⁸ As Bock says, “He has told them all they need to know to walk well with God.”¹⁹ Paul’s claim has an important correlation to the academic goals of the College and how they relate to cognitive content. Students are often frustrated in introductory courses such as New Testament Literature and History, which is crafted to be an introduction to the New Testament. Most of them realize that they are learning the tip of the iceberg that composes New Testament studies. They know that more can be said by the professor in every class, and some of their questions and concerns will not be fully answered by the time a course is completed. Some lament that instead of becoming authorities, they have begun to realize the extent of what they do not know. Similarly, in two years the elders of the Ephesian church could not have

18. Marshall, *Acts*, 333.

19. Bock, *Acts*, 629.

become the authoritative scholars of great learning that Paul was, but they were given enough to go forward without Paul. As professors, we are accountable in structuring our courses so that students are equipped to lead as effective leaders in the twenty-first century, as well as “walk well with God” in the areas that we teach. This is a huge responsibility that must involve continual examination of the structure and objectives of our courses and our content and conduct in every class session. We also need to assist students in shifting their expectations from thinking they will become experts and authorities on the Bible and theology in two or three years to recognizing that the knowledge, skills, and experience they receive is meant to be formational and foundational for their identity and function as Christian leaders. Becoming a Christian leader involves an ongoing journey rather than achieving a two- or three-year goal. Similarly, becoming an authority in theology, biblical studies, or the practice of ministry is a journey. This is one reason why the professors of McMaster Divinity College have a goal to continue to participate in scholarship and publication. To be on the journey we have to habitually take part in the conversation of our discipline.

Additionally, Paul had an objective of determining what was helpful and effective for each of his churches. The faculty also has the intimidating mandate to pay attention to the shifting needs of the culture, the student body, and the churches. Ultimately, this should be our guide in how and what we teach and what we give as assignments. We must be dedicated to offering what is effective and helpful, and therefore, we must be ready to understand the times in a prophetic way. We are responsible to be experts in our field so that we may be prepared to offer whatever would be helpful from our field. We need to continually evaluate our programs and curriculum so that we meet the needs of students in a way that both attracts them to study and effectively prepares them for a variety of ministry contexts. Of course, in regards to a given assignment, we may not always see eye to eye with our students on what is needed or what is helpful—a teacher or mentor has the responsibility to balance a consideration of the students’ felt needs with their own expertise—the teacher is ultimately responsible to utilize their

understanding and experience of what is necessary to equip students for ministry as well as meet the standards for a graduate course.

Doing

Paul's focus in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders was clearly on "Doing." He said, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus . . . For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (Acts 20:20–21, 27). The Doing elements in Paul's farewell address may be represented by four activities:

- He preached/taught using various opportunities in public and in private
- He preached to everyone to turn to God in repentance
- He preached to have faith in our Lord Jesus
- He did not hesitate to proclaim the whole will/purpose/counsel of God

First, Paul modeled teaching in public and private, making the most of every opportunity. The professors at McMaster Divinity College are committed to high standards of teaching in the classroom. However, teaching opportunities and occasions to minister with students, churches, and the community may extend beyond the classroom walls. Certainly our academic subjects at the Divinity College contain the type of content that must permeate and change our public and private lives. But Paul's model here is more about recognizing not only the importance of our opportunities to teach and speak in public, but also our opportunities to teach and participate in small informal groups and contexts such as our MRS groups, and the value of what we say and do in unstructured situations in the office, halls, and off-campus. In Paul's time, speaking in public was a high status activity, while speaking in private referred to the informal more egalitarian domestic context of the house church where Paul claimed all

members have equal status (1 Cor 12).²⁰ Similarly, we will be most effective as we move with ease from the authority of the classroom and the status of the expert to the role of a fellow sojourner in informal situations.

Second, Paul modeled teaching everyone (Jews and Greeks) to turn to God in repentance. “Repentance” means “a change in direction in how one relates to God.”²¹ For Paul, it is roughly an equivalent to conversion (cf. 1 Thess 1:9),²² but it was also demonstrated when the Ephesian believers burned their magic scrolls and turned fully to God after they witnessed God’s power in Paul’s ministry (Acts 19:18–19). The Ephesian believers were convicted, so they “confessed and disclosed” their magic practices. In a general sense, we must support a call to repentance that is prophetic towards our time and culture as well as specific in regards to individual lives. We are not only called to contextualize the gospel in the twenty-first century, but we are also called to critique our culture and our involvement in it prophetically. In addition, the way in which we preach repentance will differ for each faculty member according to their core discipline. Each faculty member contributes something to spiritual formation that at least some of the students may not be interested in pursuing. Together, we draw students to faith and God’s community through different gates—the very nature of our teaching involves calling our students to a kind of repentance because they are being subjected to disciplines that they perhaps would not have pursued on their own. But in addition, we all should pursue together a coherent, integrated ethical lifestyle within our culture, community, and homes that is subjected to the lordship of Christ—a preparation for ministry or for teaching biblical studies in the academy cannot be separated from personal righteousness. Turning to God is a choice that the faculty, staff, and students must make every day.

20. See Neyrey, “Teaching You in Public.” See also Bock, *Acts*, 627.

21. Bock, *Acts*, 627.

22. As Marshall asserts, *Acts*, 331.

Third, Paul modeled how to stimulate people to have faith in our Lord Jesus.²³ Again, repentance and faith primarily refer to conversion, but faith is also a journey. Sadly, seminaries are sometimes characterized as places where godly people lose their faith. As a New Testament professor, I am aware of the inherent dangers to faith when we cultivate critical thinking and consider alternative theological understandings and biblical interpretations. However, I believe that possibly a far greater danger for the average seminary student in an evangelical seminary comes from simply treating the Bible like a textbook and regarding the interpretation of Scripture as an assignment. This kind of approach to the Bible can breed contempt and even resentment. If we strive to maintain our faith, we cannot polarize devotion for the Word and study of the Word as students or as professors—our study and our assignments should be viewed as acts of worship and spiritual discipline. Every time we touch the Word it should burn us. By studying the Word of God, we come to know Jesus intimately. We live by knowing him, obeying him, and being formed by and responding to what he has done for us. As Deut 32:47 says, “They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.” While my personal commitment is to stimulate faith directly with the Word of God, specifically the New Testament, it must be recognized that faith is stimulated through other means as well at the College. God has given each of us a gift or lens through which we view his Word, his works, his people, and our own lives, and with these key gifts we stimulate faith in each other and in the students.

Fourth, Paul modeled the proclamation of the whole will/counsel/purpose of God. As argued above, this does not mean that he delivered exhaustive content, but it does mean that he equipped the elders with a complete foundation of the gospel that could be built on. It also means that he did not hold anything back in terms of hiding any secret information about the faith, or by failing to confront particular spiritual strongholds at great

23. Barrett points out that there is a close grammatical connection between repentance and faith; the terms are bound closely together by the article (Barrett, *Acts*, 969).

risk. At least in part, this involves no hesitation in talking about what repentance and the lordship of Christ looks like in our time.

Equipping students with an adequate foundation involves a careful integration of the different academic disciplines of the seminary. Traditionally, the academic departments have functioned separately without meaningful reference to each other. We are striving to interface with each other to demonstrate how different aspects of the curriculum fit into and contribute to a coherent Christian worldview, a life that is characterized by theological reflection, a spirituality that is nourished by godly disciplines, and a ministry that is relevant and effective.

Embracing a Call for the Future

Paul evaluated himself and defended himself at the end of his ministry with the Ephesian church based on these criteria that can be categorized as Knowing/Being/Doing. The criteria form a sound basis for evaluating my past here and forming my future as a professor. I could not think of better criteria for evaluation to set before me and to challenge myself, my colleagues, the staff, and the students at the point of my installation. Yet, this event also carries the elements of farewell and the necessary alteration of relationships. Distance and new goals are appropriate for the end of the academic year when students graduate, and sometimes professors and staff leave for other appointments or retirement.

The whole point of the farewell speech in Acts 20 was that Paul was leaving and did not plan to return. Paul had a well-defined sense of purpose and call in going to Jerusalem and facing prison and the hardships that were predicted everywhere. Most students who leave McMaster Divinity College will not share Paul's call to go to prison, but the goal is to share his sense of call and commitment. In his farewell speech he said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). One of our objectives is to train students to look at their lives prophetically in a similar manner: it involves seeing where God was in their

past, seeing how he has worked their life as students and in their ministry placements, and find and/or pursue what their call is. A graduate from the seminary truly has completed a significant lap of his or her race and received a degree, a certificate, or a diploma. Ephesians 2:10 is a particularly apt reminder for students at the point when they finish their studies: "You are God's handiwork, crafted in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for you to do." In view of the work that God has accomplished in each student's life, and in view of the fact that they stand at the crossroads and on the cusp of a new beginning, I urge them each to "Grab hold of the reason why Christ grabbed hold of you" (Phil 3:12).

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