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PREPARATION FOR DIALOGUE

BY

P. D. DEVANANDAN

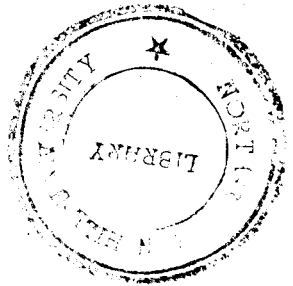
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Devanandan Memorial Volume No. 2

PREPARATION FOR DIALOGUE

*A Collection of Essays on Hinduism and Christianity
in New India*

BY

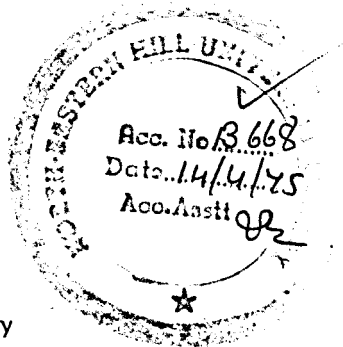
Dr. P. D. DEVANANDAN

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Preface

This *Collection of Essays by P. D. Devanandan* is the second in the Devanandan Memorial Volumes which the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society is publishing. The first was a selection of his Sermons and Bible Studies. The third will be a symposium to further the discussion on the relation of the Gospel to the Living Faiths of mankind.

This Collection does not give any idea of the evolution of Devanandan's thought on religion and society. Most if not all the essays in this volume are those which he wrote in the last five years of his life when he was working as Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. They therefore represent his mature thoughts on modern Hinduism and Christianity. They also represent the period when after a long period of his life of Christian study of Hinduism, he was beginning to develop the Institute as an organ for Christians to enter into personal dialogue with men of other faiths, especially of Hinduism, at a deeply religious level, both to understand modern Hinduism in a new way and to explain the nature and meaning of the Christian Gospel. I repeat, he was only beginning. Most inter-religious meetings in our country are still full of "parallel monologues". The breakthrough into dialogue is yet to come. Devanandan saw it coming, and set himself the task of preparing for it. He knew that the cultural context of modern India demanded the development of a dialogue among religions. For men of all faiths have begun to become aware in a new way of their solidarity in the face of the challenge of the

common problems and tasks of building a common society and culture on new foundations ; and all have begun to put questions about the significance of the ultimate religious concern to the common striving for the truly human existence. The discovery of the dignity of the personal in man and the struggle for an idea of community which does justice to the personal in men have created a ferment in all religions. And there is a constant search for the ultimate ground of man's personal being. It is this that opens up the possibilities of a religious dialogue at depth between Christianity and Hinduism. Many of the essays in this Collection deal with the nature of the ferment in modern Hinduism, Indian Christianity and the relation between the two in the new context of self-and-social awakening in India. Since an understanding of these are an essential *Preparation for Dialogue*, we have chosen this title for the volume.

To Devanandan the Gospel meant Jesus Christ and the New Creation in Him. How is its hard core of universality and the exclusivism inherent in that universality, to be explained to Hindu friends without making them confuse it with cultural, communal and religious aggressiveness or isolation ? Personally I think the essays which are addressed to Hindu audiences are the gems in this Collection of pearls. Here we find not a discussion of the meaning of communication but a patient effort at it. Of course he himself in the last few essays of this Collection draws out the revolutionary implications of it for Christian witness. He speaks rightly of the need of a revolution in Christianity if the Christian witness is to be challenging and relevant in the present situation. It is possible that these essays contain also the elements

of a post-Kraemer theology of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism, a theology in the development of which he was keen on working and did not have the time to do.

Several of the essays in this Collection were published in different journals including *Religion and Society*. We are grateful to the publishers of the *Ecumenical Review*, the *Indian Journal of Theology*, the *Quest* and the *F.F.T. Quarterly* for permission to reprint the same. I would like specially to thank Nalini Devanandan for her co-operation in editing and proof-reading this volume.

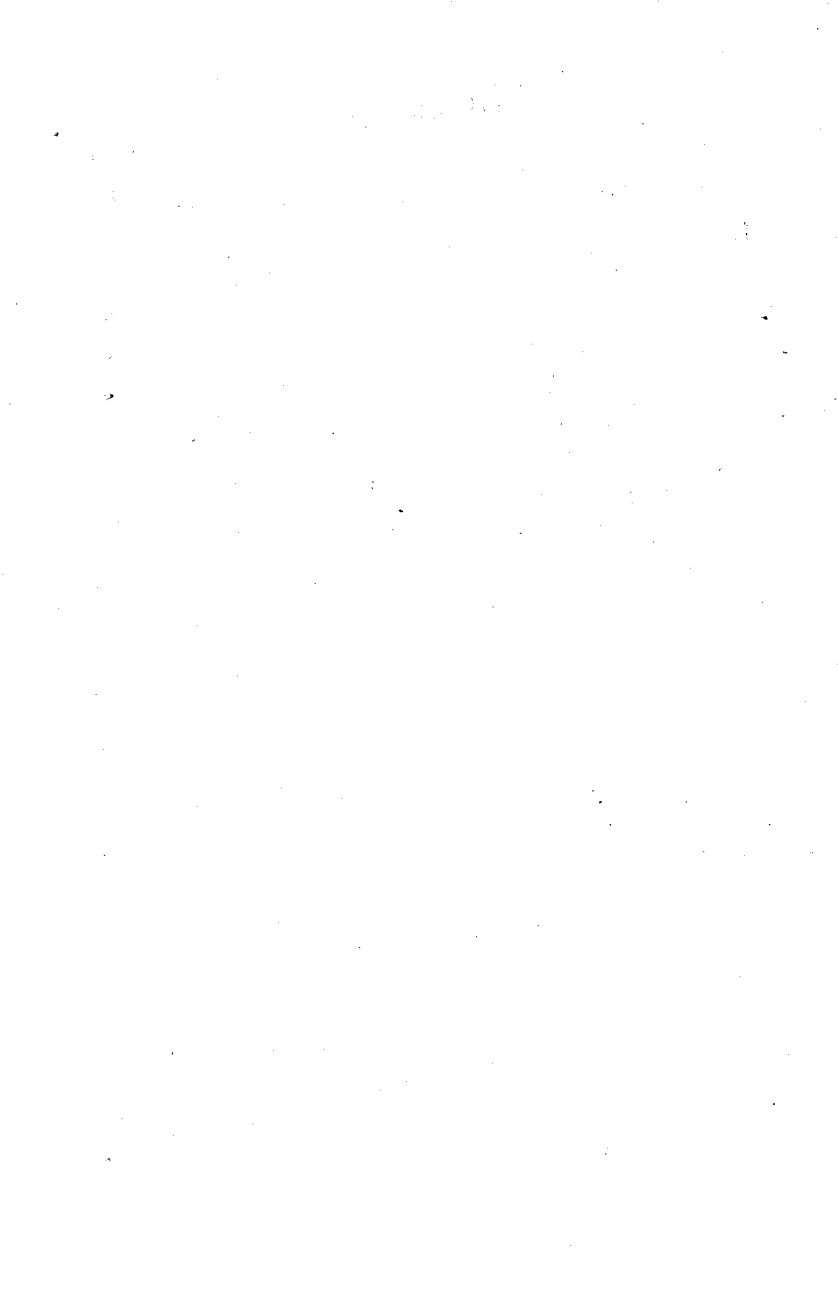
BANGALORE,
February 1, 1964.

M. M. THOMAS,
Director,
*Christian Institute for the Study of
Religion and Society.*

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The Renaissance of Hinduism in India*

THERE are four recent developments in the renaissance of Asian religions that call for attention. (i) The claim that each of them makes independently that it has the answer to the world's many ills. A new emphasis is placed on a world message and on "missionary" work. (ii) At the same time, the plea is put forward that all religious folk work for peaceful co-existence. No mention is made of co-operation; but the desire is expressed that no attempt be made at propaganda and proselytism. Nor is there any appreciable talk of compounding the best in all to produce a common world religion. But the request for "mutual respect and tolerance" is made again and again. (iii) In every case renascent religions have become socially conscious. Keen interest is taken in the reform of social institutions which militate against the development of the individual person and the realisation of justice in social relations. This emphasis has involved a new interest in contemporary history. (iv) Finally, there is a determined effort to include what until now had been described as "lower forms" of those religions, the animistic types, so that renascent religions become, in a sense, catholic. Partly this interest is due to the desire to prevent conversions, especially to Christianity, as most Christian converts have come from this level of culture.

* This is part of a paper originally published in 1958.

Post-Independence Era of Contemporary Hinduism

IF modern India as a secular welfare state is largely modelled on the political ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, it is no less true that the Hinduism of post-independence era is greatly influenced by his religious beliefs and practices. The Mahatma may not be described in any sense as a religious reformer. At no time did he claim that it was his mission to restate the Hindu creed to accord with the new demands of modern life. Gandhiji's real contribution to the Hindu renaissance was in his insistence that the nationalist struggle must be under-girded by a religious faith which should find its inspiration in the traditional heritage of Hinduism. According to him the primary scriptural authority in the ancestral faith was to be found in the Bhagavad Gita. Since his days the Gita is the accepted source book for the main affirmations of modern Hindu religious beliefs. From the beginning of this century there has been a steady flow of translations of the Bhagavad Gita in the various Indian languages. Several simple commentaries on the text of the Gita have also been published. The intention is not only to popularise the teachings of the Gita but also to indicate that they have a challenging relevance for the times.

In his own commentary on the Gita which the Mahatma originally wrote in his mother-tongue, Gujarati, Gandhiji was specially concerned to

Man in Society according to Neo-Hinduism*

THE concept of man in society is a modern concept. Of recent times we have come to accept not only the worth of the individual person of man as a separate entity, but also the collective significance of men and women in the network of human relations which we call society. Increasingly, we realize that only in as far as an individual is wholesomely related to others, constituting together a community, does that individual find full scope for self-expression and self-fulfilment.

This understanding of man implies that he is so made that, in order to grow into anything like perfection, his innate capacity to influence others and be influenced by others should be given sufficient scope. Personal relations which underlie the concept of man in society presuppose the view that there is the possibility of the meaningful confrontation of man and man in purposefully seeking a common good. Secondly, in modern times, we place great store by human personality. It is the worth and dignity of the human person that should be safeguarded, we claim. Moreover, we require that there should be freedom for the human person to establish and develop

* This paper appeared in the *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XIV, October-December 1961.

The Hindu Conception of Religious Liberty in the Melting-Pot*

THE purpose of this paper is to throw some light on the Hindu understanding of the nature and implication of religious liberty. The Hindus themselves prefer to use the word tolerance, and they take pride in the claim that Hinduism is the most tolerant of religions. In a sense this is true. Throughout its long history we find that within the larger whole of Hinduism many different sects have continued to live for centuries in comparative peace and harmony. For this reason, Hindus describe their religion by a very suggestive name, *sanātana dharma*. This is to indicate that Hinduism is a religion (*dharma*) which is so extensive and wide as to stretch all the way from forms of primitive animism, which is the religion of village Hindus, to the more advanced understanding of religious values as expressed in the new forms of Vedanta, which today claims to be acceptable to the modern intellectual in all cultures. In India itself, it is true that the intellectual Vedāntin assumes no religious superiority as against the simple villager whose faith consists in animistic worship of titular

* Originally written for the W.C.C. Commission on Religious Liberty, this paper appeared in the *Ecumenical Review* of July 1961.

Contemporary Hindu Secularism*

THE commonly accepted dictionary meaning of the word "secularist" is "one who discarding religious belief and worship applies himself exclusively to things of the world". So that secularism would imply a twofold attitude which, on the one hand, relates to religion and, on the other, refers to the world of material things. This assumes a dichotomy between what are generally described as "spirit" and "matter" which are regarded as mutually exclusive: pursuit of the goods of the material world could only be to the comparative neglect of all that the spiritual world stood for. Traditional orthodoxy in Hinduism has for centuries taken the position that to affirm the Realm of the Spirit is necessarily to discount the reality of the world of matter and to withdraw from all involvement in earthly concerns for human betterment and material advance. This, however, has not been true of popular Hinduism, although the ideal of *sannyāsa*, of renunciation, is generally accepted as the ultimate goal of the spiritually inclined. To say that Hindus in general have all along neglected to reckon with the demands of world-life would not be true. It may well be argued "that Indian spirituality is more assumed than proved and that to hold that spirituality is the sole characteristic of the Indian intellectual tradition is to ignore the persistence of another and parallel

* A paper published in *Religion and Society*, March 1962.

Hindu Reaction to Christian Evangelism

THE impact of Christianity on Hinduism was not felt till the beginning of the nineteenth century. There is a persistent tradition that St. Thomas, the Apostle, had visited India and had established a Church on the south-west coast. But that little community of Christians, cut off for centuries from all contact with their fellow-Christians, had lived very much to themselves. From the sixteenth century on both Roman Catholic and Protestant Missions had been established here and there. These missions had come in the wake of the many European trading companies which found their way to India now that Vasco da Gama had discovered the sea route to the East. Trade settlements developed into colonial possessions, and European nations became involved throughout the eighteenth century in a series of wars, both among themselves and with Indian rulers. At the end of it, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, practically the whole of India came under British rule. In 1857 India was declared part of the British Empire, and so it remained till 1947 when Britain decided to withdraw and India became independent.

In the early period of the British connection, Christian missionary work was discouraged. Only after the first decade of the nineteenth century the British Government permitted Christian missions,

Gandhi's Critique of Christianity*

A COLLECTION of relevant passages from Mahatma Gandhi's writings dealing with his attitude towards Jesus Christ, Christianity and the Bible has been brought out recently by Navajivan Publishing House under the title, *What Jesus Means to Me*. How exhaustive this collection is, it is difficult to say. But there is no doubt that the passages included in this booklet, selected from various articles which the Mahatma contributed from time to time to several periodicals, more or less faithfully represent his considered opinion. A careful reading of the pamphlet shows that the Mahatma encountered sincere and serious difficulty in understanding the Christian position. In part, the difficulty was created by the form and manner in which Christian teachings had been presented to Gandhiji; in part it was due to the strange climate of thought which prevailed in India in Gandhiji's days; and in part also to certain presuppositions that Gandhiji himself held about religion in general, and Christianity in particular.

Christianity and Western Culture

In the first place, it is repeatedly stated that the outlandish ways and manners of the Christians that

* This paper was written for publication in 1962 in the CISRS Series of *Pamphlets on Religion*. But it has not been published so far.

Religion and National Unity in India*

Religious Roots of Communalism

SINCE Independence, increasing attention has been rightly given to foster a sense of national coherence in the country. This has been felt necessary because of the persistence of many divisive forces which make for disunity among our people. One of the potent factors in this tragic situation is religion. Our disunity is in great part due to the prevalence of many religions in the land. It is inevitable, of course, that their adherents should differ from one another in their religious beliefs and practices. But the general tendency is also, in consequence of such differences, to be separate and isolated in cultural outlook and social customs. Several factors have contributed to this result. For one thing, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam came into India from outside. All through these centuries they have maintained a sense of apartness from Hinduism, partly out of self-defense and partly because Hinduism would have nothing to do with them either socially or culturally. Hindus who became Christians and Moslems, whether by persuasion or coercion, were put out of the Hindu fold; they were culturally and socially outcaste. For

* A paper read at the Seminar on "National Integration", organised by the University Grants Commission in New Delhi in 1959, and later published in the *Quest*, April-June 1959.

The Exclusive Claims of Christianity*

LET me at the very outset express to you my deep appreciation of the privilege of sharing in this Conference. In what I have to say on this subject given me I can only speak for myself as an individual Christian believer. I take it that the intention is to enter into a frank conversation on the difficulties involved in this vital issue of religious exclusivism. Claims and counter-claims can only result in controversy. A conversation of this sort may not lead to conclusions on which we can all agree. But a frank exchange of views can certainly result in a better understanding of the difficulties we are up against. I dare say that there is a great volume of good-will on occasions like this, and also a sincere desire to see each other's point of view. It is in that sense of mutual responsibility and respect for each other's convictions on the faith whereby we live and act, I have ventured to submit this paper.

* This is a paper read at the Conference of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth in Gandhigram in April 1960 on "The Exclusive Claims of Different World Religions and How to Reconcile Them". This was published in the *F.F.T. Quarterly*, organ of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth, edited by Dr. M. Yamunacharya: *Conference Issue*, April 1961.

Man—Whence and Whither*

As a Christian Sees It

THE Christian belief is that man is created by God. On this there has been no difference of opinion in the history of Christian thought. As a creature, therefore, man is different from and other than the Creator. In the same way it is held that, although man is part of creation, he is different from the rest of creation. This is because, unlike other creatures, man alone is capable of responding in fellowship to the Creator. Indeed, the purpose for which man was created is that he might experience in the end, to the fullest, such fellowship with God. That is man's destiny, "the high calling wherewith he is called". It is man's supreme vocation, the purpose for which he is made, on the one hand, and the distinctive mark which separates man from other living beings, on the other.

Man-in-Relation-with-God

For this reason, Christian faith holds that man was created "in the image of God". This is to affirm the fact that man reflects the nature of God, but that he is not of the same substance as God. Man's reality

* A paper presented at the Hindu-Christian Colloquy on the Hindu and the Christian Views of Man, held at Nagpur, in October 1960. It was later published in *Religion and Society*, October-December 1960.

The Nature of Ultimate Truth*

The Christian Understanding

THE concept of Truth refers not only to what is actual in the here and now, but also to what is real everywhere and always. That is to say, Truth concerns both what is actual in time and space as well as what is real beyond time and space. The Sanskrit term *satya* and the Tamil word *unmai* seek to bring out this emphasis, that what is fundamental in the concept of truth is the "is-ness" of it. Ultimate truth would then mean ultimate reality in the sense of that which is, in the final analysis, the eternally real, beyond and beneath the temporal actual. It may be granted that the actual is not to be equated with the real; but if the actual is to have any meaning and significance at all, it should in some sense reflect the real. Thus the concept of truth should be inclusive of the now and the always.

Any inquiry concerning ultimate truth should take us into the realm of metaphysics. For it is apparent that the search for ultimate reality needs to be pursued farther afield, beyond the sphere of the natural and contingent into that of the supernatural and the abiding. But we are assembled here not so much as philosophers as religious men. Our approach in this group

* This paper was presented at the Hindu-Christian Colloquium on The Concept of Truth, held at Christavasram, Manganam, Kottayam (Kerala), in June 1962. It was published in *Religion and Society*, September 1962.

The Younger Churches Look Ahead

Problems and Opportunities of the Days
to Come

The Burden of History

"WE are concerned with the shaping of the future of India. It is therefore with a sense of the burden of history upon me, upon us, upon this House, that I face this problem," observed Prime Minister Nehru of India recently. He was opening the debate in the Indian Parliament on the Second Five-Year Plan. The sense of the burden of history is the new awareness of cultural heritage. Under foreign rule and influence our future was being planned for us by others without reference to our past. Today as a free people we are busy building anew, but on foundations already laid.

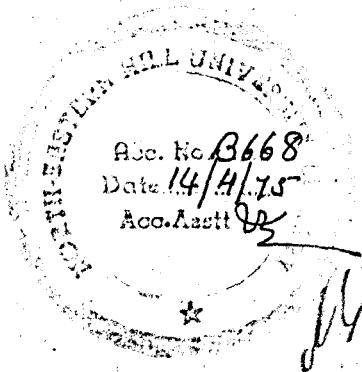
This is not only true of India but of all countries in newly-awakened Asia and Africa. Political freedom has brought in its wake a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage. At the same time, there is widespread acceptance of modern social values and economic standards of life. This is obviously due to the increasing impact of industry and mechanization, so that traditional culture is itself being restated by a process of creative selection. Thus the burden of history resolves itself into a dynamic urge for cultural change and social repatterning. The problem is to

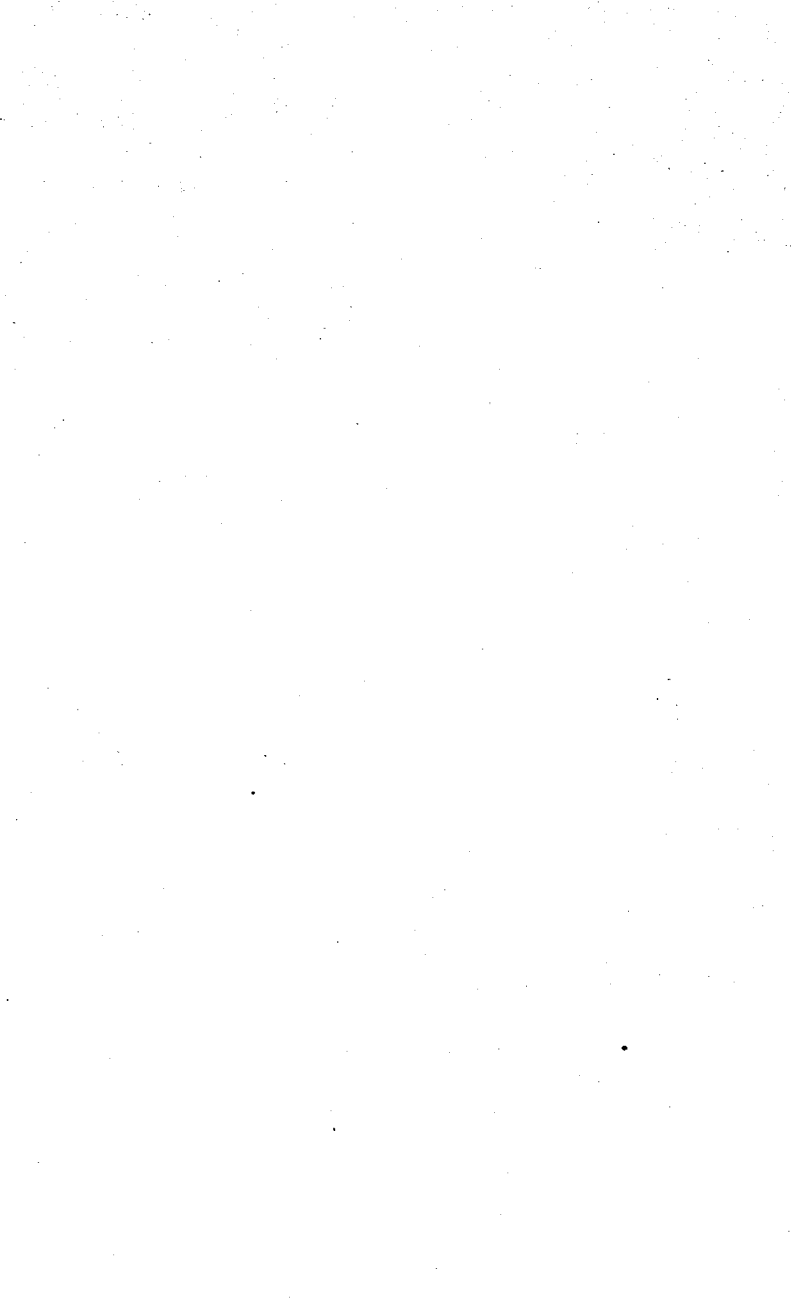
Called to Witness*

WITNESSING to the faith is in a sense peculiarly characteristic of Christian belief. For no one can claim to be a Christian believer, unless he bears living testimony to the redemptive work of God in Christ Jesus as a present reality. This constraint to witness springs out of the assuredness that, even in this very world of diverse tensions, God Almighty is purposefully engaged in redeeming earthly being in order that His plan for His creation may be finally achieved.

The Christian's awareness of God's persisting concern in human history is due to the creative work of the Holy Spirit in his own life. He has in himself experienced the amazing wonder of God's forgiveness wrought for all mankind on Calvary, and the quickening liberation from the bondage of sin to the newness of the resurrection-life in Jesus Christ. This one thing he knows: Whereas he was blind he now sees. The Light of the World has shined within his own heart. And he bears witness: "For mine eyes have seen the glory of thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; to be a light to lighten the Gentiles to be the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2: 30-32).

* Address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, New Delhi, December 1961. This has been published in the *Ecumenical Review* of January 1962. But some changes made by the author in his own copy have been included here.





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