



The Biblical Principles Responsible for Church Planting and Church Growth

Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, PhD

HoD Pastoral Studies Department, ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, P. O. Box 5398, Goodluck EbeleJonathan Road, Jos 930001, Plateau State, Nigeria.

***Corresponding Author:** *Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, PhD, HoD Pastoral Studies Department, ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, P. O. Box 5398, Goodluck EbeleJonathan Road, Jos 930001, Plateau State, Nigeria.*

1. PREAMBLE

This background would help the reader know the history and the concept of how and why church planting and church growth came about. Antioch of Syria was a cosmopolitan city, closer in character to a modern metropolis than was any other city in the Roman world. Therefore, understanding Antioch is crucial for a biblical perception of church planting and church growth because patterns were established there that set the course of mission history and changed the religious map of the world.

This is why Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma (2000:54) stress that at Antioch the gospel was preached for the first time to people who had no previous connection with the Jewish faith and community. The church at Antioch, by commissioning and sending out the first missionaries to the unevangelized world, became the mother of all the Gentile churches. Furthermore, from the life and ministry of the Antiochan church a man who was destined to become the great urban apostle of the first century learned firsthand what a Gentile church could be to extend and grow itself. As the church in Antioch, today's churches need to be willing to make sacrifices and invest personnel and financial resources so new churches can be started and grown.

Roger S. Greenway (2000:55), added, despite the negative features, Antioch became the main gateway for the gospel to the Gentile world. It is interesting to note that the New Testament never talks about Antioch's wickedness and idolatry, its cultural and beauty, or its importance as one of the great commercial centers of iniquity. But in describing Antioch, Luke refers only to the great spiritual events that took place there. It was reported that, events in Antioch affected the course of the gospel, threw open the empire to evangelization, church planting, church growth and molded the character of the missionary enterprise. As for its impact upon the world, Antioch soon came to supersede Jerusalem, developing into the missionary headquarters of the first century. Therefore, according to Christian A. Schwarz (2002:35), "The key to church growth is for the local congregation to focus its evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians." Roger S. Greenway affirms the fact that church growth can occur numerically in three different ways. First, when there is biological growth. Second, when there is transfer of members. Third, when there is conversion of new believers in Christ, (2000:58).

2. DEFINING OF TERMS

2.1. Church Planting

Graham Cheesman (1997:58) quoted Malphurs Aubrey by defining church planting as a planned process of beginning and growing new local churches, which implies that (a) it is a process that involves planning; (b) it is an intentional activity; (c) it had to do with church multiplication and growth. Dennis J. Mock (1989:21) emphasize the fact that, "Church planting is an integral part of missions. And that a church that is not actively involved in local or 'foreign' (cross-cultural) missions is out of the will of God."

2.2. Church Growth

According to Christian A. Schwarz (2002:10), “Church Growth is simply a church that has grown to maturity stage spiritually and is it able to reproduce herself both by becoming a sending church and through the development of sister churches in nearby communities.” Christian A. (2002:126) went further to explain that Church growth is not an attempt to manufacture the growth, but rather it is an effort to release the biotic potential which God has put into every church. It is our task to minimize the obstacles to growth (the “environmental resistance”)-both inside and outside the church. Since we have very little control over outside factors, we should concentrate on the removal of obstacles to church growth and multiplication within churches. The church growth can happen “all by itself.” God will do what he promised to do. He will grant growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). Therefore, church growth in the power of the Holy Spirit does not mean ignoring God’s principles. It means putting the biblical principles to work in the churches as much as possible even when they seem unusual, hard to follow, or even hurt.

3. DYNAMICS OF CHURCH PLANTING

Christian A. (2002:12) knew from the Bible that Christ commanded his disciples to go into the world not simply to do good works, but to make disciples of all peoples. Christ wanted lost people found, won to him, and gathered into his church. What became known as the “Church Growth Movement” began from McGauran’s teaching and writing. He added that, the release of God’s growth automatism is the strategic secret of growing churches. Donald A. McGavran (1980:5) believes that:

Church growth is humane action: the strong bearing the burdens of the weak and introducing to the hungry the bread by which man lives. Nevertheless, God’s obedient servants seek church growth not as an exercise in humanity, but because the extension of the Church is pleasing to God. Only where Christians constrains by love obediently press on, telling men the good news of the Savior, does the Church spread and increase. Where there is no faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, there is no growth. There must also be obedience in hearing. Churches do not multiply and spread across a land or through a city unless among the multitudes who hear there are many who obey and-loving Christ more than father or mother-deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him. Therefore, Church growth follows where Christians show faithfulness in finding the lost. It is not enough to search for the lost sheep. Church growth follows where the lost are not merely found but restored to normal life in the fold-though it may be a life they have never consciously known.

Dennis J. Mock (1989:42) has further defined church planting as follows;

1. Church planting refers to the process of bringing together a group of like-minded professing believers to establish a new local church through equipping (training), encouragement, and edification (teaching). Below are some basic guidelines to church planting.
 - a.) Pray for God’s wisdom and enablement
 - b.) Pick the venue or location and select the people-group
 - c.) Plant the seed of the Word through evangelistic Bible studies
 - d.) Prepare the soil of the people’s hearts and minds by building relationships/friendships
 - e.) Prioritize based on people, not programs.
2. Lifestyle evangelism and discipleship will establish strong new churches. Particularly in cross-cultural settings, working on building a genuine friendship/relationship with a key leader or elder of a people-group is a proven successful approach- “for as a leader goes, so go his people.” Avery Wills and David Garrison, in *The Mission of an Evangelist*, affirms, “A church-planting movement is a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment (2002:335).

4. BASIC PRINCIPLES OR FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS ABOUT CHURCH PLANTING AND CHURCH GROWTH

John Corrie in the *Dictionary of Mission Theology* indicates that these principles have been applied in a number of publications to distinct people-groups in a variety of locations. The merit of the church

growth is its insistence that missions should (a) not set up permanent stations but move on; (b) never impose alien cultural or ethical patterns on local Christians; and (c) encourage new Christians to remain within their own culture both to affirm and to critique it and to set up churches which relate meaningfully to it, (2001:56).

Avery Wills and David Garrison in *The Mission of an Evangelist*, affirms the five basic principles or foundational beliefs as follows; first, that God loves all people and wants them to be saved. Second, wherever Jesus Christ is lifted up and proclaimed in a bold, positive, culturally relevant witness, people will be saved. Third, where people are being saved, born again by the Holy Spirit, they will be drawn together into a fellowship, a New Testament church. Fourth, God will provide the leaders needed to minister within that body. Fifth, it is the very nature of a church, as any living organism, to grow and multiply. If it does not grow and multiply, we have got to ask ourselves, “Is it a living organism?”(2002:335).

5. CHURCH GROWTH AS REVEALED IN THE TESTAMENT

Donald A. McGavran has clarify the fact that, Church growth is much wider and deeper than adding names to church rolls. It delves into how persons and peoples become genuinely Christian and revolutionize and bless the cultures and populations in the midst of which God has placed them. Church growth arises in theology and biblical faithfulness (1980: vii).

During Christ’s lifetime, the spreading of the gospel was focused on the house of Israel, and consequently most of the events occurred in Judea and Galilee. In Acts, however, the commission was to minister to scattered Israel and to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. This expansion was not without its difficulties. Long, dangerous travels, persecutions, issues of Church policy, incorporation of foreigners, and maintaining distant congregations challenged the Apostles as they sought to fulfill their commission to carry the gospel message to the nations(<https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/shedding-light-new-testament/1-book-acts-pattern-modern-church-growth>, accessed on 12/06/2022).

Donald A. stress that there are biblical concepts that helps missionaries to understand how the church can grow. First, Internal Growth: this occurs or it is seen as it increases in sub-groups within existing churches, that is, increase of competent Christians, men and women who know the Bible and practice the Christian faith. These Christians can move from marginal to ardent belief. Second, Expansion Growth: each congregation expands as it converts non-Christians and takes more of them into itself. Third, Extension Growth: each congregation plants daughter churches among its own kind of people in its neighborhood or region. Forth, Bridging Growth: congregations and denominations find bridges to other segments of the population and, crossing the bridges of God, multiply companies of the committed on the other side (1980:100).

The book of Acts is given to us by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives life, who regenerates, who gives life to the church. And the Holy Spirit has given us the book of Acts, not just as history for the sake of history, but history for the sake of instruction; history to establish a pattern, an example, a practical reality. This is not theory. This is neither just history nor is it some kind of theory, this is a practical illustration of how the Lord builds His church and nothing has changed. But the church begins to be built, and that is defined in chapter 2, verse 39 as the Lord begins to gather His children, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. Now remember, the process of building a church is the Lord calling the elect to Himself. So the church grows as the Lord gathers His children—first among the Jews referred to in verse 39 as “you and your children,” and then the Gentiles, “all who are far off as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself,” (NIV). That’s how the Lord builds the church. He gathers His own elect. That’s redemptive history. Now the book of Acts shows how this begins in the case of the church. In Acts 1:12, the followers of Jesus returned to Jerusalem on the mount called Olivet, near Jerusalem, the Sabbath day is a journey away. They entered into the city, went to the upper room where they were staying, that is Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the zealot, and Judas, not Iscariot, but Judas the son of James. And they are all there with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers. At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, the gathering of about 120 persons was there together. So as the book of Acts begins in Jerusalem, they’re about 120 followers.

We know there are another 500 who saw the resurrected Christ in Galilee, but here in Jerusalem, the church is launched. And this would be the first church, the Jerusalem church of 120 people, (www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-455/marks-of-real-church-growth, accessed on 15/06/2022).

Also, in Acts 2:41, you begin to see the explosive growth of the church. On the Day of Pentecost there were added about three thousand souls. Oh, in one chapter the church has gone from 120 to 300. Again Acts 2:47, there we see that God is adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. So, three thousand on one day, the day of Pentecost under the great preaching of Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and then day by day, by day, by day; it's an imperfect tense meaning just that, "day by day, by day, by day." Still in Acts 4:4, the researcher observed that, "Many of those who had heard the message" ... (NIV). This would be Peter's second sermon; there is an amazing response... "they believed and the number of men came to be about five thousand," (NIV). They start out with a hundred and twenty, then you have three thousand, then people being added day by day by day, and being saved. And then again, there are five thousand men plus women. What is the number? Is it twenty thousand in a matter of days, a few weeks? And by the way, the statement regarding five thousand in Acts 4:4 is the last, next to the last, I should say, identification of people in numbers. It is the last indication of numbers. And the reason I hedge a little bit, if you look at Acts 5:14, all the more believers in the Lord—multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number. So, technically speaking, Acts 4:4 is the last time a specific number is mentioned. And yet there are more numbers being added, they're coming too fast to count. So, the last official number is Acts 4:4, and then it's just a matter of more and more without numbers. You come into Acts 6: 7, "The Word of God kept on spreading, the number", again they use the word "number" without a number, "and the number continues to increase greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith," (NIV). This is a fast, explosive growth in days and weeks.

Acts 9:31 gives us further illustrations, the church now grows throughout not only in Jerusalem, but starts to spread into Judea and now it grows into Galilee where it started with five hundred who were gathered there. And then it goes into Samaria, and they're enjoying peace, "being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase" again growing fast and furious (NIV). Acts 12:24, this book reveals how "The Word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (NKJV). Acts 16:5, "So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily" (NKJV). And now we have jumped outside of Israel, we have left Jerusalem, we've gone into Galilee and Samaria and now we're in to the Gentile world, we jump into the Gentile world with the end of the ministry of Peter, and the beginning of the ministry of Paul in Acts 13, so in Acts 16, the church has gone into the Gentile world and it continues to grow. In Acts 17:12, the church is continuing to grow; many of them believe in Berea, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. Acts 19:20, we read again the same kind of pattern, "The Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing" (NKJV). And if you want just to jump to the end of the book of Acts, the final verse: chapter 28, verse 31, the apostle Paul has been preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness unhindered—that's how the book of Acts ends. The church is just exploding in the world. Now that's the story of the book of Acts. It's the story of the growth of the church. It starts with 120 and it reaches incalculable numbers very soon and all they can say is more and more and more and more and more increase. That's the story, (www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-455/marks-of-real-church-growth, accessed on 15/06/2022).

6. FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST CHURCH GROWTH

When the gospel is preached to non-Christians and there is a group of believers coming together to pray and read the Bible, then, it is expected that, this local assembly should grow spiritually. But Avery Wills and David Garrison in *The Mission of an Evangelist* has observed, "If a church is depending on foreign resources, it cannot multiply. A church may have had help at first, but if it feels that it must have that same help to start another church, it will never have multiplication," (2001:335). This movement must generate its own pastors and teachers. Training cannot wait for leaders to finish years of theological training. Leadership training is on the job.

First, according to Roger S. Greenway, there are not enough trained ministers to organize and lead new congregations since everything depends on the pastor in some churches, and lay members are not motivated or trained to do anything, (1999:105-106). Second, David Garrison alludes, importing

extra-biblical requirements for being a church. This point is simply saying when a church denomination attempts to require a congregation to have extra-biblical things such as land, building, seminary-trained leadership or paid clergy before granting them full status as a church, a Church Planting Movement is obstructed, (1999:49). Avery Wills stress, these are all good things, but not prerequisites to being a church (2001:335). Third, David Garrison emphasized, when there is a loss of a valued cultural identity, the church cannot grow spiritually. When a people have to abandon their valued ethnic identity and adopt an alien culture in order to become believers, the cause of church planting would not go far. In too many instances, church planting has become cultural warfare, as missionaries and local Christians attempt to conquer and change the culture rather than the hearts of the people, (1999:49-50).

Forth, another factor stated by Avery Wills is when there are poor examples of Christianity where people in churches do not really believe the Word of God or do not have good ethical lives. If the local church does not love the non-believers or there is a sin problem in the church, it will be very difficult to work through that church to plant a new church (2001:336). Fifth, Duane L. Anderson has stress that “some people are often chosen for leadership in the church because of their leadership in the world rather than for their godly lifestyle. When this happens, the church will not make an impact on the world because the world has already made its impact on the church” (no date:9). Sixth, Avery Wills and David Garrison believe that when there are subsidies that create dependence, the church cannot grow. The area of concern simply is; outside money has to support a missionary coming in cross-culturally. But if that support continues, the church will never be an indigenous church. The key is creating dependence on God, not on others, (2001:336). Seventh, Duane L. Anderson observed that when the church has an effective ministry of evangelism but have no plan for the follow-up of new Christians, it would affect the growth of the church. Such a church has many decisions but no disciples, (no date:8). Eight, according to Donald McGavran, “Leaders were chained to existent maintenance work. Or, Church and mission were devoted to a nonproductive pattern, once needed but since outmoded,” (1980:163).

7. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SPIRITUAL CHURCH GROWTH

According to Duane L. Anderson, any local congregation that is healthy spiritually, it must be involved in reproducing itself. Their concern first is to initiate contact with new believers (Acts 14:21), second, they would arrange for group meetings for the sake of prayer and bible studies (Acts 14:21b; 2:42; 1:15). Third, they are concern on how to plant new local churches (Acts 14:22). Forth, they organized the church leaving the administration of the church in the hands of believers the apostles had trained (Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11-16; II Tim. 2:2). Fifth, they should be concerned about the extension of the local churches planted (Acts 16:1-5; 1:8), (no date:3-6). The challenge before the growing local churches today is for, they leadership to learn how to develop outreach team, prepare people for cross-cultural ministry and then learn to plant sister churches.

Sixth, training local leaders. Roger S. Greenway believes that the key to church growth depend in training local leaders to carry on the ministry of the gospel in dependence on the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and the grace of God, (1999:106). David Garrison affirms “The leadership of the church firmly grounded the new churches on the Word of God and the priesthood of all believers” (1999:13). David Eby stress, church growth depends on preaching the Word, (2001:19). David M. Howard states:

The church leadership took time to train new Christians. Apostle Paul chose young men with potential who could be with him to learn from him so that they could later assume broader responsibilities and train others. Paul writes to Timothy, who had spent much time with him in his travels, “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2), (1979:56-57).

Seventh, the witness of all believers. David M. Howard still alludes, there was a witness of all believers. In the New Testament we do not find the cleavage between clergy and laymen that sprang up in later centuries. While some were clearly designated by God for special ministry of the Word (cf. Acts 6:2-4), all Christians participated in witnessing for Jesus Christ. This is spelled out in Acts 8 where we read that “they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:1, 4, NKJV). That is,

those who were not apostles were preaching the Word wherever they went, (1979:52). Eight, gift-oriented ministry. There was recognition of gifts of the Spirit in the individual persons. As Christians became active in the witness of the church, they learned to recognize the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they were willing to accept responsibilities, no matter how menial the task seemed, in accord with those gifts. Some were called to devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word,” while others were chosen “to serve tables” (Acts 6:2-4), (1979:52-53). This is why Christian A. Schwarz gives reason why the role of church leadership is to help its members to identify their gifts and to integrate them into appropriate ministries. Because when Christians serve in their area of giftedness, they generally function less in their own strength and more in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, ordinary people can accomplish the extraordinary, (2002:24).

Ninth, constant preaching of the Word. David M. Howard agree with Christian A. Schwarz that the believers were involved in constant preaching of the Word. The involvement of every Christian in outreach plus the recognition of the gifts that differ within the church were the natural setting for a constant proclamation of the message of salvation. This was done to individuals (Philip to the eunuch), to families (Peter to Cornelius, Paul to the Philippians jailer), to religious and political authorities. In other words, wherever the Christians could find an audience, one person or a great multitude, they were quick to speak of Jesus and the resurrection, (1979:52). Tenth, follow-up for new believers. Plan a follow-up program for new believers. According to David M. Howard, Apostle Paul never left the young churches without help. He employed at least four means to cultivate them in their newly found faith. 1.) He prayed regularly for them (Philippians 1:3-4; Col.1:9). 2.) He visited them personally whenever possible (Acts 15:36). 3.) When he could not visit personally, he sometimes sent someone else in his place (Phi. 2:19-20; Titus 1:5). 4.) He followed up many previous contacts by letter. Nine of Paul’s letters were addressed to young churches, most of which he had established himself, (1978:58-59). Therefore, Dennis J. Mock stress, the more there was prayer, fellowship, praise, and teaching of the Word in the church, it made the church to grow spiritually and numerically, (1989:40).

Eleventh, empowering leadership. Christian A. point out the fact that, the key distinction is probably best expressed by the word “empowerment.” Leaders of growing churches concentrate on empowering other Christians for ministry. They do not use lay workers as “helpers” in attaining their own goals and fulfilling their own visions. Rather, they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assists Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them. These pastors equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be. Leaders who realize their own empowerment by empowering others experience how the “all-by-itself” principle contributes to church growth. Rather than handling the bulk of church responsibilities on their own, they invest the majority of their time in discipleship, delegation, and multiplication. God’s energy, not human effort and pressure, is released to set the church in motion, (2002:22-23).

8. SUMMARY

There is no dispute that in established church regular teaching for believers at all stages in their pilgrimage must be given, and appropriate pastoral care must be provided. Pastors in conjunction with missionaries should lead their congregations in the work of evangelism. Further, we affirm that the formation of godly, witnessing disciples is at the heart of the church’s responsibility to prepare its members for their work of service. We affirm that the church must be made a welcoming place for new believers.

Although evangelism is not advocacy of any social program, it does entail social responsibility for at least two reasons. First, the Gospel proclaims the kingship of the loving Creator who is committed to justice, human life and the welfare of His creation. So evangelism, church planting and church growth will need to be accompanied by obedience to God’s command to work for the good of all in a way that is fitting for the children of the Father who makes His sun shine on the evil and the good and sends His rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Second, when our evangelism is linked with concern to alleviate poverty, uphold justice, oppose abuses of secular and economic power, stand against racism, and advance responsible stewardship of the global environment, it reflects the compassion of Christ and may gain an acceptance it would not otherwise receive.

In this paper, we have seen and known what we can call a mature church, also we have come to understand when a church is growing to maturity because a lot of factors were looked into that can either help the church to grow or not to grow. We have seen that we want a leadership team to develop which will be able to help that church continue to grow and mature. Therefore, the church that is planted, it is expected to grow spiritually. The church must prove the fact that, first, her members can go out for evangelism in order to reach people for Christ, second, they are committed to edification teaching and shepherding people and helping them to grow, third, equipping themselves by way of training people by showing them through on the job training, fourth, expansion, this is done by way of sharing leadership by giving people a small group in the church to lead, fifth, extension, this can be done by way of sending some of the leaders out to repeat the same process in other areas.

There are two key words for becoming a healthy reproducing church are maturity and vision. Churches that are mature want to reproduce. Vision is seeing what God wants to do throughout the entire world and not just in the local community. The early church has a lot to teach us about how to plant, grow and become a sending church. If a church is going to be obedient to the Great Commission, it must begin training people in the church to go to other cultures to share the gospel. The leaders of the existing church and the developing church need to determine together the process that they will follow to help the new church become organized. As the new church is organized, the leadership of the new church can then take the full responsibility for their continued development. This frees the original church to begin to focus on the next area where they will begin to plant a church. God will greatly use that church to multiply churches when they have a vision to reproduce.

As a result of churches becoming strong in the faith and having the leadership needed to start churches in nearby areas, Acts 16:5 tells us that the churches increased in number daily. The results of having a vision as a church (Colossians 4:13, 16; Acts 8:11; 9:31; 11:18-22), there we see that churches will be planted and grown in our communities. The concern to reach out to the surrounding areas of our communities is a characteristic of the early church. That should become a characteristic of the churches today.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, PhD, Born in Nyanya, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria, May 25, 1967. Married to Ms. Rebecca Eliazar and are blessed with three children, Elijah, Esther, and Emmanuel. Began Christian ministry in July 6, 1988. Served as a field missionary with EMS of ECWA from July 1988-March 2001. Served as a resident pastor with ECWA Minna DCC (District Church Council) from April, 2001 to May, 2012. Served as Chairman from June 30, 2007 to April, 2012. ECWA Assistant General Secretary from April, 2012 to April, 2018. Lecturer at ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria from August, 2018 to date. HoD, Pastoral Studies Department, ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos from January 13, 2022 to date. Rev. Baba earned his academic degrees from the following institutions:

1. Bachelor of Arts-ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria
2. Master of Arts-ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, Nigeria
3. Master of Divinity-Asian Theological Seminary, South Korea
4. Doctor of Ministry-ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, Nigeria
5. Doctor of Philosophy-Columbia International University, USA.

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