

The following Scripture passages are offered to aid beginning fellowships. The readings and commentary for this week are more in line with what has become usual; for the following will most likely be familiar observations. The concept behind this Sabbath's selection is The American Monomyth.

Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of November 15, 2008

The person conducting the Sabbath service should open services with two or three hymns, or psalms, followed by an opening prayer acknowledging that two or three (or more) are gathered together in Christ Jesus' name, and inviting the Lord to be with them.

The election of the 44th President of the United States is now history: Barack Hussein Obama won enough state electors that he will, without doubt, become the next president. He campaigned on a platform of "change," with what sort of change he would bring to the White House mostly undefined. He spoke, often energetically, in political platitudes, promising more than he can easily deliver. But the electorate did not seem to care: it wanted change, and Obama benefited from a wearing thin of President Bush's cowboy imperialism. However, in wanting change, the electorate voted for the candidate who best represented the *American Monomyth*.

In their 1977 book, *The American Monomyth*, Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence argued for the existence and importance of a uniquely American monomyth that was a variation on the classical cultural monomyth proposed by Joseph Campbell: this classical monomyth describes a hero's journey from this world into a supernatural realm where the hero wins victory and returns with a boon. In Jewett and Lawrence's American monomyth,

[A] community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity.

(from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Monomyth).

Barack Obama presented himself as this hero: the community threatened by evil was *America*. Normal institutions failed to stop this threatening evil manifested in the personhood of President George W. Bush and his seemingly irresponsible foreign policy. So Obama, a selfless superhero and citizen of the world, emerges to renounce temptations and the evils of lobbyists and special interest groups. Obama assumes the mantle of *messiah* as he goes forth to carry out his redemptive task, aided by fate and the collapse of Wall Street. His decisive victory restores *America* to its paradisiacal condition even before he is sworn into office. Only, the probability of Obama now receding into obscurity is slim.

What was the role of fate in Obama's victory? Could he have won if foreign policy and national security were the public's greatest concerns? Probably not, but Obama benefited far more from the mortgage investment meltdown than did John McCain. Obama's plan for a middle-class tax cut was more believable than was McCain's plan. And the Iraq war was an almost forgotten issue.

But within America lies a contradiction: on the Republican side, Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin also tapped into the energy of the American monomyth. The threatened harmonious paradise wasn't *America*, but the Republican administration that was fighting the enemies of *America* abroad in two wars, and fighting the enemies of American capitalism here at home. Palin became the selfless hero, who, with children in tow and a selfless husband behind her, emerged from the frozen North to renounce temptation, earmark spending, and creeping socialism. The Republican victory was hers to win or lose; her running mate could be likened to a father-figure who needed the help of a warrior daughter to complete his redemptive task of recovering *Conservatism* from *Liberal* spendthrifts while retaining American omnipresence. But this father-figure got "tricked" into supporting the same spending package that his Democratic opponent supported, thereby making the warrior princess' efforts go for naught. So the warrior princess returned to the frozen North and returned to obscurity where she lives to fight another day in another battle to save *America* from big tax-and-spenders and social apologists.

Within the personages of Obama and Palin were the two hands of the American monomyth. Whereas most heroes who tapped the energy of the American monomyth have been fictional, both Obama and Palin are real people coming from obscure backgrounds, figuratively riding into conflict not on the merit of their accomplishments but on the vagueness of an informing myth. In the past, presidents like George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and F.D.R. used the incorporated energy of the monomyth to "save" the nation or the world from impending doom—and the obscurity to which they returned has sometimes been death. Nevertheless, they have not been forgotten. Like Rome's Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, who left his small farm when called to serve as dictator and who returned to his farm when his task was completed, the hero of the American monomyth figuratively rides off into the sunset when the war has been won and order restored to paradise—and seceding generations pay homage to this hero whereas non-heroes are quickly forgotten.

The authors of *The American Monomyth* expanded their premise in 2002: in *the Myth of the American Superhero*, Jewett and Lawrence describe the idealized, fantasized violence of pop culture, and they show that the American heroic ideal is anti-democratic and contagious, for the *hero* is a crusading loner, a Quixotical knight-errant called to destroy evil, often with tragic consequences. The authors show how Timothy McVey and Theodore Kaczynski enacted in life what is ritually celebrated in film by the likes of John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and Steven Seagal.

The concept of "hero" is necessarily anti-democratic, for not everyone can be a larger-than-life personage, destined to save the world. Not everyone can be Superman, or Dirty Harry. And in stories based on a primal distrust of government and especially despair about self-managed governance, the super hero takes flight and asks villains to, "Make my

day.” The redemption found in a .44 caliber hollowpoint bullet will stop evil in its tracks as the heroic individual rises above law and social institutions.

When asked about Sarah Palin, *Saturday Night Live* actress Tina Fey, who specialized in imitating Palin, said Palin was a woman like herself, and she didn’t want someone like herself as Vice President of the United States. She didn’t want democracy; she wanted a superhero and she just couldn’t see anyone like herself being a superhero.

Following the publication of their second book addressing the American monomyth, Jewett and Lawrence brought forth, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil* (2003), a book that could be scary when the authors’ thesis is reduced to the question, Has American foreign policy been shaped by the comic book heroes of its leaders’ youth? The authors contend that America has a Rambo-imitator in the Whitehouse, and they trace the super-hero myth that apparently informs the actions of President Bush and his policy of “zealous nationalism” back to the Bible. The authors argue that within American culture, one of two competing and incompatible political traditions rooted in Scripture—(1) *political realism* based on justice and tolerance as expounded by the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah, or (2) *zealous nationalism* described in Deuteronomy and Revelation—has dominated American thought, with the nation presently gripped by *zealous nationalism*, which has America being the chosen instrument of God called to redeem the world. If America is the chosen instrument of God, destined to destroy His enemies, then whatever America does is good, and all who resist are to be righteously destroyed. The world is now divided between *true believers* and *those who must suffer*; thus, Americans are innocent of any wrongdoing in how America conducts its affairs and its adversaries are full of malice, hate, and evil.

Jewett and Lawrence go on to show how apocalyptic zeal, presently dominant in American Evangelicals, is a mirror image of both Islamic jihad and the militant Israeli settler movement. The authors note how America as a nation has distanced itself from accountability to the United Nations or to international law in order to impose President Bush’s *Pax Americana* upon the world thereby ridding the world of evil ... America has become the superhero of the American monomyth. It isn’t President Bush who is this John Wayne-type hero, but the nation itself.

And *America* isn’t comfortable as a superhero: the election was the nation, as if a man, turning back toward the political realism of the Clinton years.

America now stands before the world as an individual, not as a nation-state. It is the embodiment of the king of Greece; its shadow looks like the man Alexander the Great, not like Rome or even ancient Greece. But it is afraid of its shadow, which will assume a life of its own as the nation slinks into a political realism that restricts superheroes to the movies. President-elect Obama will squander the energy that came from tapping into the American monomyth if he continues reassembling the Clinton Whitehouse.

The contradictory impulses within America described as political realism and zealous nationalism exist within the individual personhood of most Americans. Although these contradictory impulses could be nationally seen in the persons of Obama and Palin, with

realism temporarily overcoming nationalism, the American monomyth remains alive and well, and remains armed with predator drones, cruise missiles, and daisy cutters. And whether good or bad, this is how it must be until the single kingdom of this world is given to the Son of Man.

Therefore, individually and collectively, Americans are *America* just as Christians are *Christ* — and it is here where this Sabbath’s reading begins.

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The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read 1 John chapters 2 and 3.

Commentary: John writes this epistle because there were teachers of Israel who were trying to deceive those whom John calls *my little children*. The epistle is an anti-deception edict that cannot be easily misconstrued: if John’s *little children* are to know Jesus Christ, they will keep His commandments. If they do not keep His commandments yet claim to be of Christ, they are liars. It’s just this simple. Whoever says that Jesus abides in the person will walk as Jesus walked (2:6). The person will look like Jesus.

John was not writing to his *little children* a new commandment, a new law, a new covenant, but the old one that every Israelite has had from the beginning. All of these *little children* had heard this commandment before. Yet, this old commandment is also new (2:8): the vast majority of endtime Christendom has never heard that disciples are to keep the commandments. Rather, they have been taught that it is acceptable to walk as Gentiles while calling themselves “Christians.” They have been taught that Jews are to walk as Jesus did, but Gentiles are saved by grace and can therefore walk as bastards, their father being the Adversary, their mother the Church.

John writes that everyone who makes a practices of sinning also practices lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness (3:4); that whoever practices righteousness is righteous, and whoever practices sin is of the devil (vv. 7–8). John adds that it is evident who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are by who keeps the commandments and practices righteousness as opposed to who does not keep the commandments and who does not have love for his brother or brethren (v. 10).

Keeping the commandments is expressed through having love for one’s brethren, which doesn’t mean that it’s okay to worship idols or transgress the Sabbath. A disciple has no love his or her brethren if this disciple takes God’s name in vain—i.e., claiming to be a Christian, to be of Christ, but living as a bastard—and a disciple has no love if he or she teaches brethren to break the commandments, for Jesus said, “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:19). Relaxing a commandment isn’t breaking the commandment. The person who teaches disciples to break the commandments will be denied when judgments are revealed regardless of the great works the person has done in the name of Jesus (Matt 7:21–23).

How does one relax a commandment without breaking it?

Today, if a person wears a crucifix as a pendant or as earrings the person most likely doesn't knowingly wear the symbol of a murder weapon in worship of a demon: the cross was used to kill political dissidents and others who had committed heinous crimes. The crucifix is not a symbol of life, but the representation of Death, the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse; the crucifix is the representation of the fourth beast of Daniel chapter 7. Yet the person who wears a cross doesn't knowingly worship a demon even though that is what the person inadvertently does: the image of this fourth beast is cross-shaped, and is described by the Greek letters *Chi xi stigma* (Rev 13:18). Thus, this person has relaxed the commandment against idol worship, but most likely this person has done nothing that was not of faith even though the simplest application of logic would tell the person that the crucifix represents death. But religion is seldom bothered by logic—and faith is often hostile to logic. So again, the person who wears a crucifix out of innocence relaxes the commandment against idolatry and will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but this person will be in the kingdom whereas the person who taught disciples to worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath teaches lawlessness and will be denied when judgments are revealed if Jesus' words are applied as recorded ... the lay member who was taught to worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath, if never knowing better and if keeping Sunday as the Sabbath ought to be kept, can be likened to the person who innocently wears a crucifix, but this person's teacher is not covered by an argument for innocence. Presenting oneself as a teacher carries the responsibility of teaching Israel, physically or spiritually circumcised, to keep the commandments by faith.

Relaxing a commandment is ultimately a matter of innocence; it is a matter for the glorified Jesus to determine. But no disciple should put him or herself into such a situation. For the disciple who walks as Jesus walked looks like Jesus, and the disciple who follows Paul as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1) looks like Christ and is the Body of Christ and the temple of God. If this disciple also keeps Jesus' words about patient endurance, the disciple will be a pillar within the temple, standing firm on the foundation Paul laid (1 Cor 3:10–11) and supporting the endtime harvest of firstfruits called by the Father when Babylon falls. So the one who is of Christ looks like Christ.

However, Paul found a different law at work in his fleshly members than the law that was at work in his mind—the law of God reigned in his mind (Rom 7:7–25). A different law has been at work in the fleshly members [disciples] comprising the Body of Christ than the law of God ... if it would be easy, as a Sabbatarian disciple, to say that no one but a Sabbatarian Christian can even possibly be of God. John writes, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). The person who worships on Sunday is not, by John's words, a Christian. And there is really no way to twist John's words into saying that Sunday is the Sabbath, or that it is permissible to outwardly worship Christ on Sunday. The person who keeps Sunday breaks the commandments—again, there is no way around this reality. But Paul said that his fleshly members did the very things that he hated, and he couldn't understand why this was so. The vast majority of Christians do the very things that Jesus hates, but He knows why—the flesh remains in bondage to sin and death, and remains in need of liberation at the second Passover.

Denying that any Sunday-keeping Christian is of God makes for an easy out; for if these Sunday-keeping Christians are of the devil, then no effort needs to be made to bring them into covenant with God. They can be dismissed as human debris, deceived by the devil, servants of the devil, spiritual junk. But where is love in such a teaching?

The idea that Sabbatarians are “special” (and they are) mentally justifies these disciples living contrary to the world that is oriented to breaking the Sabbath and transgressing the laws of God. Herbert W. Armstrong instinctively understood that this *specialness* borrowed energy from the American monomyth: he presented himself as the superhero who emerged from obscurity to renounce temptation and carry out the redemptive task of warning the United States and Britain [the English speaking peoples of this world] to repent of their lawlessness. But he never completed his task, for he never properly identified endtime Israel. He ignored, as best he could, the visible Church. He failed to appreciate that the visible Church actually was his audience; so he flew around the world, meeting with petty dictators and hereditary kings and ignoring the ones to whom the gospel should have gone. He couldn’t well refute what would have been easily refuted if he had continued to grow in grace and knowledge throughout his fifty years of discipleship. Therefore, God brought an end to the work Armstrong began. And Armstrong went into the obscurity of the grave.

The specialness of Sabbatarian disciples denies legitimacy to all Sunday-observing Christians, regardless of innocence. All who break the commandments would be the sons (or seed) of Satan. No effort would now be necessary to reach out to them and to try and get them into covenant with God: in this teaching, Sunday-keeping Christians would not be lost sheep or brothers that need to be sought and brought into covenant, but would be human cannon fodder in a war in the heavenly realm between the present prince of this world and the Son of Man. And all such teachings are abominable to Christ Jesus, who died for all of Israel, including those Israelites who have not yet been born of spirit.

The synagogue of Satan will bow before the feet of *Philadelphia* and will learn that the glorified Jesus has loved this fellowship because *Philadelphia* was willing to recognize Sunday-keeping Christians as lost sheep that need to be sought and recovered. John adds a qualifier of equal importance to what he writes about “whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:10), this qualifier being, “nor is the one who does not love his brother” of God. It is never enough to focus on the person’s own righteousness. The Pharisees focused on their own righteousness to such an extent that they failed to keep the law, which isn’t about doing the expectations of the household of God [keeping the commandments, even by faith, is the reasonable expectation of all who are of God], but rather, is about having love for neighbor as Christ loves even those who are today sinners.

When the lawyer sought to test Jesus, he asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). Jesus asked the lawyer how he read the law, and the lawyer answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [psyche] and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (v. 27) ... how does one outwardly show that he or she loves the Lord with all one’s heart, life, strength, mind? Does one wear odd clothing? Does one wear fringe on his or her garments, or does one dangle a crucifix from one’s neck? What can the outer person do to reveal the fact that the inner new creature or new self loves the Lord? What is the person to do?

The only thing that really can be done is to show love towards one's neighbor. There is little else a person can do; for a disciple [the new creature born of spirit] shows the Lord that he loves the Lord by keeping the commandments by faith, with half of these commandments addressing how the disciple treats his neighbor.

Jesus told the lawyer that he had answered correctly, that to inherit eternal life the lawyer needed to only do as he said. But the lawyer, now put on the spot, asked, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

Who, indeed, is "neighbor" or "brother" to a Sabbath-keeping Christian? Is an ox a neighbor or brother? No, of course not! Is the person who denies that God exists a neighbor? According to the parable Jesus told to the lawyer, if this atheist extends mercy to the disciple, this atheist is the disciple's neighbor. This atheist is certainly not a brother to the disciple, but the extension of mercy denotes who one's neighbors are—and the mirror image of this is, one's neighbors are those to whom the disciple extends mercy.

If a disciple by extending mercy to another person becomes the neighbor of the person, then the one who extends mercy outwardly shows love to his or her neighbor. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan has a reverse image that requires disciples to become this presumably uncircumcised Samaritan, who showed mercy to a man he found lying wounded alongside a road. How, then, can Sabbatarian disciples who have received mercy from the Lord not also extend mercy to other human beings, and especially to those who profess to being "Christians" even though these *Christians* do not keep the law?

When a person actively resists receiving mercy, perhaps the person truly doesn't want to be a neighbor. Should this hostile person be forgotten, figuratively written off as spiritual trash, or should the disciple do good to the person, hoping that by the disciple's conduct the person can be won over? Yes, the disciple should do good to the hostile person, but the disciple needs to also understand that the intentions of this person will be to do the disciple harm, so wisdom must be exercised. And it is this conflicting need to show love to neighbor and to protect oneself that brings us back to the American monomyth and America acting as an individual governed by the application of this monomyth.

A Christian is collectively and individually the Body of Christ, and when walking as Jesus walked, is *Christ*, this title derived from the Greek word *Christos* [nominative case]. Christ is not the name of an individual, but the title of the Son of Man, as "President" or "King" or "Queen" is the title and not the name of a person. Thus, the glorified Jesus is *Christ Jesus* as the present American president is *President Bush* and the next president is *President-elect Obama*. A glorified disciple who will be as Jesus now is (but will be a younger sibling) will derive his identity from the title *Christ*.

Today, the disciple is *Christ* as President-elect Obama is the President of the United States. But the United States only has one president at a time, whereas all of who are of Christ Jesus will, when glorified, co-exist with Him as the reigning Christ, a concept that is not difficult to understand or even to accept. What is more difficult to accept is that presently, disciples are *Christ* even though this doesn't seem correct because two conflicting applications of one myth-like reality are at work within each person.

America today functions as a single person within the kingdom of this world, but a person with a bipolar personality and with each personality tapping into the energy of the American monomyth. Likewise, Christianity is one body, one personhood, with schizophrenic personalities, some of which have tapped in mythic energy reserves. As much as Sabbatarian disciples would like to dismiss Sunday-keeping disciples as false Christians, all within the umbrella cover of *Churchianity*, such an out-of-hand dismissal isn't of God, who will seek to recover as many as He can when Israel is liberated from indwelling sin and death, the law Paul found at work in his fleshly members (Rom 7:21–23).

Paul wrote that disciples are individually and collectively members of the one Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27): disciples within Sunday churches are, if not brothers in Christ, then at least neighbors in Christ ... the Sunday observing Baptist and the Latter Day Saint, both of whom deny legitimacy to the other, are *Philadelphia's* neighbors in Christ—neighbors because God has extended mercy to them and because another law other than the law of God is at work within their minds.

Pause and consider the above: if the law of God were at work within the mind of disciples, these disciples would be brothers to Sabbatarian disciples albeit sometimes estranged brothers, for these disciples would keep the commandments, especially the Sabbath commandment. But because Sunday-observing Christians openly reject keeping the commandments, regardless of what their words say, they cannot be brothers (for they are not of the same mind) as Sabbatarian disciples. Yet, within lawless Christendom are disciples who have been born of spirit and have received mercy from God—and because God has extended them mercy as the Good Samaritan extended mercy to the man who had been robbed, God is both Father and neighbor to them. They are as the prodigal son was; they are figuratively slopping hogs for the prince of this world. They remain sons of God, but they are far from Him. And as the father of the prodigal son did not seek after his son but thought him dead (Luke 15:24), God does not go after those who have turned their backs to him and who now worship the prince of this world. Rather, the father was overjoyed when the prodigal son returned home as the Father and the Son will be overjoyed when lawless Christendom returns to heavenly Jerusalem, a city defined by disciples looking like Jesus, walking as Jesus walked, keeping the law by faith.

Should the brother of the prodigal son have sought after his brother? Was the faithful son also his brother's keeper? Or was the faithful son like most of today's Sabbatarian disciples, willing to stay close to God, but having no love for his brother who was suffering.

The faithful son would inherit everything; Sabbatarian disciples who love God and neighbor will inherit everything. So what motivation is there to seek after an estranged brother, who has become a neighbor by having received and squandered his inheritance? And within every Sabbatarian disciple are two conflicting paradigms, one that wants every *Christian* to enter the kingdom of God, and another that would just as soon leave Sunday keepers alone for it will be from unrepentant Sunday keepers that persecution will come in the Tribulation.

To seek to recover those disciples who are presently far from God (but who sincerely believe they are "right" with Christ Jesus) requires calling attention to oneself ... as the followers

of Jakob Ammann found, enthusiasm brings persecution—with enough persecution, the Amish became quiet folks, quaint but silent, the only means by which they could survive separated from a world ruled by the spiritual king of Babylon.

Sabbatarian Christians do not and cannot trust the organizations and institutions of this world, for they all belong to the king of spiritual Babylon. Whatever Sabbatarian disciples do must, necessarily, be through rejecting temptation and must be for the redemption of this world. Sabbatarian disciples are to Christendom as Americans are to this world ... will Sabbatarian disciples risk their own lives attempting to recover those Sunday keeping Christians who will, someday soon, earnestly seek to kill them? What would Jesus do? What did He do? He died on the cross not just for faithful Israelites, but for sinners, Israelites who would and did kill Him when they could. So should *Philadelphia* not also go after its neighbors in Christ to bring them back so that they are again brothers?

Under Armstrong, a period of passive political realism transpired: most members of the former Worldwide Church of God would, when asked what church did they belong, say something stupid like, “Oh, I have a funny religion.” They denied Christ, and because they didn’t wear odd clothing as the Amish do, they left no testimony with anyone when asked for the reason of the hope within them.

But all of this is about to change. As *America* enters a period of political realism under President-elect Obama, Sabbatarian Christendom is about enter a period of zealous nationalism, or zealous evangelism; for today, visible Christianity stands before the world as a wild man, unruly in appearance, demon possessed, a person at war with himself. He stands as a myth, a legend created by a poorly told story. In reality, he is spiritually dead—he has life in this world only. Yet within this corpse is “life,” or at least a spark of life that by gently breathing on this spark will grow to set the world ablaze. And this life is found within a portion of the greater Sabbatarian church, which is anti-democratic for not everyone can be a “Christian.” Only those who have been drawn from this world as the firstfruits of God can today be of Christ.

The energy of the American monomyth that both Obama and Palin tapped will fuel *Philadelphia* as a single belief paradigm goes after its brother and neighbor to recover as many as possible from the clutches of the king of Babylon. *Philadelphia* will feel within itself those same conflicting urges to seek Sunday keeping disciples, trying to get as many as possible into fellowship, and to ignore Sunday keeping disciples because of the danger they pose, as are felt by other Sabbatarians. But *Philadelphia* will not ignore the spiritual plight of its brother; rather the fellowship will try to recover him from the pigpens of this world, knowing ahead of time that the fellowship will not be terribly effective. Nevertheless, out of love *Philadelphia* will proceed forth as if it will get every single Sunday keeping Christian into covenant with Christ, making *Philadelphia* a danger to the rule of the present prince of this world.

Philadelphia will not be ruled by a mob, or intimidated by its lack of size or by the size of the task before it. David selected five stones before he faced Goliath, but he only cast one of them. The other four remain to be slung at the four beasts of Daniel chapter seven—and today, *Philadelphia* carries those four stones in its bag. It is the prince of this world who

needs to fear *Philadelphia* and its big brother.

The challenge is great; the danger is great; but the rewards are even greater. Salvation is the gift of God, but rewards are earned. Those who have been intimidated into silence may well be in the kingdom, but they certainly lost their opportunity for receiving rewards. They will never be a pillar in the temple of God, for they loved their own lives more than they loved their neighbor in Christ.

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The person conducting the Sabbath service should close services with two hymns, or psalms, followed by a prayer asking God's dismissal.

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