An Evaluation of the Missiology Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf in Light of Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods* By Cory Wilson

Introduction

The Moravian missions movement of the eighteenth century is a unique missionary movement in the history of the church. The influence of their leader, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, over the Moravians of Herrnhut and the effect of their missions movement is nearly incalculable. Over a period of 28 years (1732-1760) under Zinzendorf's leadership, at least 226 missionaries were sent out from Herrnhut, Germany. Their mission efforts stretched from Greenland to Cape Coast and across the Atlantic to the West Indies and Americas. As the leader of the Moravians, Zinzendorf's missiology carried much sway over how the Moravian missionaries carried out their methodology. The aim of this paper is to explore various elements of Zinzendorf's missiology and then provide a comparison of each to Roland Allen's missiology as outlined in *Missionary Methods*.¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full analysis and comparison of Zinzendorf and Allen's missiology, therefore three specific aspects will be considered: strategic focus, financial support, the end goal of missionary endeavors. First, a brief overview of the Moravian missions movement (MMM) under Zinzendorf will be given.

Overview of Moravian Missions

A particular aspect of uniqueness for the Moravians lies in the unusually high percentage of members who were willing to give their lives for the cause of Christ among the unreached "heathens" of the world. Some estimates state that one in thirteen Moravians followed the call to serve as missionaries between 1732 and 1760.² In the 1730's, the Moravians, despite a congregation of only approximately six-hundred, engaged in missionary labors spanning from Greenland to the Americas and from the Northern tip of Africa in Algeria to the Southern tip in South Africa.

The concentrated focus on missions by the Moravians appears more significant when their circumstances are understood. The Moravians of the eighteenth century were not wealthy noble-class citizens with vast resources to send members to the nations.³ In fact, the opposite was true for them.⁴ They were severely persecuted, to near extinction,

¹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

² Paul Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission : History Through a Missiological Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009), 191.

³ *The Memorial Days of the Renewed Church of the Brethren* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1895), 12.

⁴ Some may argue that Zinzendorf was of the noble class and was able to provide the necessary resources. While it is true that Zinzendorf provided land for the Moravian refugees, he did not use his personal wealth to endlessly supply missionaries. This is evidenced by his willingness to give the first Moravian missions only one gold coin each to get them to the seaport (Hutton 1923, 23).

as Protestants living in Catholic territory in their homeland of Moravia and Bohemia.⁵ This persecution and oppression lead them to seek refuge in neighboring present-day Germany. Even after obtaining land to live on through the graces of Zinzendorf, and forming a new community, Herrnhut, the fact remained that they had left all of their possessions to come to settle on Zinzendorf's estate.⁶ The location of their settlement furthered their difficulties, as it was located a considerable distance from the local village. This was intentionally done by Zinzendorf's steward and in objection to the new refugees.⁷ Although they received land and building supplies from Zinzendorf, their location and lack of significant resources placed them as living on the margins of society.⁸

This affliction seems to have served to prepare them for the harsh mission fields in which many of them would go. A particular interest of early Moravian missions was focus upon, "those whom no one else cared."⁹ The result was that Moravian missionaries directed their evangelistic efforts on those that were often ignored by the state churches. In fact, according J.E. Hutton, one famous Lutheran clergy was quoted as saying in reference to the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen, "It is useless to try to convert savages who have nothing human about them except the shape of their bodies".¹⁰ Prevailing attitudes such as this did not appear to cause the Moravians any hesitation in their work. One example of this is the Moravians first mission work in the West Indies. Early missionaries went to St. Thomas for the specific purpose of working with the plantation slaves. This caused the missionaries to be recipients of much hatred and many evil actions from the European colonists. In spite of these tribulations, their work continued among the slaves.

In addition to the affliction from serving as missionaries, sickness was a constant hindrance to the work. The first two missionaries were sent out in August 1732 to St. Thomas. Over the following two years twenty-nine additional missionaries from Herrnhut were deployed to the West Indies as reinforcements. By April 1735 twelve of them had died due to a variety of sicknesses. The early struggles with colonists and sickness were characteristic of many of the Moravian's early mission stations. The Moravians arrived in Herrnhut with a strong history of persecution. J. Taylor Hamilton suggests that it is this history that prepared them for the harsh labors of the mission field. He writes that the witness spirit, "brought from the lands of persecution and martyrdom . . . gave impetus to the movement".¹¹

⁵ J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum*, *1722-1957*, (Bethlehem, PA: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education Moravian Church in America, 1967), 13.

⁶ *The Memorial Days of the Renewed Church of the Brethren*, 25–26,29.

⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁹ J. E. Hutton, *A History of Moravian Missions* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1922), 7. ¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ J Hamilton, A History of the Missions of the Moravian Church, During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, (Bethlehem Pa.: Times Pub. Co., 1901), 18.

Strategic Focus of Zinzendorf

The sprouting of Zinzendorf's missiology began at less than ten years of age. As a young boy he crossed paths with Piestist leader Philip Spener at a meeting. During this meeting Zinzendorf heard missionary accounts from the East Indies that involved Spener's colleague, August Hermann Francke. By Zinzendorf's own account, it is at this time his heart was first pricked for missions. His interest in missions was continually nurtured through letters containing accounts from the East Indies that were forwarded to his home. He soon had an opportunity to attend Francke's school at Halle. Each night he would dine at Francke's home and listen to stories from the mission field. During 1715, three missionaries from the East Indies made their furlough at Halle. Each night Zinzendorf was filled with stories from the missionaries. These accounts made such an impact on the future leader of the Moravians that he covenanted with his friend, Count Frederick de Watteville, "to do all in our power for the conversion of the heathen, especially for those for whom no one else cared, and by means of men whom God, we believed, would provide".¹² Little did Zinzendorf know that seven years later a band of refugees would settle on his land and prove to be those whom God would provide for his missions endeavors. Although it would be over fifteen years after the covenant before Zinzendorf would send out his first missionary, the desire to reach those in whom no one else cared would become a distinguishing mark of the early Moravian missionaries.

As already mentioned, Zinzendorf was greatly influenced by Francke. Francke held firmly that, "one of the chief duties of the church was to preach the gospel to the heathen".¹³ This most likely influenced Zinzendorf's early commitment to the least-reached peoples. At the time of the MMM, there were three main mission societies in the world. Each of these mission societies focused their labors mostly upon colony interests and the establishment of state churches. This left little time, interest, or resources for the proclamation of the gospel to the heathen. The opposite was true for Zinzendorf. The entire focus of the MMM was specifically those who had no knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. This theological position led to the methodology of selecting missionaries to go unreached lands. The result was that in the first decade of the MMM, Zinzendorf had sent missionaries to the slaves in St. Thomas, the Eskimos in Greenland, the Indians in North America, and various indigenous peoples in Sweden, Russia, South America, and Africa – none of whom had previously enjoyed a Gospel witness among them.¹⁴

In regard to strategic focus, there appears to be a major point of agreement and disagreement with Zinzendorf and Allen's interpretation of Paul's labors. The point of agreement is straightforward and need not be elaborated on—that is that Zinzendorf and Paul both sought to see the gospel proclaimed among those who had never heard. The point of disagreement appears to be in the precise strategy to be used in reaching the unreached. As previously mentioned, a major focus of Moravian missions in the early years under Zinzendorf was an emphasis those whom no one else cared, as expressed in

¹² Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions, 7.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Hamilton and Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum*, 1722-1957,.

the covenant with Count Watteville. The first missionaries sent out by Zinzendorf in 1732 went to the slaves in the West Indies on the island of St. Thomas. Later mission work would likewise often focus on the indigenous peoples of European colonies, peoples that were largely ignored by the state churches.

According to Allen, the Apostle Paul utilized a different strategy in his emphasis on reaching the Gentiles. Considering the total of Paul's missionary journeys, Allen writes, "we must certainly infer that St Paul did deliberately consider the strategic value of the provinces and places in which he preached."¹⁵ This strategy led Paul to focus on establishing strong churches in a few select cities within a province with the hope that the gospel would then spread to the surrounding areas within the province.¹⁶ Allen notes four different requirements that Paul considered in determining which cities would serve as these strategic centers, with the desire that the city meet at least one of the requirements. According to Allen, the four requirements were that city be under Roman administration, of Greek civilization, of Jewish influence, or maintain commercial significance.¹⁷ Allen does not dismiss the role of the Spirit in directing the apostle where to focus his work. He is simply suggesting that Paul's natural focus and the leading of the Spirit resulted in choosing strategic centers of influence as the focus of missionary labors. He writes that Paul's "method of work was so designed that centres of intellectual and commercial activity became centres of Christian activity."¹⁸

Therefore, although Zinzendorf and Paul shared a passion for engaging unreached peoples, they differed in their strategy of which unreached to focus on. Zinzendorf was drawn to the neglected peoples of the time, those whom some Europeans thought unworthy of salvation. Paul, on the other hand, seemed to have a broader vision, according to Allen. His focus was on transforming strategic intellectual and cultural centers into strategic gospel proclaiming centers. It appears unwise to strongly criticize either focus, but rather to recognize that the fulfillment of the Great Commission will require various mission strategies by the global church and that God gives to the church individuals with various giftings to fulfill the needed diversity of emphasis.

Financial Support

In regard to personal conduct, Zinzendorf stressed the inward and outward responsibilities of the missionary. One of his critiques of earlier missionaries was their lack of humility. For this reason, Zinzendorf put much emphasis on the inner condition of his missionaries. He stressed that humility must be a key characteristic in their life and that his humility should lead to a distinct type of lifestyle. In turn, this distinct lifestyle would be a key element in winning the heathen to Christ. Zinzendorf held firmly that, "the force of personal example could raise such wretches from the mire."¹⁹

¹⁵ Allen, Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?, 12.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions, 176.

Zinzendorf's application of this emphasis in the financial realm resulted in his belief that each missionary had a duty to earn their own living. Contrary to most missionaries that are sent out today from North America, the Moravian missionaries were required to earn their own living. The church at Herrnhut would often supply only enough money to get the missionary to the seaport. After that, the missionaries were expected to earn their own living based on the skills that they had. The reasoning for this was two-fold, one practical and one theological. The practical aspect was the church would save money and could send out more missionaries. It seems highly unlikely that the MMM would have enjoyed such great numbers being sent to the nations if the congregation at Herrnhut was forced to pay the salaries of the missionaries they sent out. The theological reason for maintaining this policy was to show the heathen the biblical example of the responsibility to work diligently to support one's family. This policy proved true from the beginning. The first two missionaries to depart Herrnhut, Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann, were only given one gold coin each by Zinzendorf on the morning of their departure.²⁰ Nitschmann, a carpenter by trade, earned money for the fare to the West Indies. Upon their arrival there, Nitschmann continued working to support both of them.

On the issue of money, Zinzendorf and Allen share many similarities. Like Zinzendorf, Allen recognized that money was not a neutral issue. He writes, "The primary importance of missionary finance lies in the fact that financial arrangements very seriously affect the relations between the missionary and those whom he approaches."²¹ He adds, "what is of supreme importance is how these arrangements, whatever they may be, affect the minds of the people, and so promote, or hinder, the spread of the Gospel."²² It is clear Allen's conviction was that the very nature of the financial arrangements of the missionary had a direct affect on the way in which the gospel was understood and received. Allen bases his conviction on three financial principles that he argues the Apostle Paul held to: 1) he did not solicit financial assistance for himself, 2) he did not receive financial assistance from those he preached to, and 3) he did not administer local church funds.²³

It is the first two principles that are of particular interest here. Allen highlights Paul's refusal to accept funds from those he was preaching to so that no hindrance would be caused to the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:12).²⁴ There is little doubt that this was Paul's practice. The question is whether Paul intended his practice to be normative. On this issue, it appears that Allen possibly changed his position in-between the first printing of *Missionary Methods* in 1912 and the second printing in 1927.²⁵ In the main text of the 1927 edition, Allen writes concerning receiving financial support, "in the Church there was a class of people who made their living by preaching. St. Paul did not condemn

²⁰ Ibid., 23.

²¹ Allen, Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?, 49.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to acquire a 1912 version of *Missionary Methods* to determine whether the footnote related to this discussion was an addition to the 1927 publication.

these; on the contrary, he argued that it was legitimate that they should do so."²⁶ However, Allen provides a footnote following this sentence that seems to suggest a different view. The footnote begins with, "When I wrote this book I had not observed that in addressing the Elders of Ephesus St Paul definitely directs them to follow his example and to support themselves (Acts 20.34, 35)."²⁷ He goes on to argue in the footnote that traditional passages used to support financial support for the clergy like Gal. 6:6 and 1 Tim. 5:18 are "doubtful exceptions" and "even if those passages do refer to money gifts, they certainly do not contemplate fixed salaries which were an abomination in the eyes of the early Christians."²⁸ Therefore, in the main text of the book Allen seems to be suggesting that Paul did not see his practice as normative. However, in the footnote Allen seems to suggest otherwise.

It appears difficult to make a biblical case that Paul's refusal to accept financial support from those he preached to is meant to be normative, and thus discourage any type of fully supported ministry positions.²⁹ However, that is not to suggest there is no biblical precedent for Zinzendorf's policy. In Acts 18 the apostle Paul arrives in Corinth. Upon his arrival he begins earning a living by making tents, which was his trade. Many strategies today send missionaries as "tentmakers" into creative access countries. This strategy is utilized because traditional missionaries are not allowed in the country. However, this strategy distorts why Paul was working as a tentmaker. He was not working as a tentmaker to provide cover for being in Corinth, but to provide a living for himself (Acts 18:3-4; 1 Cor. 4:12, 9:15; 2 Cor. 11:7, 12:13). As Allen comments about Paul, "He refused to do anything from which it might appear that he came to receive, that his object was to make money."³⁰

Although this is the clear example of Paul in his work in Corinth, it is not necessarily what he appears to advocate as the *necessary* biblical model. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul argues that "those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). Furthermore, Paul acknowledges that he accepted offerings from other churches (2 Cor. 11:8) and suggests he was wrong for not accepting an offering from the Corinth church (2 Cor. 12:13). There is a clear biblical precedent for the Moravian policy in the example of Paul in Corinth. However, based on his letters to the Corinthians, Paul does not appear to be suggesting this example as the required norm for missionaries.

The distinction between Zinzendorf and Allen here is not whether money should be taken from those the missionary is currently preaching to, as both are equally opposed to that practice. However, based on the fact that Paul received offerings from previous converts and planted churches, Allen allows for missionaries to be fully supported by

²⁶ Allen, *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?*, 50.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Passages such as Luke 10:7, 1 Cor. 9:11, Gal. 6:6, and 1 Tim. 5:17-18 seem to restrict Paul's example from being prescriptive.

³⁰ Allen, *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?*, 51.

their sending churches.³¹ He writes, "Our missionaries all receive their supplies from home, and cannot possibly be thought to seek financial support from their converts."³² Zinzendorf, however, did not provide financial support to his missionaries, and here lies the distinction between Zinzendorf and Allen on the matter. In evaluating both sides, Zinzendorf has the clear example of Paul on his side. However, when the entire biblical account is considered, especially Paul's own writings, it is difficult to insist Paul's example is prescription and not simply descriptive. At the very least, missionaries, and those who send them, would be wise to give serious reflection to Allen's argument that money and the use of money serves as a vehicle of communication and that "if we are persuaded that the material vehicle misrepresents the spirit which we would express, and yet continue to use it, it checks the spirit in us."³³

The End Goal of Missionary Labors

The final aspect of Zinzendorf's missiology to be analyzed is the end goal of the Moravian missionary endeavors under Zinzendorf. It is at this point that the greatest distance between Zinzendorf and Allen exist. Zinzendorf had a strong desire for evangelism. He greatly desired the heathen to hear and respond to the Gospel message. A consequence of these strengths of Zinzendorf was that the centrality of the local church took a back seat in his theology. In his instructions to missionaries Zinzendorf writes, "You must not try to establish native churches; you must not enroll your converts as members of the Moravian Church; you must be content to enroll them as Christians".³⁴ The fleshing out of this position would be that hundreds and thousands would profess Christ, but only a small handful of that number progressed to baptism and church membership. The emphasis was on conversion and not discipleship. Hutton provides on example of this methodology in Frederick Martin. According to Hutton, Martin had seven hundred converts by the year 1736, yet had baptized only thirty.

This methodology is in direct opposition to the methodology of Paul according to Allen. Throughout *Missionary Methods*, Allen continually puts before the reader Paul's clear reoccurring goal of establishing indigenous local churches, which is exactly what Zinzendorf told his missionaries not be concerned with. According to Allen the goal of Paul's strategic focus was the establishment of influential churches, not just converts. He writes, "There is no particular virtue in attacking a centre or establishing a church in an important place unless the church established in the important place is a church possessed of sufficient life to be a source of light to the whole country round."³⁵ Likewise, the goal of Paul's financial position was to not hinder the development of local churches, for in each province that he labored in he established "financially independent" churches.

³¹ It is admitted that Allen's acceptance of this seems to go contrary to his own argument against fully supporting Christian laborers.

³² Allen, Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?, 51.

³³ Ibid., 55.

³⁴ Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions, 182.

³⁵ Allen, Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?, 12.

³⁶ Ibid., 51.

The difference in Zinzendorf and Paul's end-goals led to differences in their methodology. One aspect directly related to the end-goal is the context of evangelistic preaching. Zinzendorf carried a strong conviction, based on Rom. 1, that all men knew there was a God and knew they had sinned. Therefore what they needed was the Gospel message. He wrote to Dober the following,

What is it that the heathen know already? They know that there is a God (Rom. 1:19-20), and, therefore, the man who tells them of God is simply wasting his time. What is it that they do not know? They do not know that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and, therefore, the missionary must always begin with the Gospel message.³⁷

At the time, other missionaries would begin with creation and the fall before proceeding to the gospel. Zinzendorf strongly opposed this, and therefore, the focus of the Moravian message was the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ and His sufferings.

The effect of this methodology appears to have examples of success. One example is found in the missionary labors of Matthew and Christian Stach and Christian David in Greenland. The trio labored for over seven years by focusing on teaching the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.³⁸ Over this timeframe only a few Eskimos came to Christ. In 1741 the missionaries changed their methodology. They began shifting the focus their preaching to be more Christocentric, with emphasis upon assurance of salvation. By 1745 they had approximately 200 gathering for worship services.³⁹

Was Zinzendorf following the biblical model on this position? Biblical arguments in response to this questions call for a healthy balance. Paul's encounter in Athens in Acts 17:16:34 can be used as a case study. In this example Paul is found preaching to Gentiles, so his audience does not have a worldview influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures. Because of this, Paul begins his sermon with creation by declaring; "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). He then quickly worked his way to the command of God to repent because of the coming judgment. Paul clearly references Jesus as the righteous one by whom God will judge the world and the one who was raised from the dead. Interestingly, for whatever reason, Paul does not call Jesus by name during his sermon. In this example, we see that Paul did start with creation, however he quickly moved to the heart of the gospel. Further help in answering this question is found in 1 Cor. 15:1-5, where Paul describes the gospel he preached to the Corinthians. In verse three he writes that it was the gospel that he delivered "as of first importance." This does not necessarily mean that Paul did discuss creation and the fall in his sermons. It simply means that regardless of what type of sermon he preached, the gospel was presented as first importance.

³⁷ Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions, 178–179.

³⁸ Hamilton, A History of the Missions of the Moravian Church, During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, 12.

³⁹ Ibid., 13–14.

Allen sees the aforementioned account from Acts as insufficient to judge the whole of Paul's preaching to the Gentiles. He writes, "These speeches were rather examples of the way in which St Paul made his first approach to people who were either ignorant of, or in practice denied, the fundamental truths which lie behind the Gospel, than a setting forth of his Gospel."⁴⁰ He adds that it is "impossible to maintain that the speeches at Lystra and Athens represent St Paul's Gospel."⁴¹ Instead, Allen offers that the first epistle to the Thessalonians as offering a more comprehensive view of the message that Paul preached to Gentiles. Here Allen outlines nine major components of Paul's preaching:⁴²

- 1. There is one living and true God (1:9)
- 2. Idolatry is sinful and must be forsaken (1:9)
- 3. The wrath of God is ready to be revealed against the heathen for their impurity (4:6)
- 4. The judgment will come suddenly and unexpectedly (5:2,3)
- 5. Jesus the Son of God (1:10), given over to death (5:10), raised from the dead (4:14), is the Savior from the wrath of God (1:10)
- 6. The Kingdom of Jesus is now set up and all men are invited to enter it (2:12)
- 7. Those who believe and turn to God are now expecting the coming of the Savior who will return from heaven to receive them (1:10; 4:15-17)
- Meanwhile their life must be pure (4:1-8), useful (4:11-12), and watchful (5:4-8)
- 9. To that end God has given them His Holy Spirit (4:8; 5:19)

Allen's interpretation of the role the 1 Thessalonians in understanding Paul's preaching to the Gentiles is strengthened when the whole biblical context is considered. This can be seen at several points. First, the command of Christ is to "make disciples," (Matt. 28:19) not simply see conversions take place. Zinzendorf's methodology fails in obedience to this command. Second, it appears to be out of step with Paul's work in Ephesus. Luke writes that Paul declared the "whole counsel" of God to the believers at Ephesus (Acts 20:27). Furthermore, Paul continually exhorts Timothy in his letters to him to teach sound doctrine and reminds him that all Scripture is profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16). Third, the Christian faith and the church are never separated in the New Testament. The example throughout the New Testament is that the Christian faith was meant to be lived out in the context of a community – the church. It is through the church that the manifold wisdom of God is displayed (Eph 3:10) and His glory reflected (Eph 3:21). When the church is not emphasized and regenerate church membership is not taken seriously the display of God's wisdom and glory are distorted. A final reason concerns the longevity and influence of the church. The establishing of healthy churches lays the structural system for the passing of the faith from one generation to the next. For these reasons, Zinzendorf appears to have hindered what could have been an even greater and longer lasting impact by his missionaries.

⁴⁰ Allen, *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours?*, 66.

⁴¹ Ibid., 67.

⁴² Ibid., 68.

Conclusion

The MMM was one of the greatest missionary movements in the history of the church. This is particularly true when their context in history is considered. The goal of this paper is to highlight some key aspects of Zinzendorf's missiology and evaluate them in light of Allen's work on the labors of the Apostle Paul. The goal is not to pit Zinzendorf against Allen, but to simply recognize some the significant contributions of each in the field of missiology. By God's grace, Zinzendorf was able to mobilize a poor, uneducated, persecuted community of believers into a missionary force that touched all corners of the globe. As shown through Allen's writings, Zinzendorf was not a perfect missiologists. However, he was a missiologist that was ahead of his time and should be remembered as one of the greatest mission thinkers in the history of the church. Zinzendorf and Allen both are evidences of God's gracious giftings to the church. During their lives, they were each used in various ways for the advancement of the gospel. Today, through their writings and example, they both continue to contribute to the cause of global missions.

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