

**Blind and naked
but feeling fine!**

**Laodicea
the lukewarm church**

An exposition of
Revelation Chapter 3:14-21

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Table of contents

Background	3
The meaning of Laodicea.....	3
The significance of Christ's titles	3
The Amen.....	3
The Faithful and True Witness	4
The Beginning of the creation of God	4
Laodicea's problem	5
Christ's solution	6
Gold tried in the fire	6
White garments.....	7
Eye salve.....	8
Rebuke and chastening	8
Repentance.....	11
Promise to the overcomer	12
Appendix A.....	14
Appendix B.....	15
Appendix C.....	15
Appendix D.....	15
Bibliography	15

Background

And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write...

The meaning of Laodicea

The word *Laodicea* is composed of two words: *Laos* = people and *Dikaios* = righteous, right, or lawful.

Laodicea means *the righteous people* or *the judged* or *the justified people*.

According to the seventh and eighth chapters of Daniel the judging of God's people transpires prior to the Second Advent, commencing in 1844. This is a pre-advent or an investigative judgment.¹ On this basis many conclude that the period involving Laodicea is from 1844 until the Second Advent of Christ.

Seeing that the seven churches represent the seven periods of the Christian Church, Laodicea, being the seventh would naturally represent the final period. This means that Laodicea must be involved with what scripture describes as *the remnant* (Revelation 12:17) or the saints at the end time.

The term Laodicea also means *a just or righteous people*. This could apply very accurately to the final product of Laodicea² - a people ready for translation at the Second Advent of Christ.

The significance of Christ's titles

...These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God v14

The Amen

This title is borrowed from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth... Isaiah 65:16

The expression *God of Truth* in the Hebrew is *The God of Amen*. This is a title for the Messiah,³ and represents Jesus Christ as the truth. (John 14:6) This thought was frequently expressed by Jesus when he introduced his teachings by exclaiming *Verily, verily or truly, truly*.

For all the promises of God in Him are Ye,s and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 2 Corinthians 1:20

Christ is the source of all certainty and truth.

¹ See author's publications, *Time No Longer* and *God's Final Ultimatum to Men*

² See the author's publication, *The 144,000*

³ 2 Corinthians 1:20

The Faithful and True Witness

This is a repetition of Revelation 1:5 where Jesus is described as the *faithful witness*.⁴ Likewise in Revelation 19:11 Jesus is described at the Second Advent as *faithful and true*.⁵

Why are the above two titles used by Christ when he is addressing Laodicea?

The Laodicean message is the most drastic of all the seven churches' messages. It is so strong in reproof that the charges made could be regarded as an exaggeration. But he who delivers the message is *the Amen* and *the faithful and true witness*. Therefore his messages must be the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The Beginning of the creation of God

This description of Jesus is used by some to purport that Jesus was a created being, that he had a beginning. While it is true that Jesus was begotten as far as his humanity is concerned, numerous other scriptures clearly state that Jesus had no beginning; that he was God the Son; that he came from eternity.

The original Greek word for beginning is *arche*. What does this word mean?

Arche can be understood in two ways. It may be translated as *beginning* or *beginner*.⁶ How can we know which is the correct word? We must allow scripture to interpret scripture. Do other scriptures portray Christ as *the beginner of creation*, or *the beginning of creation*?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him, (the Word) and without Him nothing was made that was made... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... John 1:1, 3, 14

He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn (or chief) over all creation.⁷ For by him (Christ) all were things were created that are in heaven, and that are on earth ... All things were created through Him and for Him...and in Him all things consist. Colossians 1:15-17

... in these last days (God has) spoken to us by His Son...through whom also He made the worlds Hebrews 1:2

... Christ is the prime source of all of God's creation Revelation 3:14 NEB.

Indisputably Christ was the Beginner of creation. He was involved in the creation of all things. He is the Creator. He is also co-creator with his Father.

⁴ See the author's publication *Jesus Christ - The Alpha and the Omega*

⁵ See the author's publication *2 Armies, 2 Suppers, 2 Destinies*

⁶ Refer Appendix C

⁷ Refer Appendix D

*The Beginner of all creation, its originating instrument.*⁸

Is there significance in the emphasis on Christ as Creator in the introduction to this final church? Yes! for the following reasons:

Firstly, it is in this final age of history that man has rejected the truth of creation and accepted the alternative concept of evolution. It is therefore most relevant.

Secondly, if Christ is Creator, then he is also divine. He is God the Son. The ability to create is the mark of deity, which means that Christ is all-knowing.

I know your works... v15

Laodicea's problem

I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot ... because you are lukewarm... I will spew you out of my mouth. v15 -16

Of all the seven churches, Laodicea's need is the most drastic – so much so that if there is no recovery from it, complete rejection by God will result. How is this lukewarm condition manifested by Laodiceans?

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'...

The Laodicean attitude is one of spiritual self-satisfaction. They may not literally say it, but within themselves they feel assured of salvation. They have the truth; they are on their way to heaven. In other words they feel that they have spiritually arrived. They believe they are acceptable to God – they feel or sense no need.

What should the mental attitude of a healthy believer be? Paul warns

...let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12

This means that we are to be continually aware that we are in spiritual danger. This leads to watchfulness, to a realization of our own insufficiency and inability. We will know that unless Christ is within we have no hope of reaching the standard. We will be conscious that there is a continual battle and that the battle is with self; that it will not cease until death or translation. We will never feel that we have *made it*.

The problem with the Laodicean believers is that they think that they are safe; that they have found the truth; that they are on the way to heaven and all is well. Christ declares that such an attitude is symptomatic of spiritual wretchedness, misery, poverty, blindness and nakedness.

...and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked v17

This is a shocking revelation and what makes it so serious is that the one who is in this condition is totally unaware of it. Some have described the condition as *hopeless*.

⁸ R Jamieson, AR Fausset and D Brown, *Commentary - Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1871), Revelation 3:14.

But the condition of Laodicea is not hopeless. Care needs to be taken that an incorrect conclusion is not drawn. The Laodicean message has frequently been used as a weapon to attack the people of God and to condemn them as apostate. This scripture does not indicate apostasy but spiritual self-satisfaction. Apostasy among God's people in the end time is identified in other scriptures.

In the stern rebuke to Laodicea Christ holds out the cure for her spiritual disease.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. v18-19

These two verses cancel out completely the idea that Laodicea is hopeless, or apostate. It is a love message. Christ has to hurt in order to help. He rebukes and calls for repentance, ie to turn around, to turn back; and the way of repentance is to buy of Christ three particular items which will make them acceptable for heaven.

Christ's solution

Gold tried in the fire

...buy from Me (Christ) gold refined in the fire...

Spiritual gold is pure gold!

What does scripture describe as being tried by fire? It is the believer's faith.

That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:7

A tried or tested faith is spiritual gold, but how is it recognized?

Faith that works by love. Galations 5:6

Faith active in love. NEB and Moffatt.

Faith which expresses itself in love. Philips and Knox.

Faith activated and energized and expressed and working through love. Amp NT ⁹

The first and most serious lack among believers in the Laodicean period is a lack of faith which expresses itself in love. It is not love alone, but faith, active faith which is stimulated by love and expresses itself in love. This is not sentimental love but love as a principle. In essence it is the renunciation of self, unselfishness or selflessness.

⁹ EG White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1900) 158
"The gold tried in the fire is faith that works by love"

But no one can empty themselves of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work...

*...there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him. Only by constant renunciation of self and dependence on Christ can we walk safely.*¹⁰

While this is the chief lack among God's people in the last days, we believe that care should be exercised not to make a universal application of Christ's complaint. Surely, there are those among God's professed people who are earnestly involved in subduing self and looking to Christ for constant aid? Laodiceans must beware of self saying to them that all is well, relax, cease from struggling.

As one discerning Christian warns

*Those whom heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness. Men who have lived nearest to God...have confessed the sinfulness of their own nature...At every advance step in Christian experience our repentance will deepen.*¹¹

Paul counseled

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12 -13.

The complaint with Laodicea is that there is too little fear and trembling in regard to their personal spiritual attitude. There are some things that believers must be afraid of

*Fear lest your will shall not be held in subjection to Christ's will; lest your hereditary and cultivated traits of character shall control your life.... Fear lest self shall interpose between your soul and the great Master Worker. Fear lest self-will shall mar the high purpose that through you God desires to accomplish. Fear to trust to your own strength. Fear to withdraw your hand from the hand of Christ and attempt to walk life's pathway without His abiding presence.*¹²

With such an attitude, spiritual self-satisfaction and pride will never gain the ascendancy. Instead one will become spiritually *rich*.

White garments

...white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed...

Here Christ is declaring that in the sight of Heaven many Laodiceans are spiritually naked. This should shock us out of our spiritual complacency! What is it that clothes the Christian – that covers completely his spiritual nakedness?

¹⁰ EG White, *Christ Object Lessons*, 160

¹¹ Ibid, 160

¹² Ibid, 161

It is the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith – by believing that Christ died as my substitute and that the perfect obedience he demonstrated while on earth is placed to my credit or imputed to me. More than that - it is a righteousness that comes solely from Christ and which alone can fit the believer for the kingdom.

The white garments represent Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer in justification and imparted in sanctification.¹³

As the previous author so beautifully penned,

By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.¹⁴

Does Christ's suggest that many Laodiceans are not trusting in or applying the righteousness of Christ? Does it mean that they have a head knowledge of salvation but not a heart experience? If *self* is enthroned in the Laodicean's heart then the situation described will be a natural consequence.

Eye salve

...anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see. v18

Christ is saying that those who are lukewarm in Laodicea are spiritually blind. They cannot discern between good and evil, nor can they distinguish clearly between right and wrong. This is extremely serious in the light of the tremendous deceptions that are to beset the people of God in the end time. Because of the coming conflict involving the saints, spiritual eye-salve will be an essential requirement. More than human discernment will be needed to detect sin and deception and to know what to do in the crisis.

It is significant to notice that unlike five of the previous church periods, there is no hint of any opponents from without or of any heresies from within Laodicea. Satan has no need to attack the church when it is in a lukewarm condition. He has no fear of such a church.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous, and repent. v19

Rebuke and chastening

Chasten means to punish or discipline with the object of reforming.

To instruct by chastisement! Here is a prediction as to how Christ is to bring His church to repentance. He is to bring chastisement upon the church. The church is to receive punishment. The Lord must be cruel to be kind.

¹³ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary – Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Whole Bible*, Revelation 3:18

¹⁴ EG White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 312

*...when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Isaiah 26:9*¹⁵

Seeing that Laodicea is the last of God's churches, it must therefore be the church that exists at the time of Christ's return. This means that because Laodicea is in the woeful condition described by Christ, something exceptional will need to happen in order for God's people to be ready for translation. Is there evidence of some special experience for Laodicea that will prepare it for translation?

Other scriptures show that before the Second Advent there is to be a sorting out, a sifting, a dividing of the wheat and the tares within the church of God.¹⁶ This is referred to as *the shaking*. In the parable of *The Wheat and the Tares* (Matthew 13:24 -30) Jesus declared

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'. Matthew 13:30.

Later Jesus explained that

...the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.

The Son of Man...will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness... v39-40

These texts allude to a process in the period near the end of the world (age) when Christ purifies his church. This therefore must be the Laodicean church.¹⁷ The purifying process is described as a *gathering out* and a *gathering in* (Matthew 13:30, 41). It is *the shaking which divides*, or polarizes, *the entire church of God*.

How will this process be initiated? One of the instruments employed will be a proclamation within the Laodicean church of the Laodicean message. Other scriptures predict that a startling message is to be presented to believers in Laodicea to prepare them for the Advent. The prophet Joel, whose predictions now have an end time application to spiritual Israel, predicted this special call within the church.

Blow the trumpet in Zion (the church), consecrate a fast (abstain from the normal way of life), call a sacred assembly; gather the people... let the priest, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar (in repentance with their flock); let them say, "Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations (unsaved) should rule over them. (oppress them). Why should they (the unsaved) say among the people, 'Where is their (the saints) God?' " Joel 2:15 -17.

The apostle James was also inspired to warn God's professed people and this applies especially to those in the Laodicean condition.

¹⁵ For further details on the judgment that will come upon the last section of the church of God in the Last Days, see the author's publication *Philadelphia or Laodicea*

¹⁶ See the author's publication *The Mighty Shaking of the Adventist Church*

¹⁷ Refer Appendix E

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning (of repentance) and your joy to gloom (godly sorrow). Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:8 -10

This is the experience that those in the Laodicean condition will need to pass through in order to be overcomers. Again the prophet Zephaniah reveals the experience that God's end time people must have

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation (spiritual Israel), before the decree is issued (probably the death decree), before the day passes like chaff (the day of salvation), before the Lord's fierce anger (the 7 last plagues) comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you! (the close of probation and the Day of the Lord). Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth... Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. Zephaniah 2:1-3

In the Hebrew *not desired* means *not longed for* or *not ashamed*. This implies that:

- this people is unworthy of God's protection, which is true of Laodicea in its present state,
- this people is unashamed of its spiritual condition. It has no sense of its guilt.

How true this is of Laodicea.¹⁸ However, this scripture also forecasts a special call to God's end-time people to seek righteousness (*white raiment*) and meekness (the opposite of spiritual pride) in order to be hidden or protected during the outpouring of God's wrath in the seven last plagues.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. Joel 2:1

This tells of an alarm, of a crisis which involves the church itself. This may well result from the sounding of the irresistible Laodicean message within the Laodicean church. It will involve a powerful call to repentance and reformation and as a result there will be polarization. Those rejecting the call will remove themselves from Laodicea.¹⁹

Christ's message to Laodicea –

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. V19

could well be God's effort, as outlined above, to bring Laodicea to repentance. There is clear evidence that this effort will be successful. Many of God's people within Laodicea will finally be cured of the curse of luke-warmness. Some teach that true believers must

¹⁸ FD Nichol (Ed). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol 4* on Zephaniah 2:1-3

¹⁹ EG White, *Testimonies to the Church, Vol 1* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1948), 179-184

leave Laodicea and join the church of Philadelphia. This is an incorrect claim and is fully answered elsewhere.²⁰

Repentance

The Greek word *repent* in v19 is in the singular, implying that the call of Christ to Laodicea is a call to individuals. Repentance is a personal experience, and each individual believer must seek it if they are to be an overcomer.

Behold I stand at the door and knock...

What door is this? Is it the door of the Laodicean church as a corporate body?

No! It is the door of each individual believer's heart.

... If anyone hears my voice and opens the door...

The church of Christ consists of individual believers and the only way Christ may dwell within his church is by dwelling in each member's heart. Thus Christ calls to everyone - every individual - to open the door to their heart (the mind) and receive Christ.

An important truth is revealed in this verse. Christ stands at the door of a person's heart and knocks. He does not attempt to open the door. He does not use compulsion. He does not threaten. He does not try to force the will. He knocks and waits. He will only enter into a person's life at the individual's personal invitation. Our Creator holds a sacred respect for the freedom of will. Never will he breach this principle. Here is a revelation of the noble character of our God.

...I will come in to him...

The Greek may read *I will enter into him*. This is a mystic union of Jesus and the believer. By the Holy Spirit, Christ enters into the believer and reigns upon the spiritual throne of his heart. *This is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Colossians 1:27

...and will dine with him... v20

This is alluding to the spiritual supper of the Lamb. It denotes the unique fellowship that the believer enjoys with Christ but which is incomprehensible to the world.

The ministry of Christ is likened in scripture to the experience of human love, courtship and marriage. The Holy Spirit woos the sinner. If the sinner responds, there takes place a spiritual union or marriage as follows:

- Christ becomes the spiritual husband and the believer becomes the bride.
- The bride takes her husband's name. She is now a Christ-ian, a Christian.
- The husband becomes responsible for his bride. He provides her with everything she needs.

²⁰ See author's publication, *Philadelphia or Laodicea - Must we migrate from one church to the other?*

- He supplies her garments – the robe of His own righteousness.
- He provides her food, which is the Word of God and which is likened to spiritual milk, bread and meat.
- He protects her by providing a spiritual bodyguard – guardian angels.
- He assures her that he will never leave her nor forsake her, provided she is faithful.

But the believer always retains the freedom of their will. They are not under compulsion to continue the spiritual marriage relationship. It is based on love and freedom of choice.

Promise to the overcomer

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne... v21

This is the grandest of promises to the overcomers in the seven churches. It is the crowning promise. It shows that the Laodicean condition can and will be overcome by at least some or even many in this period. God will have a people out of earth's last generation who will be fit for translation at the Second Advent. Their reward will be greater than those of any other period.

Compare the seven rewards of each period –

Ephesus	Eat of Tree of Life.
Smyrna	Not hurt of the Second Death.
Pergamos	Eat hidden manna, given a white stone and a new name.
Thyatira	Power over the nations, will rule with rod of iron.
Sardis	White raiment, name retained in the Book of Life.
Philadelphia	A temple pillar, the name of God, New Jerusalem and Christ's new name.
Laodicea	Sit with Christ on his throne, sharing his rule.

The overcomers from Laodicea share the eternal throne of Christ in the kingdom. What a privilege! What a reward! What an honour!

Why should those of Laodicea be granted a higher honour than those of any other church period? The reason is that this is an age of the greatest affluence, tolerance, compromise and enlightenment. While it is probably the age when it has never been easier to become a Christian, on the other hand, never has it been so difficult to retain one's faith and zeal.

Those of the last generation pass through the final crisis of the great controversy. They are involved in the conflict with the beast and his image and his mark.

A special preparation is required of them in order to endure the time of trouble and finally to stand ready for translation. The final remnant of Laodicea are those who are described in Revelation 7:13 -17.

- They *come out of great tribulation.*
- They are *before the throne or God* (or in the presence of the throne)
- They *serve him day and night in his temple.*

This same group is on Mount Zion with the Lamb and is the *one hundred and forty-four thousand.* Revelation 14:1 (See Appendix B).

This indicates that the final group of overcomers from Laodicea comprises the 144,000. This may be why their reward is so much greater than those of any other church period.

...as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. v21

Here Jesus Christ reminds his followers that because he overcame, so may the believer overcome. While he was on earth Jesus experienced life in exactly the same way as we do. In his humanity he possessed the same nature as we have. He had access to divine power exactly the same way as we may. He had no advantages over us. He demonstrated how to overcome.

... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. John 16:33

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. v22

Appendix A

What about the claim that in six of the messages to the seven churches the truth of the Second Advent is emphasized?

This conclusion is based on the expression *I will come*. However, when each of these expressions is examined it appears that the reference is to Christ coming in judgment. Notice the six occasions the term is used:

Ephesus

Repent... or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent. Revelation 2:5

Smyrna

No mention of Christ coming to this church in judgment. Maybe this is because Christ finds no complaint with this church.

Pergamos

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Revelation 2:16.

Thyatira

But hold fast what you have till I come. Revelation 2:25

Sardis

Hold fast, and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Revelation 3:3

Philadelphia

Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. Revelation 3:11

Laodicea

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

When the six expressions above are analyzed in context, it is doubtful whether any of them could apply to the Second Advent in a primary application. Even as used to Laodicea, the church of the Advent, the expression clearly refers to Christ seeking entrance to the heart.

The expressions used to the other five churches appear to be warnings that Christ could come in judgment. If they apply to the Second Advent it would only be in a secondary sense. The Spirit of Prophecy applies some of the above expressions in this manner. Statements made to some of the previous six churches are also re-applied to the Laodicean church.

Appendix B

What about the interpretation of the seven churches as taught by some of the pioneers in the 1844 period? In the fundamental features of the faith, the conclusions of the pioneers, when confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy, were unquestionably correct.

However, in secondary aspects of truth, not confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy, care should be taken! Further study on the topic of the seven churches has shown that some of the applications of the pioneers were incorrect. Believers are to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. II Peter 3:18

Appendix C

The Greek word translated *beginning* is *arche*. Its meaning is dependent on whether it is taken in its passive sense or active sense. The principle that should govern how one takes this word is; which meaning harmonizes with the rest of scripture. The answer is – in its active sense. This means that it should be translated *beginner* and not *beginning*.

Appendix D

The word *firstborn* of Colossians 1:15 should not be interpreted to mean that Jesus Christ was originally created, because this flagrantly contradicts many other scriptures. In the Old Testament the term is used to represent the dignity and office of the first or chief of the offspring of the family – the one who inherited special titles, responsibilities and property.

However, the *firstborn* was not necessarily the one who was born first. If the first to be born was a female, she was not ‘the firstborn’. Sometimes the first son to be born was not the ‘firstborn’ as such and did not receive the birthright. Example: Esau and Jacob. Genesis 25 and 26. The word *firstborn* signifies *chief* or *head*.

His is the primacy over all created beings. Colossians 1:15 NEB

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