

# Global Forum on Church and Poverty Report

3 - 6 July 2018

Kigali, Rwanda



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# **Overview**

As Tearfund celebrated 50 years of working alongside churches to help transform communities around the world, we invited 50 leaders and theologians to join us to reflect on the successes and failures of the past and look to how the global church can be more effective in overcoming poverty in the years to come. We were also excited to have 10 places available to give young theologians aged between 18 - 35 the chance to be part of this event. It was a unique opportunity for them to engage in higher-level theological reflection with thinkers and influencers from across the globe, to build relationships and gain exposure to help support their future goals and career development.

The forum was a part of Tearfund's Thinking Theology programme of gatherings. These have been an integral part of Tearfund's envisioning strategy for the past three years, as we have worked to see the church understand, adopt and outwork an integral theology of mission, and deepen theological reflection on Christian development practice. They provide a space to bring together a diverse group of theologians, church leaders and development practitioners to reflect upon the way that the Bible can and should shape our engagement in poverty alleviation and community transformation.

In Tearfund's 50th year, the organisation is reflecting on the biblical idea of jubilee, and this theme provided the foundation for discussion at this forum, with the programme seeking to highlight areas in which the global church can work together to reconcile broken relationships that are impacting the world in which we live. It was a key time to challenge secular solutions to poverty alleviation and explore the theology and practice around jubilee and how this links to overcoming poverty.

# Programme

A key element of this forum was knowledge exchange. To maximise on this each delegate was asked to submit a white paper prior to the forum to help shape the discussion and give delegates the opportunity to share their insights on one of five themes:

- 1. The initial and ongoing causes of poverty
- 2. The jubilee as God's answer to poverty
- 3. Our jubilee mandate: church
- 4.Our jubilee mandate: individuals
- 5.Our jubilee mandate: development

Papers were circulated to all delegates prior to the forum and a number were selected as the basis for a short talks within the programme. The event programme was broken down by these themes across the three days using the following format to dig deeper into these pressing issues.

#### **Devotions**

Each day began with worship and devotions, focusing on the themes of community, repentance and reconciliation.

#### Short Talks

These were short 10 minute presentations on the theology of the theme based on a white paper that has been previously written by the speaker.

#### **Group Discussions**

Delegates were split into 7 groups made up of a mixture of NGOs, church leaders, theologians and emerging voices from different countries. They were given time to discuss key questions that had been posed and feedback to the wider group. These groups changed throughout each session. We used a few simple questions as a starting point for discussions

- What did you like or agree with in the presentation?
- What did you disagree with, and why?
- What was new to you?
- What inspired you, and what do you think would inspire your communities?
- What challenged you, and what do you think would challenge other people you know?
- Would this theological presentation or argument work in your home context
  - If not, why not and how might it need to be presented differently?

#### **Panel Sessions**

A selection of delegates from various countries and a mixture of church organisations and NGOs were presented which key questions that had come out of the previous discussions

and were able to comment based on their experience and context.

#### Reflections

Short reflections gave a brief recap of the topic area, highlighting common themes that had been drawn out and inspiring delegates to continue discussion and reflection on how this can be applied in their own context.

# **Sessions**

# **1. Welcome and Keynote**

The forum commenced with a welcome dinner hosted by Tearfund's Rwanda Country Representative, Emmanuel Murangira and a keynote on 'God's heart for the poor' from Rev Dr Antoine Rutayisire, Principal, Kigali Anglican Theological College.

Rev Antoine drew on the story of the feeding of the 5000 (Matt. 14:13-21) to highlight God's compassion for the poor. He described God as a God who sees, who hears, and who cares for his people. As he read the story he suggested that it reminds us of the ways that we often tend to be caught up in our own situations, forgetting that God sees, hears, cares - and is able to act. It is a story that reminds us that the little we have is turned into abundance when placed into the hands of God. Rev. Antoine reminded us that we are called to see, hear, and care as Jesus does, and urged us as Christians and a church to go out and be with God's people.

# 2. The initial and ongoing causes of poverty

Our devotions in the morning were on the theme of 'diverse communities'.

Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje then gave a short talk on the ongoing causes of poverty through the lense of Africa. He started by reminding us of the opening words of the Bible, 'In the beginning, God...' helping us to remember that poverty and injustice were not a part of God's creation plan. He continued to present the idea that poverty can be attributed to humankind's imperfect nature, the narrative of self-centeredness and deviance from God's plans and expectations. He illustrated this by arguing that poverty in Africa can be attributed to colonialism, slave trade and oppression but also argued Africans themselves can cause poverty by spreading tribalism, corruption and by embezzling resources. He challenged the room to understand that poverty can be overcome by the mission of the church because the church is God's agent for transformation. The church is the anointed messenger to set free the oppressed, vulnerable, refugees, poor, sick and homeless.

#### Discussion

A number of themes emerged from the table discussions, which were developed into questions for the panel. These included:

- The importance of recognising and talking about sin as a cause of poverty, but of doing so in a way that does not put blame on people who are living in poverty.
- The role of empire and colonialism in causing and contributing to poverty, and the role of the church in this history.
- The idea that the church needs to reflect on its history and part in the growth of poverty, and repent of some specific sins and injustices, as well as talking about its call to respond to poverty and be a part of the solution.
- The question of how the church can free itself of the systems of the world that are embedded in it, begin to reverse them and communicate the kingdom and the importance of theological reflection and discussion in doing this.
- The importance of revisiting the theology of creation and God's intention for the world, and reminding ourselves that Genesis talks about harmony, diversity and unity.

#### Panel Discussion

#### Maria Alejandra Andrade (Chair), Paolo, Wayne, Rev. Aiah

In exploring these themes, the panel first discussed what it means to be poor. A person who lacks food, shelter, care can be said to be living in poverty, but lacking economic, political and social access is also a cause of poverty. They mentioned examples from South Africa and South America, where the church, historically, played a part in creating and upholding systems that were unjust and caused poverty. They argued that we have to raise our voices to help the church get back on the right track, and that as Christians we have to bear the responsibilities of our collective pasts. We have to be accountable and collaborate on solutions. The panel also talked about the importance of good theology in this journey, and the need to read and discuss the Bible together.

#### In Reflection

The reflection was led by Heather Roy. She noted that we have been talking about injustice and inequality in their widest sense, not just material poverty, and urged us to rediscover the language of sin, which is not something that we often talk about in our own lives and churches, as acknowledging our sin is a part of the road to liberation and restoration. She reflected that, as we talk about some of the issues that have been raised, we need to hear from different views; a gender-centric perspective, an afrocentric perspective, and so on; as this will help us to break out from the binaries that we are often told exist and to re-imagine our systems and ways of living. Good news to the poor, she pointed out, means bad news for the wealthy. She challenged the church to look at the wealth and power that it holds, and asked whether the church is willing to follow the command to 'give up everything and follow me' and to follow Christ in challenging and acting to change systems that were oppressive. She closed by reminding us of two passages from the Bible: the shortest verse in the English language Bible, 'Jesus wept' (John 11:35), and the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament, 'Rejoice always' (1 Thess 5:16) and asked us to hold those two things together as we continue in the world.

The first day of the forum continued as the assembly visited Kigali Genocide Memorial in the afternoon, concluding with a time of discussion with Rev. Antoine.

# 2. The Jubilee as God's Answer to Poverty

Dr James E. Read lead the short talk starting with the notion that jubilee is one of God's answers to poverty. He told us that jubilee addresses social inequality, it resets power and equality, setting people free, and enables people to maintain or re-establish their identity. He reminded us that regaining land and sovereignty also allows people control over the material conditions of their prosperity. However, he also reinforced that, as Old Testament jubilee is a recurrent event, it means that it is not a permanent answer or a program for perfect justice.

## Discussion

A number of themes emerged from the table discussions, which were developed into questions for the panel. These included:

- The importance of the rich demonstrating a jubilee spirit in returning land and wealth in order for others to be liberated.
- The recognition that in today's global system, many countries have mortgaged their future, making jubilee very complicated to implement. In cases where land has been returned or debts cancelled, it has been done without other compensation or changes that can be needed for liberation.
- The idea that jubilee liberation needs to be applied to economic, social, cultural political and religious realities.
- The recognition that jubilee is not the only answer to poverty alleviation, and that the church must promote liberation and justice by being aware of the influence of power dynamics in society and using its power to seek justice.
- The question about whether jubilee, in the Old Testament, condones slavery and mistreatment of foreigners and migrants, and whether the church has, at times, used it to support injustice.

# **Panel Discussion**

# Nell Goddard (Chair), Jocabed Reina Solano Miselis, Dr James E. READ, Emmanuel Kwizera

In reflecting on these points the panellists highlighted jubilee as a systematic approach that can help sustainable community development, and that can engage both rich and poor in seeking justice. It draws our attention to the poor and those suffering injustice and provides space to think about how to return to a fair society. They pointed out that it helps us bring good news for the poor, but we must also be aware that it can seem to be bad news for the rich. With this in mind they asked how we can ensure that jubilee is something that those who are more well off still want to put into practice? One suggestion in response to this was that the church can help people to reflect on who they are, where they come from and where they belong, to overcome the identity crisis that poverty and injustice can cause on both sides of the wealth divide. Another was that the church should remember that sabbath is a part of jubilee and that taking sabbath helps us not to be selfish and egocentric by giving us the space to reconnect with God and creation. Related to this, the panel also discussed the importance of land in jubilee, and encouraged us to think about what jubilee means for our relationship with and responsibility to creation and our environment.

#### **In Reflection**

Dr Alfonso Wieland, of Paz y Esperanza in Peru reflected on what had been discussed, focusing on jubilee as a reset button for social justice and the importance of returning land to its original inhabitants and challenging the accumulation of wealth. He reflected that jubilee frees the oppressed and the wealthy, and pointed out that it is not a social revenge but a restoration of relationships and respect for all human dignity. He also challenged us to be devoted to our mission despite the fact that we often have limited resources for it.

## 3. Our Jubilee Mandate: Church

In the afternoon session we turned to discuss the mandate jubilee places on the church. The short talk was given by Yenny Delgado of the World Student Christian Federation. She called on the church to offer intentional discipleship and theology, forming Christians for integral mission, and encouraged the church to speak up on the issues of today. She argued that much of the church has narrowed and individualised the gospel and needs to recognise its call to justice in all spheres of society, and become a prophetic voice. She also encouraged us to seek integrity in our lifestyles and theology, and to recognise that maintaining Sabbath provides space for reflection, repentance and reconciliation and a platform for building bridges between belief and action. She described the way that God is calling the church into society and suggested that jubilee needs to be a generational pact. Finally, she asked us to think about whether we discipling the next generation to live out the jubilee, to Dream, Discover, Design and Deliver.

#### **Panel Discussion**

#### John Mark Bowers (Chair), Marco van der Graaf, Carol Ng'ang'a, Yenny Delgado

The panel began with a discussion of the importance of lament for the church, responding to the passage of Habakkuk 1 that Yenny read in her talk. Questions included, 'how do we balance the joy of the Lord with the scriptures that talk about pain and our experience of pain?' and 'how can the church rediscover prophetic lament?'

The panel agreed that in their experiences many churches do not equip their congregations to talk about pain in ways that acknowledge the hurt before finding hope. They emphasised the way that lament and prayer help us to think and talk about pain and prepare us to respond, especially in situations where we do not know what to do with the realities that we face. It was suggested that reading scriptures of lament can help us to voice pain in ways that transcend political and economic disagreements and agendas.

Another point of conversation was about the way churches disciple their congregations to engage in a holistic mission and to respond to all the needs of their communities. It was pointed out that often those in churches who develop a particular passion for justice and action find themselves without a place in the church or a space to express their gifts and passions. This often leads them to end up working for parachurches and NGOs, outside the church, and leaves the church with fewer people to lead them in this area.

#### **In Reflection**

The reflection was led by Dr David Lim of the Asian School of Development and Cross-cultural Studies in the Philippines. In reflecting on the topic of jubilee and the church, he emphasised that in pursuing jubilee towards ending injustice, discrimination and inequality the church has to embody the discipleship of rich and poor within our church. He argued that jubilee calls for oneness in Christianity, and allows for it in open space because it gives freedom to everybody. To do this, he suggested, Jesus must be experienced and assimilated in local and indigenous cultures. Our Christianity must be self-supporting, self-propagating and should allow us to love our neighbours. We have to live our belief, in order to share the Kingdom of God.

# 4. Our Jubilee Mandate: Development

In a short talk, Sheryl Haw of Micah Global spoke about the importance of our belief - what we believe informs how we act. She reminded us that our actual picture of God, the things that we believe about his mission, his church, reflect what is actually in our hearts and influences our behavior. The greatest hurdle is people calling themselves Christians but not living it out. We are therefore not fully understanding our mission or choosing not to obey it. Therefore the most urgent need we have today is teaching that ensures our understanding of God's Mission and our role as believers. But being convinced and convicted does not always lead to responding. There is a need for discipleship and mentoring, and opportunities to hear stories of change, so that we learn more about God and are convicted to start a journey of transformation. This means that the church, Christian and parachurch organisations need to take biblical literacy and discipleship seriously.

The task is too big for one group to do alone. However, if we agree to utilise our gifts of teaching and practice together we will see transformation spring out. We need to unite and collaborate globally, regionally and nationally to explore how to be agents of transformation in a concerted approach.

### **Panel Discussion**

# Sheryl Haw (Chair), Nigel Harris, Anna Jacobson, Alfonso Wieland, Abraham Gaga, Bishop Ivan Abrahams.

The panel focussed on the tensions that can arise between the church and parachurch as the church engages in development work.

Some of the questions included:

- Is there a difference between church and parachurch?
- Are we creating a problem by our vocabulary and looking for a difference?
- NGOs need to exist because the expertise do not exist in the church Does the church take offence to this statement?
- How can the church and parachurch work more effectively together rather than using each other? Where is the gap and the problem?

• In the idea of jubilee what does an ideal reset button look like? Do we genuinely want the best for each other?

All the panellists, who represented both churches and parachurch organisations, expressed the view that God is working through parachurches as well a churches to reveal the Kingdom of God. They emphasised the importance of dialogue with church leaders so that the two can work hand in hand to eradicate the scourge of poverty locally and globally. The two partners have different skills but they have a common King.

#### **In Reflection**

Dr Sas Conradie, Tearfund's Theology and Network Engagement Manager for Africa presented the morning reflection. He reflected on the fact that both churches and parachurches have successes and failures in their histories of tackling poverty and injustice. However, he also highlighted examples of churches and parachurches in making a difference, and working together to do so, including the Jubilee debt campaign, and work on the millennium development goals, along with other development organisations. He concluded by discussing the way that some of the principles of jubilee can be seen in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in the way that both seek to reduce inequality between the world He suggested that these provide a framework for the church to live out the mandate in collaboration with other stakeholders in the international community, so long as we bear in mind that jubilee reminds us that in the end everything belongs to God.

Finally, he stressed that the jubilee mandate should prioritise reducing inequality between the world populations. The jubilee should bring good news for the poor and oppressed and at the same this implies that the jubilee brings bad news for those who are most well-off - at least by the standards of the western world.

#### **Discussion**

After lunch, the participants formed five groups according to the regions of origin to discuss some of the ways that the ideas discussed during the gathering might be helpful to them and their contexts.

# 5. Our Jubilee Mandate: Individuals

The final area of discussion focused on what jubilee means for us as individuals and disciples, in the way that we live our lives. The session was facilitated by Jo Herbert (UK) and Maria Andrade (Ecuador), Theology Networking Managers from Tearfund, and Oscar Danladi, a young theologian from Nigeria. They each shared their personal experiences of contributing in their various churches to uproot inequality among the population, and hosted a conversation with a number of delegates. Each expressed how they have each made a conscious decision to live out jubilee in their own lives and shared what that looked like in practice within their own countries. The session concluded with a moment of reflection and commitment, as each delegate was invited to make a personal response to what had been shared, writing it on a stone which they could take away as a physical reminder.

# **Closing Sessions**

# 1. Young Theologians Response

We began our closing sessions with a response to the week from the Young Theologians. They each shared some of the thoughts that the week had provoked in them, phrased as questions and challenges for the delegates. Some of these included:

- What if Christians committed to tithing not just their money; but their time, energy and resource. What if Christians maintained sabbath to reflect, repent and reconcile?
- What if Christians practiced the spirit and principle of jubilee as daily lifestyle?
- What if we in the West chose to go against the prevailing culture inside and outside the church and committed to being radically uncomfortable?
- What if we stopped categorising life into 'sacred' and 'secular' areas and actions but instead empowered and released Christians to be disciples of Christ in every part of their lives, transforming sectors and spheres from the inside out?
- What if our theologians studied the Bible alongside communities rather than telling them what it means?
- What if the leadership of our churches, networks, and organisations committed to knowing and not just helping?
- What if the church used their land and property for restorative justice?
- What if the church was known in every town for showing radical hospitality?
- What if the church was at the forefront of fighting climate change, gender inequality and unfair trade?
- What if the church prioritised the discipleship and creative theological formation of women and children instead of making them an afterthought?
- What if the church recognises the diversity of its members, theology, realities and worldviews?
- What if we lived out our prophetic call to be the voice of the oppressed in our country?
- What if the orphan, widow, abused, homeless, excluded, marginalised, drug users stood at the centre and inform and shape the church agenda, worship, prayer, preaching, meetings and conversations?

The Young Theologians closed their response by praying for the other delegates in their own languages

# 2. World Cafe

Delegates then participated in a world cafe discussion, picking key words to describe the gathering, reflecting on what had inspired and challenged them during the week, and offering suggestions as to the role the Global Forum on Church and Poverty might play in the future. The responses included:

Inspirations:

- They have been inspired by the Tearfund theology committee's capacity to organise conferences that allow more interactions.
- The value of listening to a diverse range of perspectives on theology and poverty
- The fact that each day started with prayer and worship and devotions
- Being in Rwanda, and having the chance to learn more about the genocide and the way the country has sought healing.
- Noticing the opportunities to live out jubilee in they own lives recognising that jubilee starts with me

- Inspired by the unity and diversity of the group and that everyone's voice was heard and valued.
- The space for interaction and discussion, and the room given to the voice of emerging theologians

Challenges

- The participants were challenged by the narratives of young theologians living out jubilee
- The backdrop of Rwanda's history and where it is as a nation today waas inspiring but challenging.
- There still exists a need to engage cross cultural and theological divides, we hear differences in theology, there is therefore a need to harmonize theology.
- It is important to hear different perspectives but we therefore need more gender representations in our churches and organisations

Ideas for the role of the Global Forum

- A place for church and parachurch to connect and collaborate
- A space for engaging and influencing the church to tackle poverty injustice
- A space for focused conversation among engaged theologians

# 3. Closing Reflection

Emmanuel Murangira closed the afternoon by reflecting back on what we had heard throughout the week. He reflected on what we discussed about God's heart for the poor and his nature as a God who sees, hears and cares for his people, and reminded us that broken relationships are at the root of poverty. He reminded us that the church cannot avoid being held accountable when it comes to ongoing poverty, arguing that while the early church condemned and proactively responded to causes of poverty, the church in more recent history was an institution often condoning or turning a blind-eye to injustices, and the contemporary church often finds itself driven by a secular social agenda, rather than a divine social agenda when it does respond. He described the way that, during the week, we experienced the tension between the our need to lament and repent, and the hope that we have in Christ.

Emmanuel argued that the church is called to take sides in the world's social discourse, the side of the oppressed, the marginalised and those made invisible by unequal power dynamics, and that this means going beyond simple concern to challenge and condemn social, economic and political contexts that allows injustice of any kind to prevail in society. He reflected on our discussion on jubilee as a God-given response poverty describing it as a counterbalance to the kind of socio-economic conditions that characterise societies emerging from long episodes of social, economic, political and spiritual oppression, and a call to live in a way that embodies God's kingdom. He described jubilee as a blueprint for the church, and argued that a focus on focus on social action need not diminish the importance of worship to the church; that as Isaiah and James tell us, it is a part of our worship.

In closing, he reminded us that redemption it is both communal and personal, the rules of the jubilee affecting the community as much as the individual, and suggested that the prophetic role of the church is both institutional in nature, and individual, and is often expressed in

individual lives. The Jubilee ordinances speak to the community, but they must also speak to us as individuals, challenging and encouraging us to live in total obedience to God and to the rules that order communal existence in the kingdom.

# 4. Commitments from Tearfund

At the final dinner, Hannah Swithinbank reflected on what the Tearfund organising team had heard and learned during the week, and what they would be exploring in the future for the Global Forum.

She said that Tearfund are committed to learning from the ideas and discussions shared this week in as they develop their theological research and tools, just as they are committed to hearing from global voices in all of their theological reflection. They will be continuing to host this kind of dialogue and discussion through their Thinking Theology gatherings that take place at national and regional levels. The team are also hoping to publish an essay collection containing revised versions of some of the white papers, in order to share some of the learning and ideas from this event.

Tearfund is also committed to supporting the Young Theologians as a peer community who grow together and support each other, and exploring ways that they can offer development opportunities, including further engagement with the global church. Each young theologians will be producing a reflection on their experience of the Global Forum, which will be published on Tearfund Learn's blog.

Finally, Hannah said that the team felt that they had head participants express the value of gathering together small, diverse groups of thinkers and practitioners to reflect on a particular theme relevant to the church's engagement with poverty and injustice. Tearfund is committed to exploring a future iteration of the Global Forum that fits alongside the other networks and forums that exist to inspire and grow the global church to challenge injustice and poverty.

# **Delegate List**

#### **TEARFUND STAFF:**

Nigel Harris, CEO, Tearfund Emmanuel Murangira, Country Representative Godfrey Gakwandi, Program Manager Sarah Nishimwe, Programme Administrator Peninah Kayitesi, Programme Coordinator (Church programmes & SGBV) Denise Niyonizigiye, Administrator Assitant Priscilla Nishimwe, Finance Manager Non disclosed, Interim Grants & Information Coordinator Andrew Meredith-Jones, International Trusts and Foundations Dr Hannah J Swithinbank, Theology and Network Engagement Team Manager Rev. Dr Sas Conradie, Theology and Network Manager (Africa) Jo Herbert, Theology and Network Manager (Europe & USA) Maria Andrade, Theology and Network Manager (Latin America & Caribbean) Caitlin Collins, Theology and Network Engagement Assistant Iyisha Rocke, Project Manager

#### **DELEGATES:**

Wayne Johnson, CEO, Tearfund Canada Marco van der Graaf, CEO Tear Netherlands Archbishop Laurent Mbanda, Anglican Church of Rwanda Bishop Dr. Onesphore Rwaje, Anglican Church of Rwanda Rev. Dr. Protais Gahungu Bunini, Evangelical Alliance of Rwanda Rev Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje, General Secretary, Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) Major Joseph Muindi, Training Principal, Officer Training College, Thika, Kenya East Dr Alfonso Wieland, Senior Advisor, Programs in Latin America, Peace and Hope International Ven. John Gichimu, Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) Apostle Prof Opoku Onyinah The Chairman, The Church of Pentecost, Ghana Dr James E. Read, Senior Policy Analyst, The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission Yenny Delgado, Global Program Director for Advocacy and Solidarity, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) Dr David S. Lim, CEO, Asian School of Development and Cross-cultural Studies (ASDECS) Sheryl Haw, International Director, Micah Global Dr Moses Alagbe, Chairman, Pentecostal Council of Churches, Amsterdam Dr Jayakumar Christian, Former Partnership Leader for Faith & Development, World Vision International, Former CEO, World Vision India Thomas G. Yaccino, Church Mobilization & Gospel Proclamation Advisor, Latin America & the Caribbean Region, Living Water International J. Mark Bowers, Director of Program Design & Engagement, Chalmers Center Heather Roy, Secretary General, Eurodiaconia Clément Sianka, Board Chair of the Chadian student movement, IFES Abraham Gaga, Executive Administrator, DAI Nigeria Prof Paulo Ueti, Theology Advisor and Regional Facilitator for Latin America, Anglican Alliance Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary, World Methodist Council Emmanuel Kwizera, Catalyst for Proclamation Evangelism, Lausanne Movement Rev Dr Antoine Rutavisire, Principal, Kigali Anglican Theological College Moses Ndahiro, Country Director, World Relief Rwanda Daniel Ryumugabe, Director of International Programs, Chalmers

Rev Andy Bowerman, Co-Executive Director, Anglican Alliance

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#### YOUNG THEOLOGIANS:

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