

The Holy Spirit & Evangelism

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## Introduction

Attitudes towards evangelism can frequently be lax even amongst Spirit filled Christians. Christians can often be content in being a good witness through acts of kindness, but passive about sharing their faith in Christ. And yet expect people to come to Christ. There is a need like never before in Australia for Spirit filled Christians to reach their generation with the message of the gospel. When Franklin Graham visited Melbourne in March 2005 he commented Australians are hard to reach with the gospel and will require a great deal of prayer.<sup>1</sup> In the past 70 years Australian culture has become increasingly secularised and there has been a rise in other religions. As a result there are less people going to church today since the post war era.<sup>2</sup> In 1933 the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census calculated 87% of the population declared they belonged to a Christian denomination. In 2001, this declined to 70%. There are more people today who don't believe in religion, with 15% of the population claiming they do not identify with a religion.<sup>3</sup> A great deal of prayer is required for the gospel message not to be hindered. For it to be preached with power and results seen, as in the early Church, Christians need to ensure they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Just as the disciples in the New Testament relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Kingdom of God, God relies on the Body of Christ to testify about his son Jesus. This essay will explore what evangelism is and its purpose, the role of the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Zwartz, "The prophet motive". [Internet], 17 March, 2005, <http://theage.com.au/articles/2005/03/16/1110913669613.html>, 19 September 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Powell, Why People Don't Go To Church and What Churches Can Do About It, [Internet], 23 July 2004, <http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000242.cgi>, 25 September 2005

Spirit in evangelism and how the Holy Spirit continues to work in all believers, as well as those gifted to evangelise.

### **Understanding Key Words**

The word “evangelist” only appears three times in the Bible in (Acts 21:8, Eph 4:11 and 2 Tim 4:5). An evangelist is often viewed as a person who converts people to Christianity by proclaiming or preaching the gospel. The original Greek word “euangelistes” meaning “messenger of good”<sup>4</sup>, reveals the role of an evangelist is to bring forth good news and in Christian terms that means the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ. The original meaning does not imply it is a person’s responsibility to convert people to Christ, but just to be a messenger.

The “gospel” in English means good message or glad tidings and has the same connotation as “euangelion” (in English evangel).<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament it is used to proclaim good news about God’s Kingdom and salvation by faith through Jesus Christ as preached by Christ.

The Holy Spirit is described in Is 40:7 and Job 32:8 as “breath” (in Greek “Pneuma” means “breath or wind”) implying an invisible force at work. The Holy Spirit is more than an invisible force. He is a person and possesses personal qualities such as a will, thoughts, knowledge, language, love and goodness.<sup>6</sup> He acts and responds as a person: He can be grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, Trends in Religious Identification, [Internet] 13 August 2004, <http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000249.cgi>, 25 September 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, W.E. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1996), 374.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, 497.

against (Matt 12:31) or called upon (Ezek 37:9). The Holy Spirit has many names such as “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord” (Is 61:1); “The Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), “The Spirit of your Father” (Matt 10:40) and “The Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17).

The term “gift” comes from the Greek word “charisma” which means “a gift of grace, a gift involving grace on the part of God or the donor”<sup>7</sup>. Broadly speaking the word is used to indicate God’s gift of redemption to mankind as sinners in Rom 5:15 and in other cases it’s used alongside special manifestations or abilities (Spiritual gifts) which are given to believers (1 Cor 12:4-10) such as prophecy or healing. In both cases grace is involved and is not achieved by people’s merits.

The word “witness” and “testify” derive from the root word “martureo” to signify one who can assert what they have seen, know or heard.<sup>8</sup> It has this significance in key passages such as Acts 1:8 when Jesus tells his disciples they will be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV)

## **Explaining Evangelism and Its Purpose**

Often the word “evangelism” has a negative connotation because it is linked with Bible bashing. It is also a term that grips many Christians with fear and feelings of inadequacy. The heart of evangelism is the foundation of Christianity and it is what makes it the largest religion in the world today. The world’s population in mid 2005 was calculated at over 6.4 billion and there are 2.1 billion

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<sup>6</sup> Pache, R. *The Person and Work Of The Holy Spirit*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, 477.

people who recognise themselves as Christians spanning all denominations.<sup>9</sup> How a religion, which started with a few followers of Jesus Christ, could become so influential across many nations over 2000 years and continue to grow, is because its foundational purpose is evangelistic. Its essence is to bring a message of good news. The purpose of evangelism is two fold and is summed up in Jesus' two greatest statements: the greatest commandment followed by the great commission. The great commandment is the root of evangelism. In Matt 22:37-39 (NIV) Jesus instructed:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

Evangelism comes from loving God and loving others. Filled with this love, John Arnott points out Jesus then gave the great commission to share that love.<sup>10</sup> In Matt 28:18-20 (NIV) Jesus instructs:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The purpose of evangelism is love. It is to share and tell the world of God's love through His Son Jesus. Arnott puts it succinctly:

“Jesus is sending us out to share and tell the world about His kingdom of love, and we need loving hearts to tell it. He never intended for us to go and tell this wonderful news without first experiencing it ourselves. And He

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<sup>8</sup> Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, 1237 and 1132.

<sup>9</sup> [www.globalchristianity.org/resources.htm](http://www.globalchristianity.org/resources.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Arnott, “The Great Commission,” *Spread The Fire*, 3, 2005, 5.

wants us to continue to humbly receive it and give it out throughout the rest of our lives.”<sup>11</sup>

Paul affirms the basis is love when he said to the Thessalonian Church, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.” (I Thess 2:8) (NIV). Without people first experiencing the love and grace of God, it is unlikely there would be a desire to testify of His goodness. Walking in love at all times must be the Christian’s occupation.

The motivation behind evangelism is to bring people to faith in Christ. Good news once shared and received, needs to be shared and received again. Jesus told his disciples to call people to turn from their sins, receive forgiveness and believe what He did on the Cross for them. This good news needs to be preached or proclaimed. The original Greek word used for “to preach” is “kerusso” and signifies to herald.<sup>12</sup> Jesus commanded “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk 16:15) (NIV) Rev 22:17 shows salvation is an invitation to all creation: “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” (NIV) Adam Clarke Commentary explains this passage means “All the prophets and all the apostles; the Church of God under the Old Testament, and the Church of Christ under the New, invite men to Jesus, that by him they may be saved and prepared

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<sup>11</sup> Arnott, “The Great Commission,” *Spread The Fire*, 3, 2005: 6.

<sup>12</sup> Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, 873.

for this kingdom.”<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:14 asks the logical question how are people to call and believe and accept the invitation if they don't know and the gospel is not first preached? Jim Peterson makes an interesting point by questioning what assurance do Christians have that people will believe or respond to the gospel when people live most of their lives contrary to God's ways.<sup>14</sup> Christians can be assured when they explain the good news to non believers they are not testifying alone.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism**

If God left it up to people to testify to his plan of salvation, without any involvement on His part to change people's hearts, it is doubtful there would be many Christian conversions. Knowledge alone of what Jesus accomplished on the cross is not enough. Rom 1:32 reveals how even when man knows God's decrees and deserves death, he continues to do them and approves of others who practice them. Man's heart is deceitful and wicked (Jer 17:19) and his spirit is dead to God because his nature is sinful (Eph 2:1). For man to be sensitive to spiritual things and choose to turn away from his sinful nature, a work of God is required. Jesus said in His Great Commission statement that He would be with us until the end of age and in John 14:18 he tells his disciples he would not leave them as orphans. He promised to send the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17). He would be a Counselor, a Comforter, a Teacher and He would testify of Jesus. There

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<sup>13</sup> Clarke, A. "Adam Clarke Commentary". (date published unknown). Retrieved September 21, 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=re&chapter=022>

would be no need to send the Holy Spirit if it was enough for Christians to testify.

Jesus said:

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify for you have been with me from the beginning.” (John 15:26) (NIV)

As believers testify, it is the Holy Spirit’s role to reveal who Jesus is. Michael Green states “The Holy Spirit was specifically given to equip the church for bearing witness. Evangelism is the outworking of the love of God in a fallen world. It is no man-made opiate.”<sup>15</sup> A powerful partnership between man and the Holy Spirit is at work to bring the good news of salvation to all people.

The Holy Spirit has a clear role to convict or fully convince a person of their sinful nature; who Jesus is and what He came to do. Jesus told His disciples when the Holy Spirit would come “He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgement.” (John 16:8) (NKJV) Clarke’s Commentary makes an interesting point that the conviction will “demonstrate these matters so clearly as to leave no doubt on the minds of those who are simple of heart; and so fully as to confound and shut the mouths of those who are gainsayers.”<sup>16</sup> John 16:9 explains the Spirit will convict people of sin in regards to their unbelief in Jesus Christ, who he is and their sinful state. He will convict of righteousness of “Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension to the Father – events demonstrating that He was indeed the

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<sup>14</sup> Peterson, J. *Evangelism As A Lifestyle*. (Colorado: Nav Press, 1983), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Green, M. *Evangelism Now and Then*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 15.

Son of God and that His claims were righteous or justified.”<sup>17</sup> And finally the Spirit will convict of judgment that Satan (the prince of this world) is defeated by what Jesus did at Calvary. An example of the Spirit’s work of conviction is Felix in Acts 24:25. After Paul in Acts 24:26 “reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come” to Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla, Scripture says Felix was afraid and told Paul to leave. Felix was convicted and the Bible does not say if he repented. A person without Christ remains a guilty sinner and needs to answer to God for breaking his law. Even after conviction, it is every individual’s choice to accept or reject the gospel.

On accepting the gospel message a spiritual renewal takes place. When a person receives salvation by faith (Acts 2:21, Heb 11:6, Eph 2:8) their Spirit is resurrected just as the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead (Eph 2:4-6). Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5-6 “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” A life turned away from sin, or dead to sin, signifies a new birth and can only be brought about by the Spirit. Clarke’s Commentary shows “by the influences of the Holy Spirit, the soul was to be purified from its defilement, and strengthened to walk in the way of truth

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<sup>16</sup> Clarke, A. “Adam Clarke Commentary”. (date published unknown). Retrieved September 21, 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=joh&chapter=016>.

<sup>17</sup> Palma, A. *The Holy Spirit, A Pentecostal Perspective*. (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 2001) 68.

and holiness.”<sup>18</sup> Jesus says “Come, follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17) (NIV) It is in following Jesus, the Spirit begins to work in new believers and fruit bearing lives are revealed (Gal 5:22). The Holy Spirit will assure a person not only of their salvation and that they are sons of God (Rom 8:9 and Rom 8:14) but also give strength to live a life led by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18). For unbelievers to believe the gospel is real they need to witness lives that demonstrate God’s goodness.

### **How The Holy Spirit Works In All Believers And Evangelists**

For believers to see results in evangelism it requires power from the Holy Spirit. In fact Christians do not have to concern themselves with results. Christie Hoos from Campus Crusade for Christ, shares the first important principal taught to people on evangelism: “Success in witnessing is taking the initiative to share Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leaving the results to God.”<sup>19</sup> In Acts 1:8 Jesus told his disciples before he ascended “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV) Believers need to receive power through Holy Spirit baptism in order to be equipped to preach. Holy Spirit baptism is only for believers and is for “greater service in God’s kingdom.”<sup>20</sup> As soon as the Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost around 2,000 years ago,

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<sup>18</sup> Clarke, A. “Adam Clarke Commentary”. (date published unknown). Retrieved September 25, 2005, from the World Wide Web: <http://studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=joh&chapter=003>

<sup>19</sup> Hoos, But I Don’t Have The Gift of Evangelism, [Internet], 2005, [www.christianwomentoday.com/training/gift2.html](http://www.christianwomentoday.com/training/gift2.html), 27 September 2005.

dramatic conversions were seen. Peter, who denied Christ three times before his death, on Pentecost was now filled with the Holy Spirit. Scripture says “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” (Acts 2:14) (NIV) After he challenged the crowd with the gospel message, Scripture says the people “were cut to the heart.” (Acts 2:37) (NKJV) About three thousand accepted his message, were baptised and became Christians. When believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, Wayde Goodall concludes “we receive the same divine anointing that descended upon Christ (see John 1:32-33) and upon the disciples, enabling us to proclaim God’s Word and work miracles.”<sup>21</sup> This same power is available today. Acts 4:31 says “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (NKJV) The Spirit also directs Christians in what to say (Mark 13:11). Even when believers do not feel bold the Spirit still works powerfully and anoints the word of God as it is preached. Paul said in 1 Cor 2:2-4:

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

The power believers receive is not based on feelings, but trust in God’s power at work.

The Holy Spirit calls some people to perform a special service. Acts 13:2 says “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (NIV)

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<sup>20</sup> Goodall, “Holy Spirit Make Me Bold”, *Charisma*, August 2005, 110.

There is a special mandate for those who are given the spiritual gift of evangelism. Spiritual gifts are given as the Spirit wills (I Cor 12: 11) and all believers at least possess one (I Cor 12:7). In Eph 4:11 (NIV) Christ gives the spiritual gift of evangelism. “It was he who gave some as apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers.” Wagner affirms the “The gift of evangelist is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that men and women become Jesus’ disciples and responsible members of the Body of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> There can be a perception that evangelism is left up to those who possess this gift. This view however is not biblical. 1 Cor 3:6-7 shows all have a part to sow and water. All believers are called to do the work of an evangelist as outlined in II Tim 4:5, the Great Commission is for every believer not just for those who are gifted evangelists. It is interesting to see only Philip was called an evangelist in the Bible (Acts 21:8) and yet all the disciples were involved in sharing the gospel. The purpose Christ gives the gift of evangelism is outlined in Eph 4:12:

“For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (NKJV).

Those with the gift of evangelism have the responsibility to equip the church to do the work to reach unbelievers, not do all the work.

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<sup>21</sup> Goodall, “Holy Spirit Make Me Bold,” page 110.

<sup>22</sup> Wagner, C.P. *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. (California: Regal Books, 1979), 173.

All believers have a role to play in extending God's Kingdom. In John 4:35 Jesus told his own disciples to "open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (NIV) As well as in Matt 9:35 he told them "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field."(NIV) According to a mid 2005 report, 27.9% of the world's population is unevangelised, approximately more than 1.8 billion people.<sup>23</sup> Horton mentions it is worth noting an evangelist did not preach in the Church, he went where the sinners were. For example Philip preached in Samaria in Acts 8 and many heeded what Philip said.<sup>24</sup> Ordinary believers can be led to demonstrate God's kingdom on earth to the masses or individuals. Kingdom evangelism according to John Wimber "Involves power evangelism: that means evangelism that transcends the rational through the demonstration of God's power in signs and wonders and introduces the numinous God."<sup>25</sup> He encourages the basic form of evangelism is sharing the gospel with friends and relatives. The results of answered prayer, especially in healing the sick, can lead many in faith in Christ. This occurred when Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 and He revealed who He was to her. Jesus filled with the Spirit shared a word of knowledge about this woman and her situation, which convinced her He was the Christ. She returned to her city and called people to come and see the Christ and they did. John 4:39 says "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him

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<sup>23</sup> Citing <http://www.globalchristianity.org/resources.htm>, retrieved 25 September 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Horton, S.M. *What The Bible Says About The Holy Spirit*. (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 268.

because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’” (NKJV) Christians are called to not only proclaim but reveal the Kingdom of God through signs and wonders such as healings, miracles, words of knowledge and prophecy. Wimber acknowledges “The ministry of Jesus in signs and wonders was based on his relationship with the Holy Spirit who is creative, imaginative and inventive.”<sup>26</sup> Believers today are to ensure they do not box the Spirit in prescriptive formulas of how He will work. The Holy Spirit will not move just at evangelistic rallies, just as He did not in the Bible. As the early Christians in Acts did not have a formula to follow, believers today have to be led by the Spirit and watch where the Spirit is at work.

The Holy Spirit directs and looks for yielded vessels that are obedient to what He asks. Evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman, renowned for miracle services where people were healed and received salvation, states “The only part I have in it is making Jesus real to the hearts of men and women. Any results there might be in this life of mine, is not Kathryn Kuhlman. It’s the Holy Spirit; it’s what the Holy Spirit does through a yielded vessel.”<sup>27</sup> Being a yielded vessel means believers allow the Holy Spirit to lead. Jesus said “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” (John 19) (NIV) The Holy Spirit led Jesus (Matt 4:1)

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<sup>25</sup> Wimber, How To Use Power Evangelism, [Internet], date published unknown, <http://christiananswers.net/evangelism/methods/powerevangelism.html> 4 September 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Wimber, How To Use Power Evangelism, [Internet], date published unknown, <http://christiananswers.net/evangelism/methods/powerevangelism.html>, 4 September 2005.

and like manner leads Spirit filled believers. For example, it is the Holy Spirit who decides when and where individuals should go. In Acts 16:6-8 the Holy Spirit forbade Paul to preach the word in Asia and Bythynia. Paul then receives a vision of a man calling him to Macedonia, so he went to Macedonia and preached the gospel there. Holy Spirit works the same way today. In March 2005, evangelist Franklin Graham was called to Melbourne to preach the gospel, just as his father Billy Graham did in 1959 and 1969. As a result of Franklin Graham's visit, 6,520 people responded to the gospel message<sup>28</sup>. The Spirit also directs individuals to specific people. For example, the Spirit told Philip to go near a chariot and "stay near it" in Acts 8:29. In the chariot was a eunuch "of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians" who was reading Isaiah. Philip questioned the man if he understood the Scripture, shared with him who Jesus was and then proceeded to baptise him after he declared and believed in heart Jesus was the Son of God. Obedience and willingness to follow and respond to the Spirit's leading is crucial.

## **Conclusion**

When 11 ordinary men went out to tell the world about Jesus more than 2,000 years ago, the impact of their message has been miraculous. The work however is not complete until Christ returns. Jesus stated in Matt 13:10 "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." (NIV) For the gospel to be preached

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<sup>27</sup> As cited on <http://kathrynkulman.com/about/html>

<sup>28</sup> As cited on [www.festivalvictoria.com.au](http://www.festivalvictoria.com.au)

to all nations, it is every Christian's responsibility to do the work of an evangelist and for those who are gifted evangelists to equip the church. Jeremiah 48:10 rebukes those who do not. "A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord's work." (NIV) Christians have to ensure they are not deceived in thinking it is not their responsibility to preach the good news or allow fear and apathy to take over. Paul's mindset of "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22) (NIV) needs to be adopted. Evangelism should not be either a legalistic accomplishment, it should flow out of a heart of love for others and their eternal situation. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is paramount. Jesus never intended for his body of believers to do the works He did and greater (John 14:20), without the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who one gives Christians a heart like Jesus, to be compassionate and concerned to share the gospel. He gives believers boldness to speak, and He tells them what to say. He leads and guides people in where and who to speak with. Of unbelievers the Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin and reveals who Jesus is when testified. God has chosen his children to be His mouthpiece and His instruments. None of it can be achieved without yielded hearts. It is a beautiful partnership, which God always intended.

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