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Gavin Rennie

This is an important conference.

It brings together for networking, learning, invigoration and challenges a variety of delegates who in a myriad of ways serve countless people in need through the Anglicare network.

Principally your work is in Australia but also increasingly in New Zealand.

We have a saying in this country what is the most important thing and I say He tangata He tangata He tangata - it is People-People- People.

We are here because we believe that our jobs are about people.

I want today to talk about people and social services centred round three main issues:

- Some history
- Rethinking and reconceptualising the spirituality of church social services
- Listening to the stories of clients and feedback from recent New Zealand research

Since 1975 I have been involved in some form of Social Services first briefly as a volunteer and since 1977 as a career choice. I moved through Community development in a local Authority to Community Development work for the Methodist Central Mission to management of a significant Interchurch Social Service Agency in South Auckland. From there to teaching which I have been doing now for twenty years. My activist days were centred around Anti Racism and Housing issues but at the basis of all that I did was a strong commitment to Social Justice which I imbibed from family and church. I actually put School in there when I wrote the original draft of this but on reflection there was not much overt stuff at Secondary School. Having said that however some of my ideas about Social Justice were developed through primary school experiences.

My School was associated with an Orphanage. The Sisters of Mercy actually owned the school and children from the local parish attended what was in those days their school... I very quickly became aware that my life was very different from that of the Orphans as they were collectively known. A memorable example, if we saved and then gave 2/6 we were able to buy a Black Baby. Think of that for a minute Buy a Black

Baby. Our buying one meant we were lauded to the rest of the class for our generosity (I expect that even amongst the Non Orphans few could afford this) but I think it meant our contribution had somehow saved a Black baby. What that meant the saving bit I was and am still not sure but we felt good at the time and enjoyed momentary fame being held up to the class as paragons of virtue! It became clear to me however that the Orphan children never had that moment of fame because where were they going to get their 2/6 from. I doubt they ever had any money for themselves let alone money to give away. But let me take this Social Justice story a little further. Whilst the Sisters were doubtless a groups with a variety of gifts abilities attitudes etc I imbibed from my parents that whatever else there were they had made a lifelong commitment, as in invariably was in those days, to work and look after poor children who had no one else to care for them and that impressed me.

Those sorts of commitments still impress me 60 years on so it was that lasting example of caring for others be it all through our 2009 eyes maybe somewhat different from what we would do today. Similar influences on me included a grandmother who told me very clearly we don't just vote for parties in an election who make our lives easier we vote so that most people are better off.

I don't want to spend further time on this but I have more than a little gratitude for those cultural antecedents.

My direct involvement with Church Social Services began when I was employed by the Auckland Methodist Mission to oversee the development of a network of Community houses in South Auckland, I had been a community worker in a local Authority for some years and had got to know some of the staff from the mission who had been very encouraging of me as a somewhat isolated community worker (at the time the only one employed by that particular local authority (it was good to share collegial and supportive relationships with them). When a job came up there I decided six years in local government was enough and I needed a change. What impressed me about the Community and Social Services Division of the Mission was that they were light years ahead of many others in having developed a Theology of community facing Ministry. Their concept of what was Church and what the Church could become was based on a response to the needs as they saw them with few pre conceptions other than openness. Whilst that Church piece was important what was to me of much greater significance was that they were there to serve. I am not suggesting for a moment this was not something that had been neglected in the past by Church Social Services but what I am saying is that they began to articulate new models of social service, and of community development, which raised big issues as much for the church itself as for others. We are talking here of the 1980's the advent of Liberation Theology as one author has put it (Bosch, 1993, p. 439). Liberation

Theology's question is not about whether God exists but knowing on which side God is.

At its outset it came under intense scrutiny and critique from many sides particularly from inside the Church, in the now often quoted words of Dom Helder Camara.

“When I build houses for the poor, they call me a saint. But when I try to help the poor by calling by name the injustices which have made them poor they call me a subversive, a Marxist (Bosch, 1993, p. 440).

I relate this because these sorts of values and the practice that resulted from them was seminal in my formation as a Social Worker. Gradually I was seeing that it was possible for there to be an integration between my personal belief system and my professional life.

I also found as time went on that the boundaries between my personal professional and spiritual self blurred as I was able to see and experience links between all three.

It seemed to me that dealing with both immediate needs and asking structural questions was also important and that in fact these were not oppositional view points but part of the same process

Part of my current satisfaction, in terms of ‘practice’ – which pretty remote as a Board member is my involvement with Epic Employment services. Increasingly I can only be involved with organisation where there is no conflict between my personal, spiritual and professional values.

So you as people engaged in social services have hopefully found jobs which reflect or at least do not conflict with your values. In a sense, however, what is more important is what do clients want from agencies.

Those of us who are teachers have no job without there being students and those who work in Social Service Agencies have no jobs without clients.

I'd like you know for a few moments to move to listening to a different voice from mine to that of Clare Allan and where she fits will be become obvious as you listen.

This *Article* appeared in the Guardian newspaper whilst I was in England earlier this year. Good news about Social Workers is music to my ears;

Two days after you read these words, an era will come to an end. It's an era more significant, to me at least, than the end of the second millennium, the end of George Bush, or the passing of Harold Pinter, monumental though these events are. Bernadette, my social worker for more than 11 years, is retiring, and this is a tribute to her - a celebration of the possibilities of the social worker/client relationship in general, and an attempt by me to get my head round the fact that, come Friday, I won't be seeing her any more.

I was assigned Bernadette in 1997, shortly after being sectioned, and have seen her pretty much every week since then. I still have the handwritten letter she sent me inviting me to my first appointment. "I will be able to work with you as a social worker in the community and should like to talk to you about your ideas for structuring your day..." Her letter was, for me, far more than the offer of an appointment; it represented one last straw of hope that I could be helped.

I had no idea what to expect, and remember searching the letter for clues, scrutinizing her handwriting, pondering the significance of her Catholic-sounding name. I read and reread each sentence, looking for hidden meanings behind the apparently straightforward words.

I realize this makes me sound like a bloody nightmare. I was certainly desperate, and desperate people are not always the easiest people to help. Sometimes, like a drowning swimmer, they may struggle against the person who tries to save them. I had been discharged from the day hospital, which I'd been attending for 18 months, as a punishment - at least, that's how I saw it - for trying to kill myself. "This doesn't mean you can't reapply," the appalling consultant told me at the appalling meeting where sentence was passed. A dozen heads gravely nodded. "But there's no point keeping on doing something if it isn't working, is there?"

Quite what it was they had been "doing" and how anyone could have conceived it might "work", remains something of a mystery. But the fact was that the day hospital had become my world. I had nowhere else to go. I walked out of that meeting with the consultant and over the edge of a metaphorical cliff. My life was in free fall. And that's when I got the letter from Bernadette...

Strength, warmth and competence. These seem to me to be crucial qualities for anyone working in the field of mental health. And there are professionals, certainly, who have all three in abundance. Regrettably, there are also those who have none, and still more who have one - usually warmth, which, without the support of the others, is possibly even worse. We could argue about the proportions of each type present in the workforce and deduce from that the likelihood of encountering one or other, but for the client, and most especially the client in crisis, such statistics are irrelevant. All that matters is the person in front of you and whether they are able to help. If the last straw is a short straw, then you've had it.

Even after 11 years and more than 500 meetings, I can fit all the concrete facts I've managed to collect about Bernadette's life into one short paragraph. She was born in Manchester, not long after the end of the Second World War. She studied sciences, and has at least one child. She is five feet and half an inch tall, and drives the same second-hand VW Golf she did when we first met. She likes gardening, reads a lot of books, sees films, and goes to concerts. And she has a thing about solar eclipses, travelling to see them whenever she can; it's something about the all-inclusive nature of the experience that appeals to her, she told me. And that's about it. I have absolutely no idea how she got to be the woman who saved my life.

That's not to say she did it single-handed. I was an active participant in my own recovery, just as I had been active in my self destruction. But it was Bernadette who enabled me to engage in the process, who made my recovery possible.

How did she do it? From the first, Bernadette managed to convey that she wanted to work with me. This is not a desire that can be faked; she conveyed it because she felt it. I remember bumping into her in the street very shortly after we started working together. "How nice to see you," she said, and it was clear to me that she meant it. The mere fact that I remember such a simple comment all these years later suggests just how potent sincerity can be.

But it wasn't just a question of what she said. Her actions reinforced her words over and over again. She never once missed an appointment and, to the best of my knowledge, in 11 years never even had a day off sick. In our very first meeting, she asked me what sort of contact I'd like from her. I was, I remember, reluctant to say, unwilling, after the day hospital, to find myself turned away again, but Bernadette persisted. "Well, I suppose, ideally, I'd like to see you every week," I ventured. I waited for the world to end. "That's fine," Bernadette said.

If Bernadette sought to convince me that she wanted to work together with me, I applied myself with some dedication to convincing her that she didn't. I overdosed repeatedly, poured boiling water over my arms, sat silent through sessions week after week, wrote her suicide notes, was hospitalized, and went AWOL. One particularly desperate evening, I went through the north London phone directory, calling everyone with Bernadette's surname and asking to speak to her.

But in this, as in all else, she proved unshakeable. When, guilt-ridden I confessed my crime (I hadn't managed to trace her), she calmly explained that her number was ex-directory, and that she supposed that if people put themselves in the book, then perhaps they don't mind being called. "But you must be angry!" I protested, for truly I was running out of ways in which to frustrate her. "Well, it's probably not the most productive use of our relationship," she finally admitted. "But I really think you've tortured yourself about it quite enough."

Bernadette's commitment, her refusal to budge, her utter reliability, showing up week after week wherever I was, in hospital or out of it, her consummate patience, the sheer amount of time she was willing to offer - all these were critical in building the trust we needed to work together. But there were other important qualities - partly, I suspect, innate, and partly the result of years of experience. Intelligence, insight, resilience, humour (I've never met anyone who knew so well the power of a well-placed laugh to defuse a situation), empathy, courage and professionalism, to name just a few.

Different phases

My relationship with Bernadette has been through many different phases over the years. One of the great benefits of social work is its flexibility. Early on, I needed more practical help; later, as I returned to work, she offered me a great deal of support in making the transition. Crucially, Bernadette recognised that the time someone begins to walk unaided is not the time to throw away the crutches.

Our relationship changed as I did, up and down and back and forth, for progress in recovery is seldom linear. I never saw her for less than an hour, usually for about an hour and a half, and occasionally two hours or more.

Through all the transitions, the boundaries of our positions remained intact. In the abstract, the concept of boundaries might seem rather cold, a sort of artificial barrier erected to keep both parties safe and prevent any genuine intimacy. But, in my experience, it was Bernadette's ability to hold firm boundaries that enabled me to use the relationship. The fact that I know so little about Bernadette's existence outside her role as my social worker is evidence, clearly, of one sort of well-kept boundary. But there are others, even more important, and still less tangible. There was never for a second the slightest question as to who was there to help who. I never had to worry about Bernadette. On the deepest, most fundamental level, I knew that taking care of her needs was not my responsibility. I cannot emphasise enough how valuable this was to my recovery.

Many demons

Our boundaries have brought us a very long way together. With Bernadette's help, I have built for myself a life that feels worth living. I have overcome - or learned, at least, to outwit - the worst of my many demons. I still suffer from periods of desperate depression, but Bernadette has guided me through the darkness so many times that I've at last grown confident of the way, and am confident too that I'll still hear her footsteps beside me when she's gone.

And it is those same boundaries that now insist - unbearable as it feels, and I am crying as I type - that the time has come for us to say goodbye.

I find this story very encouraging and very moving and it raises questions which you may wish to address later.

You have chosen to work for organizations that are under the umbrella of Anglicare from what I see that organization provides a huge resource in terms of policy information, critique of govt policy, third sector updates and the like.

All that is most useful and saves individual agencies being involved at that level. Practice needs to stay informed about current policy issues. A bigger question for me however is that alongside the importance of that is how good is what is being provided for the people we all serve and why are we doing it and what is if you like our defining difference?

In 2004 a book was published in the USA called Saving America? Faith based services and the future of Civil Society/ Portions of this book debate issues not relevant to our contexts given the American reality of separation of church and state. Leaving that aside however its author Robert Wuthnow a Sociologist from Princeton University, examines the scope and activities of a range of organizations from large across America International Agencies right down to local congregationally based services.

One of his findings which give cause to pause is that:

“there may be little reason to expect that faith based organizations in general are more effective than non sectarian organizations”. (Wuthnow, 2004, p.161).

In commenting on Wuthnow's book a reviewer notes.

“we can only understand faith- based services within the larger cultural historical and institutional contexts in which they are imbedded” (Vanderwood, 2005 p.40).

What seems helpful about Wuthnow's book is that he is clear that whilst the answer to his original question Saving America is a no on its own the links and intertwining between religion government and other not for

profits means there is a contribution that is and can be made. He argues persuasively as one commentator has noted.

That “religious involvement strengthens people’s connections to others like themselves, but despite some of the theological rhetoric it actually does far less to help people who are different from themselves particularly in terms of race and class. Wuthnow’s research challenges each of us involved in religious organizations to examine to what extent these efforts address the substantial social inequalities that are at the root of many of the social problems that we face.

For, if religion and civil society cannot move each of us past the limits of “us” and “them” then attempts to solve social problems with religion will never be more than individualized band aid solutions. (Wuthnow, 2004, p.40).

Having said that I wonder too if we need to re think what we mean when we use religious language when we talk about being in this context Christian & Anglican.

I want to develop that a little.

One of the privileges in being a teacher is that one learns a lot from the students (hopefully it works the other way too).

I am involved in teaching a paper on spirituality to Graduate students. In taking on the development of this course I had to re think my own spiritual position or should I say at this stage, I did it my religious position. I am a lifelong church goer formed in the Catholic church Pre and Post Vatican 11 attending an Anglican Church for the last twelve years and in the past a teacher of theology.

The journey from religion to spirituality was challenging and extremely helpful in my gaining a wider appreciation of just where religion fits. In the past there has been a tendency for religious dominations within Christianity for instance to make a series of claims on truth. We all, well some of us, remember the One Way Jesus stickers of the seventies, then there was and is the rivalry between the great World Religions.

The Abrahamic religions .Judaism Christianity and Islam claim at times a certain moral high ground on being just that and being monotheistic but then there are the other great world religions Buddism and Hinduism. What I discovered and you may already know this that whilst being Christian being Anglican is important, in the big scheme of things our religious positions are mere dots on the spiritual landscape when seen in the light of the larger spiritual traditions. Firstly let me say at this stage lest you think that I may have thrown the baby out with the bath water

that having explored in these areas I came to the inclusion that for me Christianity is the vehicle for the expression of my spirituality.

But I want to return to the ideas of where religion fits into the larger spiritual landscape because I do wonder whether we need to shift our thinking from religion to spirituality or rather perhaps to see our religion through that wider lens. Let me try and explain further and give a context as to why I am making this suggestion.

I came to the academic world twenty years ago having worked in church social services. I was committed to what I had done and that commitment was based on values which were at the same time religious, humanistic and based on what I would call social work values. I had been conscious of not imposing my religious views on others and working ecumenically 30 years ago and that in itself was a challenge. I became even more conscious of not doing that in the academy. For the first few years as a teacher of social work I had no cause or need to touch on matters religious with students and I took it upon myself to monitor that they were discouraged from imposing their religious views on others. What started to happen ten years ago were that the yearnings and I use that word advisedly to discuss things spiritual began to emerge.

It was student led; they wanted to talk about the spiritual aspects of being involved in Counselling and social work. We had to develop a way of doing that which was not tied to a confessional approach and in doing so discovered an extensive body of literature on the subject Canda and Furman (1999) we found particularly helpful in this regard. In working through this we also had to look at the distinctions and connections between Spirituality and Religion, There is sometimes a perception that if one takes if you will a spiritual approach to say Social work than one is excluding Religion, In fact that seems to not be the case.

To go back for a few moments one of the authors we found helpful in this regard was Diarmuid O'Murchu an Irish Catholic priest and psychologist who has a thriving practice in London (and incidentally not a welcome visitor to official Catholic functions on Australia).

O'Murchu is a prolific writer and presenter. In 1999 his book Reclaiming Spirituality – A New Spiritual Framework for Today's World contained a summary of the linear relationship between spirituality and religion.

In a chapter entitled reconnecting with our spiritual tradition he says this;

- 1) the fact that creation itself is essentially spiritual ...
- 2) That humans since their first moments of evolution have engaged with a spiritualized universe, themselves endowed with a spiritual capacity for such engagement

- 3) That we, humans, have prayed and worshipped in a conscious and enlightened way for at least 70,000 years (O'Murchu, 1999, p.53)

We in fact have concrete evidence for this spiritual dimension in humans back to that time.

On the other hand O'Murchu says

“we need to remind ourselves frequently that formal religion is a very recent visitor to planet earth no more than 5,000 years old” (O'Murchu, 1999, p.57)

And again

“Spirituality is written into the weaving and unweaving tapestry of evolution and creation our prehistoric ancestor's behaved spirituality because they remained connected to the cosmic womb of life, which in itself is innately spiritual” (O'Murchu, 1999, p.57)

O'Murchu continues

Philosophers, psychologists and spiritual writers often allude to meaning and pursuit of it.

“Many aspects of spirituality are constructed in isolation and adversarially, we tend to juxtapose the sacred and the secular, the human and the divine, body and soul, religion and politics. Frequently, we need to remind ourselves that dualisms are constructs of the human mind (and of fairly recent invention) and do not necessarily reflect reality in its essential nature, there is overwhelming evidence-anthropological, scientific and spiritual- to suggest that life operates in terms of the both and polarity rather than the either/or dualism” (O'Murchu, 1999, p.62).

O'Murchu makes a further statement that puts a lot of things in perspective, talking in the context of the Agricultural revolution he says this

“we conceptualized God on our own image and likeness as the Supreme Patriarchal Father, modelled according to the emerging cultural views of the time” and later

“What happened in the wake of the Agricultural revolution was highly convoluted form of idolatry, reducing, manipulating and distorting the God- reality into an impressive man-made idol, in whose name enormous pseudo-spiritual power was released to validate the human urge to dominate and control” (O'Murchu, 1999, p.73).

O'Murchu also outlines clearly that whilst we have clear recorded evidence of spiritual practices dating back 70,000 years religion is comparatively new with Hinduism as the oldest and that not more than 5,000 years old. Judaism about 3,000 years old and then Christianity Islam and Buddhism following, If we look at all this in the context of 70000 years religion is a relative newcomer. That is not to deny in any way its significance nor its importance but this piece of history does help to develop a perspective.

O'Murchu's key point is

“Theologians and other scholars of religion work with many unexamined assumptions notably that religion seems to be endowed with some type of eternal pre-existence making it the supreme body of wisdom “that is an authentically revealed form of divine wisdom” (O'Murchu, 1999, p.77).

He goes on to state and this is key

“God did not have to wait for formal religion to bring the divine power to the world; the divine co-creativity has been at work for billions of years and humans have been responding on the overt level alone for at least 70,000 years”

What in fact we see happening is that a major task of spirituality is the prophetic challenge of confronting religion with its own shadow.

Religion is not and never has been, the primary mediating force for spirituality, Religion is not, and was never intended to be the sole or primary medium for God's revelation to humankind.

Questions around the links and distinctions between spirituality and social work are receiving increasing attention. In the Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work Spring 2005 Hodge and McGrew list the outcomes of a survey undertaken on precisely this issue. They review the Literature (as good academics do) and explore findings from two major studies.

Canda and Furman (1999) in the USA surveyed practitioners who are affiliated with the National Association of Social Work (NASW). Later Furman & Canda et al (2004) replicated this method in the United Kingdom. Although the rank order differed the same descriptors were used to describe spirituality, religion and faith. Following these studies the authors of this paper surveyed social work students. The details of the survey are available in the papers referenced under their names but in brief in asking questions about the definition of spirituality, most said spirituality contained within it a belief in God.

As I move towards a conclusion, I want to read another story which I heard very recently, which shows that some of those who work with people still have a way to go.

I am a refugee that came to New Zealand on a quota in 1993. I was a registered nurse for 10 years before coming to New Zealand. I have done several trainings overseas, including one year of bio-statistics training in Sudan and six months of bio-statistics in Egypt. I worked in the Ministry of Health with the WHO (World Health Organisation) collecting statistics and as a supervisor for health clinics for mothers and children. I was the head of the WHO programme in Somalia before I fled to Kenya and worked in Kenya for nine months with the Red Cross. I was supervisor for supplementary feeding at refugee camps. I worked with a New Zealand nurse at the camp who wrote a letter to UNHCR telling them that I was an educated person and I should be given refugee quota to New Zealand with my children. With this recommendation I had a high hope to work as a nurse, continue my education and have a good standard of life in New Zealand.

I arrived at Mangere Camp and NZQA (New Zealand Qualification Authority) assess my qualifications as equivalent to New Zealand nursing qualification. With this I hoped to get a job as a nurse. I applied for many nursing positions, but for every position I was asked for New Zealand registration. I applied for Nursing Registration but was asked to submit evidence that I trained as a nurse and worked as a nurse. As all my certificates and testimonials were lost when I fled my country I provided evidence from Red Cross but they would not accept it.

So I enrolled for a nursing degree. I completed the first year and started my clinical. The clinical began at 7am. As a sole parent with young children this was a problem. So I tried to negotiate for changes in clinical hours due to family circumstances. This was refused. In the end I failed my clinical because I was late two times during the year, altogether for less than 10 minutes. My clinical supervisor suggested that I should stay with my children and when they grow up then I can start again. I was heartbroken. This also affected my children's welfare. I stopped the course after one and half years. I have never stayed home without going to work since I was 15 years old. So I started voluntary interpretation for the Somali community with a number of agencies. RMS and resettlement gave me part time jobs at clinics as Somali interpreter for 10 hrs per week.

I would like to work as a nurse. One day I will go back to my country or any African country and be able to work as a nurse. The whole community is isolated from the society. The group that you see today are the lucky ones. Most mothers stay at home. They have a lot of stress.

We have cultural issues because we dress differently and we look different. In 1995 I was working in a rest home for three months. They said we will give you a job if you pass this trial. I passed the trial and after one week they called me. The supervisor told me there are three things you must stop. Being a Muslim, I pray 5 times a day. So when the other nurses are smoking, I go to pray. They complained that I don't relax with people and talk to them. She also asked me about the uniform. I explained that I could not wear short dress because of my religion but she insisted that that was the uniform. I explained my position to her she would not change her mind. I told her that I could not stop my daily prays. I lost my job.

I went to the Human Rights Commission but they were kiwi people. They denied the whole story and accused me of what I never did. They fired me but paid me for nine months. I was heartbroken so instead of applying for jobs and get heartbroken I decided to work as a volunteer in the community.

There is a lot of discrimination even though they say they are not. For example one of the nurses told me yesterday we were running away from war; today we are claiming cultural safety. But I always say that although I lost my country I did not lose my dignity. (Chile, 2002, p. 363 – 364)

It seems to me that on the one hand Bernadette gave poppy most things that she needed as a client. What you have just heard tells a different story and one that does not make us proud as people who work with people. But we learn from what did not happen but in this case we also see I hope that we must continue to be aware of injustices such as those outlined here and challenge the structural issues which override this story.

I have faith in the continuing contribution that Church Social Services have to make to the overall good. What I think we need to do however is to re look at our Mission and our values and continually re assess these. Some years ago I did some research on this very issue. It was related to the Question “How do Church Social Services hold on their Mission and Values in an era of increased Govt Funding”.

In that research I discovered one had entirely given up to trying to do that and most of the others were struggling to do so, I now see with the benefit of hindsight that whilst the funding issue was or could be problematic what might have been a more helpful question was do we need to re examine what those mission and values are in the here and now rather than holding on to the question.

I hope you have got some ideas some challenge and some encouragement from what I have said.

The work you do is important at whatever level you operate. My involvement in this field has always been as a professional and as a Manager but in recent years my family have been receiving daily assistance through residential care support and I have developed new found regard and give thanks often for the people who work on the ground.

In conclusion let me read to you comments from clients who were surveyed this year by the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services. They were asked to comment on what makes services effective.

- Being treated with respect and being listened to
- Developing a relationship of trust with the agency and its staff
- Sharing in decision making about what is needed and being kept informed of developments
- Cultural appropriateness
- Advocacy services when dealing with government agencies
- Staff having extensive local networks and good relationships with others (Government agencies and community based organisations)
- Having regular access to the same key person in the agency was important, including access out of office hours for crisis situations
- Getting the help you need – both quick access to emergency support services and longer term support and transition serviced

- Wrap around support services delivered (where possible) by the same agency

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at your conference. Go well in the ongoing journey.

grennie@unitec.ac.nz

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