

CGST Bulletin

2013 APR-JUN

Vision for China
Mission to the World

Feature

Rebuilding this city is everyone's responsibility

Reflections on the Book of Nehemiah



Carver Yu
President

In my previous message I used the Book of Nehemiah as a preface, calling everyone to pray for Hong Kong. Here I would like to take yet another look at the Book and re-think what commitment means.

Each time I read Nehemiah Chapter 8 anew, I am struck to the core of my soul. Here is a scene depicting a nation regaining its identity and pride, standing on the threshold of a new beginning, being invigorated with the hope of national revival. However, behind the jubilation was a miserable past. The Kingdom of Judah had been conquered in 586 B.C., the temple demolished, the city walls destroyed, the people exiled. Forty years later, King Cyrus allowed Zerubbabel to lead around thirty thousand Jews to return to the country and to rebuild the temple. Notwithstanding the completion of the rebuilding of the temple in 516 B.C., the city walls remained in a state of bad repair. Jerusalem was exposed; its inhabitants were unprotected. Their cultural identity could hardly withstand the assault from different sides, and the result was general chaos and disorder. It was for this reason that in 445 B.C. Nehemiah wept for the turmoil that Jerusalem faced.

Resolutely Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. Inspired by him, the people rebuilt the long collapsed city walls within a short span of fifty-two days. In the seventh month, the Israelites were finally able to live in "their own city". Before that, without the walls, the city was not really a city; homes were not really homes. Anybody could enter and exit at will, doing what they liked to the inhabitants, oppressing, plundering, harassing them. Now the Israelites were finally able to live in their own place, reclaiming their own identity and esteem as the people of Israel. When they came together as one before the Water Gate, they showed that they were no longer divided but a united and connected community. On what basis were they united? When Ezra opened the Book of the Law in front of the people (v. 5), they all stood up and recited the law, possibly *Shama Israel* ("O hear, Israel"), in unison, to express the fundamental belief of the Israelites. At the reading of the Law, they all wept.

What a moving scene this was. However, this would not have come to pass without Nehemiah's earlier grievous weeping upon hearing about the destitution of Jerusalem and the humiliation the Israelites had been subjected to. Not only did he weep, he cast in his lot with his people, praying to God, "I

confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you." He was not a passive observer, but he counted himself as among his brethren Israelites. If the Israelites had sinned, he, too, had sinned, and would bear the responsibility. Not only did he confess his sin, but he also fasted, and went as far as pleading with the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls.

As the king's cup-bearer, one close to the king, Nehemiah had an easy life and did not have to go through hell and high water for his people. Yet, because of his identification with and commitment to his people, he was determined to trudge the long journey to a desolate land to embark on a feat for which there was no guarantee of success. Yet, one with his people in heart and purpose, he took on the onerous responsibility. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he lost no time but straightaway set out in the dark of night to inspect the land, and then he rallied the people to start building the walls. Chapter 3 shows his detailed plan and precise division of labor. He had carefully considered the work of every section – from the Sheep Gate to the Dung Gate, the Fountain Gate and the East Gate – and assigned people to different jobs: building the towers, setting of the doors, putting the bolts and bars in place. The people were to work as one; they would not be allowed to be divided.

External attack was fierce. The Samaritans, the Ammonites and the Arabs made every endeavour to deter them, to the extent of threatening to kill them. Subjected to ceaseless interruptions, the city-wall builders had to do their work with one hand while holding a weapon in the other. Nehemiah and his crew applied themselves assiduously to the task in hand, staying at the building site and foregoing their rest when others had gone home to take a break. This sacrifice was something they would take in their stride. Of greater concern, however, was the split that was occurring from within. The fact was, under the façade of unity social injustice was rampant. The pent-up discontent of the people was reaching a boiling point: at the time when everyone had set aside their own living and devoted all their effort to the building of the walls, government officials and the wealthy people had not stopped extorting the poor. The social disintegration was worse than the ruin in the city walls. If the city walls were mended, Nehemiah realized, but the social rupture was not

to be continued on next page...

repaired, then all would be in vain. Not only was Nehemiah worn out with fatigue, he was also heart-stricken. Nonetheless, he would not give up; he tried his best to bring about reconciliation, until the walls were restored.

Let's take a look at our own city. The walls of our being are in ruins: human nature is being distorted, subversive forces spread far and wide to undermine morals, market values reign supreme, functional rationality dominates our everyday lives. The consequences of all these are the escalation of materialism, the onslaught of eroticism, the confusion of moral order, the disparagement of truth, the oppression of justice and the bitter

division in our society. As Christians, can we afford to remain passive and turn a blind eye to these things? We need to be the first to examine ourselves and repent of our sins, indeed, to weep, to fast and to take part in rebuilding the city. Without the tearful commitment and dedication such as that demonstrated by Nehemiah, Hong Kong will continue as it is, the same in twenty years, just like Jerusalem in the old days – the temple had been built, but it would lie in waste and desolation for seventy years, until Nehemiah came forward. If today we choose to sit on our hands, we will not be able to answer to the next generation. 🔥

Faculty

Jesus, the Little Ones, the Least of These Little Ones



Wance Chan

Assistant Professor in Practical Studies

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Matt. 25:40)

Matthew 25:31-46 is often quoted as the biblical basis for Christians to care for the weak and the marginalized in the society. What guidance does the passage give towards Christian acts of charity? Why would the final judgment be linked with good deeds? How do we understand Jesus' words here?

In the gospels Jesus called the group that followed Him 'little ones' (Matthew. 10:42, 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2). The word 'least' (ἐλάχιστος) in Matt. 25:40 is comparative to 'small' (μικρός), meaning even smaller than 'small'. 'The least of these brethren' are the little ones amongst the little ones. In Matt. 25:31-46, "the least of these My brethren" refers to those lacking in material resources (food, drinking water), those lacking shelters (non-residents without a place to stay or those without clothes to wear), those having fragile physical condition (ill or handicapped), or whose personal freedom being restricted (imprisoned).

Jesus elevated these services to 'the least of these little ones' beyond the level of humanity: "You did it to Me", reminding us that services based on the Christian faith have a divine transcendent dimension that surpasses human solidarity and empathy. When a 'little one' takes care of 'the least of these brethren', Christ's transcendent presence is there. Upon Jesus' proclamation, the true nature of someone in his broken and distorted state is fully revealed, a wholistic personhood made in the image of God.

Created in the image of God

Seeing God in 'the least of these brethren' is the basis and realization for the church to practise integral mission over generations. In the early 20th century, Dorothy Day emphasized that the inherent dignity of being created in God's image should be restored to the poor. She insisted that they should also enjoy basic human rights such as food and shelter.¹ Day relayed her ideals through the media, and at the same time set up shelters and provided free meals for the homeless throughout New York City. She fought for the poor and even got imprisoned at the age of 75. The earliest record of imprisonment dated back to 1912 when Day picketed the White House to protest against inhuman treatments of imprisoned protestors, and in turn she was jailed for 30 days. It is worth noting that Day's respect for 'the least of these brethren' included also respect for people in authority in an unfair social system, for they too were created in the image of God. Hence, Day insisted on non-violence in all social protests. Such an insistence requires an extraordinary amount of strength and courage.

It is indeed honorable to sacrifice and give in order to restore the brethren's dignity, but we may ask: If man is justified by faith, then why are good deeds being linked here? When the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will separate the sheep from the goats, one going into eternal life and the other into everlasting punishment – why is He using a measurement that is vastly different from what the church states to be our faith?

The corporate dimension of salvation

Of course, Christianity must be defined by Christ, and here Jesus made a specific statement regarding the corporate dimension of salvation. By Jesus' declaration, those who were marginalized by the society and deemed ritually unclean became indispensable members of the heavenly

community. Further, our acceptance of and care for them is the standard which determines if we may inherit the kingdom prepared since the time of Creation. The genome of God's kingdom is characterized by a willingness to embrace each member of the community, especially 'the least of these brethren' who are neglected or lightly esteemed. This community dimension does not conflict with the doctrine of justification by faith, since Christ has Himself chosen to be linked or even be identified with "the least of these My brethren." A believer's faith in Christ and unity with Him therefore can neither fall short of the community dimension nor adopt a selective community dimension.

Listening to 'the least of these little ones'

Are 'the least of these brethren' only able to receive care and help? Kathy Black, an American pastor with temporary flaccid paralysis herself, proposes a 'theology of interdependence' which points out that if the church really wishes to have disabled persons as members of the faith community, she must break through the traditional "ministry to" model of purely serving them one-way. Such a model does not expect any collaboration or contribution from the persons with disabilities.²

In the Micah Network³ Global Consultation held in Switzerland in 2012, the Sri Lankan speaker Vinoth Ramachandra posed a challenge: There should be interdependence between the Global North and Global South.⁴ Immediately a participant from Global South questioned, "We are here talking about an ideal partnership, but does Global North truly think that it needs Global South?" This query challenges the party providing resources to relinquish any wealth labeling and to see everyone as equally created in God's image, even humbly to admit that, beyond material resources, the North and South may swap places and the more well off may become 'the least of these brethren'.

Thus, 'the least of these little ones' are brothers who do not view themselves as merely passive recipients of care and help. In fact, many family members and caregivers of persons with severe mental handicap can testify how the disabled turn out to be their spiritual mentors. The little ones living in impoverished or war-torn places will most definitely be stronger in many ways than the protected ones in Hong Kong.

When you read the passage of giving the little ones a cup of cold water, do you see yourself as the one giving the cup, or the one receiving it? Can we accept that when giving someone a cup in one hand, we also receive a cup from the other person with the other hand?

Today, the church has made some progress in practising integral mission. Nevertheless, as we do justice and love mercy, can we also be humble towards our brethren, see our own smallness and thus gladly be served by the little ones?

Jesus was the Word becoming flesh; He is linked and identified with the least of the little ones. The redemption that He declares here is accomplished in a community of which members, despite the diversity, are interdependent, embrace and serve each other. 🔥

1. See Dave Andrews, *People of Compassion* (Blackburn, VIC: Tears Australia, 2008), 86–87; see also a clip of interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=tRSjY_4fFfc&feature=endscreen (3/11/2012).
2. Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 34–42.
3. Micah Network is a network formed by Christian organizations worldwide engaging in global poverty.
4. 'Global North' refers to the countries that are wealthier and 'Global South' those that are relatively poorer.




Worship is a Dangerous Activity (1)

In mid-November last year, CGST, Lutheran Theological Seminary and a Christian university in the Netherlands jointly organized a theological symposium to explore the impacts of urbanization and secularization on church life. I was asked to present my views on church worship under the influence of secularization and urbanization, and so I spoke on the topic 'Worship in an Urban Secular Context – Renewal or Trivialization?' which also expressed my long-time concern.

As I pointed out at the very start, worship is a dangerous act. What is Worship? Worship provides an opportunity for us to experience God's presence. If we truly worship Him in spirit and truth and according to His attributes, we can experience God's presence, draw close to Him, hear His voice, and converse with Him. Such an experience can lead to deep self-reflection, to yearning and a sense of awe for the Most High, to a gratitude for His grace and appreciation of the beauty of His glory. In this process, we may see the truth that we do not want to see, sense a call that we ourselves would like to resist, forcing us to step out of our security and comfort zone. Such is the danger of worship. We should expect that in worship our lives may be impacted and then transformed. Encountering God is a dangerous matter, and perhaps we are not yet ready to approach God and worship Him if we have not had ourselves properly prepared.

There is yet another kind of danger to worship. Worship can secularize and trivialize the sacred space, making what was meant to be of gravity completely weightless. When God's presence no longer evokes a sense of the sacred but merely creates an experience of 'feeling good', worship becomes extremely dangerous, because it allows what guards 'the sacred' to fall into the secular.

What is secular? The 'secular' (or profane) opposes the 'sacred'. The sacred draws the amorphous and weightlessness and direct it towards the ultimate 'Center of gravity', allowing transcendence enter into ordinary living, giving orientation and weight to life experiences. The 'profane' secularizes and trivializes life, leveling, relativizing everything in it. The deeper sense of the word 'secular' may be understood from its Latin meaning: '*saeculum*' means 'now', 'the present' or 'the present age.' Hence, 'secularism' points to an ideology that regards 'the present moment' as all that matters. There is no past, future or thereafter, nor is there any deeper or transcendent meaning, only the now and the present is all the meaning there is. In our contemporary society, all these mean personal awareness, experiences and feelings. Many in the young generation would say, 'Don't talk to me about any kind of grand narrative, the metaphysical, or the purpose and ends of history, for all these are abstract and unknowable. Only the present is real.' In the realm of the profane, nothing takes priority over or is weightier, more important or more valuable than another, rather all things are neutral, without weight or orientation, or having no particular form or character. Everything exists in one dimension. This is what makes secularization frightening: It compresses human life into one dimension, compresses the world into 'my views and my feelings.' 'I am the views and feelings of the present.'

Worship in a secular context can be very dangerous, for it can be hijacked and made into a tool of secularization, turning a sacred, weighty and transcendental experience into 'feelings of the moment', a feeling of 'me'. Here, what could have been an opportunity for self-abandoning is diverted to an occasion of self-inflating. 

Connected to Eternity – Embarking on a Journey of Being Called

Yeung Nga Yan MDiv 1


I am an oncologist and had worked in Queen Elizabeth Hospital the past eleven years. I left the hospital last year to study theology as a response to God's call.

I became a Christian in my second year at university. I encountered exceptional challenges during my fourth year of study: a dear brother-in-Christ committed suicide; soon after my mother was diagnosed with terminal stage lung cancer and passed away a mere five months later. Their departures brought me indescribable pains, but added to that my beloved little sister suddenly decided to study art in France. Loved ones leaving me within a short period of time left me lonely and wanting!

The series of blows and experiences made me see the transiency of life and everything in it. I felt a deep loss but at the same time yearned for eternity. God is all that I have! I then realized that God took away one by one the people and things that I depended on, because He wanted me to trust in Him fully and solely! In the low point of my life a God-loving pastor encouraged me, stood by me and taught me how to gain strength and comfort from the Word of God. The Book of Psalms is my favorite book and God's Word has been with me in sad, difficult and painful times. I thought, God's way is eternal because Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matt. 24:35). By that time, the Holy Spirit placed in me the idea of studying theology, but my pastor encouraged me to spend some time working



in the hospital first since I had just graduated from medical school. I also need a job to support my family financially.

Yet, the thought of studying theology remained strong. As I sought the Lord's will I went through many struggles. Finally, God gave me the passage of the anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-11) and I decided to embark on the study journey in September 2012. I study at CGST as I had previously taken its Theological Education by Extension courses and respected the lecturers' biblical insights which broadened my understanding of the Bible. Further, I was greatly attracted to the School's regard for biblical Greek and Hebrew studies for I love to study the Bible. I know God has prepared my road ahead – I just need to follow Him for He will surely lead the way and I will be blessed. Amen! 

Life's Second-half

Stephen Chan MDiv 1

Scene One

Obstructed by life's baggage Flattered by uncertainty

When colleagues at school heard that I was leaving to study theology during late spring in March, they generally found it hard to believe what is going on with this old fellow, their coworker for nineteen years and the school's feared 'Mr. Chan, Director of Student Affairs.'

"It must have been a spur of the moment decision, an instant of blind passion, I bet it won't last! Or this guy is trying to bargain for something!" Another said categorically, "Aha, the old man must have succumbed to a higher-paid position and now gives up all the hard work over the years. Forget it, human is an economic animal, just think about your family – you are fifty already. You better work for at least five more years and earn enough to pay for your children's education. Be mature about it!" And my response would always be, "No fear, don't worry" before stepping into the elevator, jolly and whistling.

Scene Two

*"...As long as I know God's will for me,
I will do all that I can with all my strength and might..."*

I could walk away with a smile, not because I was particularly seasoned and spiritual, but twenty years of walking with a close friend suffering from cancer and fellowship with a senior pastor helped me see that life is both fragile and precious. And there are many hidden dreams awaiting fulfillment. It was most disquieting to read my friend's obituary expressing his indebtedness to God, and his sense of regret was overwhelming!

Not wishing to repeat the gloom, I surrendered the second-half of my life to be directed totally by God. In the past I rejected theological education and questioned ecclesiastical institution, seeing them as contrary to Jesus' original teachings – but my thinking is overturned! The old thinking started fading and my heart began to have more room to listen



to God. Since the 2008 Hong Kong Bible Conference I began to see more clearly God's plan for my life and finally in 2010, I decided to study theology first and then commit myself to ministry.


Scene Three - Duan Zhang – [Fragments] by Bian Zhilin

*You watch the view from the bridge view-watchers watch you from a building
The bright moon decorates your window you decorate someone's dream*

In theological training, a student's personality needs to match with the school's style, a bit like a dating relationship. But there can be no true happiness if one strives for a 'match' and seeks to please the other while disregarding the freedom to express oneself. Hence, freedom should be primary in teaching, and it is best to state the truth and the facts!

So what is theology about? Firstly, it is not a proof of talent, and it is not merely an occupational training. Secondly, regard it as the place for self-examination, for taking off the blindfold to see the Lord in truth, allowing His word to shed light so that one knows what to do, what is right and wrong, and what is happening in the world.

Having a free environment and the guidance of insistent teachers and fellow students, studying at CGST is not only learning about books, people and self, but also learning to be and knowing the dream from the Lord.

Using the picture painted in *Duan Zhang* by Bian Zhilin, how wonderful it is to study and have fellowship as we dance in the spiritual breeze! 

A Dream Comes True

Laura Li MCS (G) 1

I came to Hong Kong from Shanghai in 2001 and studied at City University of Hong Kong. At that time there were not many Mainland Chinese students as compared with nowadays. I became a Christian the year I graduated. The pastor who nurtured me said how she believed that God has brought Mainland Chinese students to Hong Kong for a reason, and I believe that, too.

After my conversion, I was moved by Matthew 9:37, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few". I thought to myself: I will be a laborer. After graduation, I had a job but I often wondered if God would call me to full-time ministry, for this is my heart's desire.

In 2007 I joined my church's short mission trip to Myanmar and there my desire was tested. One day I was frustrated by some 'people issues' which made me think that I should keep doing my job and work on my people skills before entering full-time ministry. But at the morning devotion the following day I read John 21:15, where the Lord asked Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" I saw the Lord's mercy – He did not scold the fallen Peter but instead personally restored him. The Lord did the same to me. I also saw that Peter did not return to fishing for the love of it, but rather he was afraid and tried to run away. I was like that. When the Lord asked me, 'Do you love Me more than these?' I was certain: the Lord knew that I loved Him more than my job, and He let me know clearly what I truly loved. Then I said to Him, 'Lord,



You know that I love You more than my job.' Even if ministry is not easy, for the Lord's sake I am willing to prepare myself and be ready for full-time ministry whenever I am called.

In the same year my church was recruiting a pastoral assistant. After seeking God's will in prayer and having discussed with my family, I quit my job and joined my church as a full-time staff. Two years later God led me to study theology. I noticed that all the pastors I know are CGST graduates. Their humility and their love for God give me much confidence in CGST. I also identify with the School's vision of 'Vision for China, Mission to the World': China and mission are indeed very much in my heart. Thus, I started my study at CGST. All these are by God's grace and I thank Him! 🔥



The Years We Dreamed Together

Wong Yuet Lung and Yuen Ching Wan MCS(BH) 1

We thank God for leading us to study and be equipped together at CGST.

Ching Wan committed to Christ in primary school, and Yuet Lung believed while working in London between 2008 and 2009, where Ching Wan happened to be there at the same time. We met in our church in London. Brothers and sisters there were fervent in the Lord and pursued the truth, showing us the sweetness of God's love and encouraged us to study His word and live His teachings.

After returning to Hong Kong in 2009, Ching Wan worked as a management trainee in a government agency while Yuet Lung continued to work in a private bank, studying MBA at the same time. By the grace of God we were doing well at work. However, more and more were we moved to seek the meaning of life, and both felt that our time should be spent on doing more meaningful things.

'To have life, and have it more abundantly' is God's promise that Yuet Lung embraces, abundance not for himself only but also for others. After a period of praying, Yuet Lung quit his job in mid-2010 and devoted his time to completing his MBA studies and reorganizing his life. The book *Half Time – Moving from Success to Significance* and the words received at the CGST Dedication Camp: "Lord, to whom shall we go", reconfirmed that Yuet Lung needed to do more for God.

Ching Wan experiences God's grace and guidance since she was little, but her life goal got clearer in London. The hymns *I Offer My Life* and *Let Me Fly* (in Chinese) aptly describe her determination. Ching Wan is set to give glory to God in all her experiences. She wants to dream for God and is willing to step out of her comfort zone and ready to be shaped for God's use. After completing her two years of training, Ching Wan left her job in early 2012 and focused on seeking a life of serving God.

We thank God that we became good partners. The Bible study group in London demonstrated God's manifold grace and led us to begin our own Bible study group in Hong Kong. As we sought our direction, we involved in various ministries such as short missions, worship team and Evangelism Explosion. While Yuet Lung is particularly passionate about youth ministry so he has taken up the role of a youth mentor, Ching Wan is moved towards brothers and sisters' spiritual growth so she often encourages them to spend time with God and walk with Him. Further, God has given us gifts of singing and piano-playing, hence a gospel music band named "Voice Within" was formed.

We felt that theological training is necessary if we were to serve better, on the one hand to be firmly established in the truth and on the other hand opening to God to shape our lives. From CGST's Theological Education by Extension courses and Dedication Camp we saw the teachers' admirable characters and knowledge. We longed to learn more from them. We were also deeply interested in the School's biblical Greek and Hebrew courses. At the time of application as we were not sure if we would serve in a church in the future, we applied to study Master of Christian Studies Program and will continue to wait upon the Lord for His guidance. 🔥

Faculty Movements

- January 14 – 17: Dr. Wing Yan Chan Mok was invited to attend and speak at the 4th Symposium of Chinese Mission Leadership on the prospects of Chinese church missions hosted by Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelism in Taipei.
- January 30 – February 2: President Carver Yu attended the Asian Theological Association (ATA) Board Meeting in Philippines.
- February 16 – 18: Dr. Joseph Kok accepted the invitation by

Great Commission Center International to attend their International Board Meeting and the 20th Anniversary events in San Francisco. During which he also preached at Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church of Daly City at Sunday service to serve the local Chinese community.

- As from February, both Dr. Stephen Lee and Dr. Kevin Cheng were promoted to Professorship. Dr. Stephen Lee was also appointed as Lam Ko Kit Tak Professor of

Biblical Studies.

- As from January 16, Dr. Jane Mann joined the School as Visiting Professor. She came from Chicago of the US and mainly teaches Counselling courses.

Development Trips

- March 8 – 29: President Yu conducted a Presidential Tour to express his heartfelt thanksgiving to friends and supporters in the US and Canada. He visited Seattle, Los Angeles, Bay Area, San

Francisco, Houston, Boston, New York of the US and Vancouver and Toronto of Canada to host sharing and thanksgiving sessions, to preach at local Chinese church, as well as to lead CGST Night gatherings. He was also invited to speak at the COLAB Conference in Chicago.

Financial Report

Dec, 2012

General Fund

US\$

Donations	534,875
Tuition & other income	278,981
	813,856
Expenditure	(532,076)
Surplus	281,780
Deficit from Jan to Nov	(277,510)
Accumulated Surplus	4,270

Outstanding mortgage loan as at Dec, 2012 : US\$ 3,131,618

Jan to Feb, 2013

General Fund

US\$

Donations	268,908
Tuition & other income	468,214
	737,122
Expenditure	(954,903)
Deficit	(217,781)

Outstanding mortgage loan as at February, 2013 : US\$ 3,086,002

Prayer Requests

1. Pray for the students who are graduating in June, that God will grant those who are entering full time ministry a humble heart to serve in faithfulness wherever God places them. Pray also for those who have completed the evening part time programs. May God use them to witness Christ in their professions.
2. Pray for the applicants who are being considered for the new school year. May God direct the selection process and give wisdom to the Admissions Committee members.
3. Pray for our students in field education assignments overseas, at local churches and para-church organizations during the summer. May God strengthen their passion for mission and pastoral ministry, and may the students experience new learning lessons.

Response

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