

## UAC TODAY

### **Congress of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, Nagpur, 10-12 August 2018**

At the very outset, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share with you some reflections on the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Special thanks to Fr. Varghese Pullan, the President of the National Coordination Council of India and to Fr. Vijay Thomas, the UAC Formator for India. Thank you so much for organising this Congress with great attention and preparations.

Certainly, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, this prophetic vision of our holy Founder is supposed to bear good fruits for the Church and the world, fruits that will indeed endure and stand the test of time. What I wish to do is to look at some aspects of the Union in a critical way, in view of deepening our understanding of it. After about 15 years of its definitive approval by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, it is right that we make such a realistic evaluation, so that it can bear even greater fruits in the future.

#### **1. A Call to a Life of Holiness: “Gaudete et Exsultate”**

Sanctity and apostolate are the two sides of the same coin in Pallottine spirituality. Pallotti recalls: “Out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ we must keep together the life of prayer and the life of the apostolate, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls” (OCC III, p. 54). This equilibrium, although difficult to be attained, can occur only through the imitation of Christ, as Pallotti clearly wrote: “No one should engage in the ministry unless he is maturely practising the Christ-life himself. Only then can he be effective in teaching this to others” (OCC III, p. 54). Once the spirit of Jesus is present in the apostle, then the apostolate will become a valuable means of perfection. The apostolate viewed in this sense is a steppingstone to perfection. It becomes an avenue by which one glorifies God since it is the outgrowth and overflow of Christ’s love made visible in the world.

A Christian, in whatever state of life, cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness; and holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full, in union with and perfect imitation of Christ. As Pope Francis says echoing the words of our Founder: “To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and

renouncing personal gain. Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14-15). In fact, sanctity combined with apostolic mission is the most attractive face of the Church.

## **2. UAC as a Treasure Hidden in a Field**

I would like to survey a few issues related to the life of the Union which need urgent attention if it has to bear lasting and good fruits for the Pallottine Family and the entire Church. A critical reflection does not mean that I question the validity or relevance of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Such queries are put to rest once for all with the official approval of the Union by the Universal Church. It is no more a choice left to the discretion of the members of the Union, whether to promote it or ignore it; rather it is a mandate, a treasure given to us through our Founder, not to be kept hidden but to be brought to the light and diffused. The UAC is the identity card of the Pallottines in the Church. Pope Francis addressing the Pallottines said that, “The Union of the Catholic Apostolate, the bearer of the charism of Saint Vincent Pallotti, offers so many opportunities and opens new horizons for participation in the mission of the Church. For this reason, it is called to operate with renewed vigour to reawaken faith and rekindle charity, especially among the most vulnerable segments of the population, that are spiritually and materially poor”<sup>1</sup>.

Hence, we need to consider this charismatic gift with pride and joy and must do everything in our capacity to realise this dream of our Founder. We also need to thank all the committed Pallottines who have dedicated themselves to live and communicate the spirituality and charism of our Founder. It is our moment in history to do our part. The following aspects are meant to challenge us to give our very best to interpret our charism according to the signs of the times.

### **2.1. The Gift of the Charism**

The first question is: what is the UAC? The apt response to this question is found in the General Statutes, n. 1: it is a “...communion of those faithful who, inspired by the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti, promote the co-responsibility of all the baptised to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and in the world bringing all to unity in Christ” (GS, Art.1).

We read further that: “The members of the Union, animated by the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti consciously commit themselves to the universal apostolate of the Church in every place, with all appropriate means and in collaboration with all people of good will...” (GS, Art. 25).

The Union, as an auxiliary body, is a gift for the entire Church. It is true that the Statutes have provisions to welcome everyone but at times we tend to think that making

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<sup>1</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the General Chapter of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, 10 October 2016.

a few lay people to do their apostolic commitment in the Union as the most important goal of the Union. In fact, being and forming apostles of Jesus in service of the mission of the Church must be our ultimate objective.

The UAC is a “communion of all the faithful in the Church”. It is neither a clerical association, nor is a lay alliance. It is a “way of being Church”, a way of living our Christian life. UAC does not mean just forming lay groups, nor do the lay members belong to a sort of third order. The beauty and uniqueness of the Union is its ‘unity in diversity’. We are united as we all share equal dignity and responsibility as members of the Union, but diverse because we are unique and have different vocations, gifts and talents. It is an equality based on the fundamental anthropological and theological principles and not on modern ideologies of equality: “The equal dignity of the members of the Union is founded on their common likeness to the Creator and on the common priesthood of the People of God. This is expressed in a plurality of vocations to the life of the lay faithful, to consecrated life and to the ordained ministry which are all so interrelated that each helps the other to be solicitous for continuous growth and to offer its own specific service” (GS, Art. 7).

## **2.2 The Joyful Responsibility of the Communities Founded by Pallotti**

The Core communities, as integral parts, “are charged with the task of guaranteeing the unity and apostolic efficiency of the total Union” (GS, Art. 35).

Commenting on this number of the General Statutes, our Juridical expert, Fr. Hubert Socha SAC enumerates some of the tasks of the members of the Core Communities as follows:

The role of the Pallottine Fathers, Brothers and Sisters is to be “the leaven of unity, the apostolic conscience and inspirational group”<sup>2</sup> and thereby to “give an expression to the Union and make it alive”<sup>3</sup>. They will only be able to do this if Vincent Pallotti’s founding vision was received in their flesh and blood<sup>4</sup>, if they “adhere to the greater and more open reality of the Union” and are capable of cooperating with all the members of the Pallottine family<sup>5</sup>. However, this necessarily presupposes that the Pallottine Fathers, Brothers and Sisters make the General Statutes their own, and intensively, personally and in community, meditate and reflect on them and on their relationship to their lives<sup>6</sup>.

The special responsibility of the Pallottine Fathers, Brothers and Sisters for Vincent Pallotti’s entire foundation requires that in their initial and ongoing formation

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<sup>2</sup> Apostolate of the Society today 8.

<sup>3</sup> Let your light shine p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Apostolate of the Society today 8.

<sup>5</sup> Let your light shine no. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Dekret des XIV. Generalkapitels der Missionsschwestern no. 2.1.c.; Dekret des XV. Generalkapitels der Missionsschwestern par. 4; Missionspallottinerinnen und die UAC: Formation no. 2 & 5; International Formation Manual p. 15: b (3); Freeman, Letter dated 22.3.2004, p. 2-3.

they become completely familiar with Pallotti's founding charism<sup>7</sup>. They must acquire the conviction that the Union is their specific contribution to evangelization<sup>8</sup> and be enabled, "to motivate, inspire and accompany both the individual members and the groups of the UAC"<sup>9</sup>.

In short, the special responsibility for the Union of the members of the Core Community will include:

- a) spiritually accompanying the members and collaborators of the Union and supporting them in their apostolate;
- b) working together in a spirit of equality with the members and collaborators of the Union and participating also in the permanent working committees;
- c) helping members and collaborators to be united with one another within the Union (cf. GS, Art. 33 & 37).

The important point to remember here is that the Core Communities have a very special responsibility - special not in terms of privilege but as an added responsibility - to ensure the unity and apostolic efficiency of the entire Union. If the Pallottine charism is implanted in 56 countries today, it is mostly the work of our confreres and the sisters. It only speaks of the importance of the involvement of the members of the Core Communities in the works of the Union.

It is also a sad reality that there are many members, especially in our Society, who do not accept the Union as it is presented today. I cannot say that these members are less Pallottine or that they understand nothing of our Founder. It is also true that there are members who care very little about our Founder and about being a Pallottine. I also believe that there are many aspects of the Union as presented in the Statutes that need further reflection and pastoral application. If we ask such simple questions like: what is the UAC, what concrete results it produces, how can it be implemented in diverse pastoral situations etc., we do not always find adequate answers. The UAC cannot be reduced to some juridical or theological concepts alone. We need pastoral praxis; we need to have it as a product that is attractive and useful both for individual members as well as for the entire Church. The Core Communities have a special responsibility, in collaboration with all, to deepen our understanding and widen our pastoral applications of this ecclesial reality.

### **2.3. Ecclesiastical Assistant: Guarantor of Fidelity to Charism**

"The Rector General of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate is, a) in direct succession from the Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti, guarantor of faithfulness to the Pallottine charism" (GS, Art. 5); b) "...*ipso iure*, the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union"

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<sup>7</sup> Missionspallottinerinnen und die UAC: Charisma no. 3, Formation; Documenti del XXIV Capitolo Generale delle Suore dell'Apostolato Cattolico p. 21; International Formation Manual S. 2: IV.A; cf. Faithful to the Future no. 7.1; Apostolate of the Society today 49; Ratio 9, 109; J. Nampudakam, From the Pastoral care of Vocations to Ongoing Formation: The formation of our members to UAC consciousness and activity in the light of the Ratio Institutionis: ASAC XXII (2004) 81-86.

<sup>8</sup> International Formation Manual p. 2: III & p. 13: 4.

<sup>9</sup> Let your light shine p. 28, no. 9.

(GS, Art. 11); “...nominates a person who, in close collaboration with him and the National Coordination Council, has responsibility for ensuring the initial and on-going Pallottine formation of the members of the Union in that territory” (GS, Art. 11).

The implications of the role and responsibilities of the Ecclesiastical Assistant are matters to be taken seriously. I must say that until now nothing much has happened in this regard. Such a situation is not at all good for the Union. To some extent there exists a certain vacuum of authority in this Association. Who is finally responsible and able to reach out to the many real questions related to the life of the Union around the world and solve them? Theoretically it is the President together with the General Coordination Council of the Union that must deal with such questions. Do they have the required authority, time, energy, financial resources, etc., at their disposal? It must be remembered that a loose global Association will face many realistic dangers especially in the areas of unity among members, misinterpretation of charism, relational and financial abuses, interferences among the components of the Union, etc. The guarantor of charism certainly has many such concerns. He, together with all the members of the Union, must be constantly watching out for tendencies and attitudes that can deviate us from the true spirit of our charism. Once again, we consider the commentary of Fr. Hubert Socha regarding the role and responsibility of the “Guarantor of charism”, who is also the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union:

The special responsibility for the charism of Pallotti, at the universal level, falls to the General Superiors of the core communities<sup>10</sup>. They fulfil this mainly by

- a) being in agreement among themselves in all matters which affect the Union;
- b) exercising their office in such a way that the communities entrusted to them are actually capable of “guaranteeing the unity and apostolic efficiency of the total Union” (cf. GS, Art. 35 par. 2);
- c) collaborating in the General Coordination Council and in the General Assembly for the well-being of the Union (cf. GS, Art. 78-80a, 91-92a).

In the spirit of the invitation of Vatican II to “hold in honour the founders’ spirit and special aims” (PC, 2b), the General Statutes, however, confirm that the Rector General of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate has a special responsibility for the spiritual heritage of the Pallottine foundation. The Statutes summarize the responsibilities, which Pallotti attached to the term “Rettore nato”, by characterising the Rector General as the “guarantor of faithfulness to the Pallottine charism” and justifying this further by the fact that he “in an unbroken line” succeeds the founder of the Union (GS, Art. 5; see also Art. 11 par. 1)<sup>11</sup>.

- As guarantor the Rector General is to maintain and foster both the form and expressive power/luminosity of the Union that Pallotti wanted in that he

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pro memoria dell’Incontro tra Mons. Delgado, P. Kretz e P. Murphy, 11 marzo 2005 [GKR 80], p. 1, no. 1.

<sup>11</sup> After a meeting of the three Superior Generals of the communities founded by Pallotti, on May 16, 1998, the Rector General S. Freeman wrote: “The main point of the meeting was probably the consensus that the General Rector of the SAC is guarantor of the charism” (Letter, dated 25 May 1998 [St. 78], p. 1, no. 1); cf. In der Kirche angenommen 136.

- a) imitates Jesus and the Queen of Apostles in their loving care for the salvation of all people (OOCC I, 20 and 22);
  - b) strengthens the fundamental unity of the Union and its bond with the shepherds of the Church (OOCC I, 56);
  - c) informs himself and lets himself be informed of the worldwide state of the Union and initiates the measures necessary for its well-being (OOCC I, 56-57);
  - d) endeavours to ensure that the General Coordination Council and the General Assembly effectively fulfil their tasks (cf. OOCC I, 19-20; GS, Art. 83c).
- Taking care that all members can actually identify themselves with the spiritual and apostolic profile of the Pallottine foundation, the Rector General protects the faithfulness of the Union to its original charism in the most lasting way. So far covers his role of guarantor with his task as Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union in accordance with General Statutes 11 par. 1<sup>12</sup>. Both obligations, the Rector General worldwide can only meet in synergy with all members of the Union (see above 2.) and with the help of representatives (GS, Art. 11 par.3)<sup>13</sup>.

It is clear that the spirit of the Union is communion and collaboration. Even guaranteeing fidelity to the charism is a matter of communal discernment. But the crucial matter is that a big association like the Union needs to have very effective leadership and that has to be realized according to the General Statutes. My humble impression is that there are limitations in such an effective leadership in the Union and that can be very detrimental to the work of our Founder. What is required is a collaborative leadership. But that should not mean that it belongs to everybody with equal responsibility, which results in no person's responsibility in reality. To some extent this is the case with the Union. As a Guarantor of the Pallottine charism, it is the responsibility of the Rector General, to ensure that we are moving in the right direction, always faithful to the original inspiration of our Founder. This is so important to ensure good fruits that will endure.

#### **2.4. The Pivotal Role of Formation of the Members**

Probably the most important challenge before the entire Union is to provide a deep human, Christian and Pallottine formation to the members. We need the basic guidelines for such a formation, a unique and specific formation model and well-prepared and mature formators to realize such a goal. Like all Ecclesiastical movements and associations, the Union too must be having an identity of its own and such an identity is formed through formation of its members in the spirituality and charism of our Founder. The Cenacle, as envisaged by Pallotti, can become an inspiration and model for the formation of the members of the Union. It is worth recalling here some of the statements on formation from the General Statutes:

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. c. 317 § 1; Annex to the General Statutes "The Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union".

<sup>13</sup> In der Kirche angenommen 191-192.

- “The nature of the life and the apostolate of the Union require comprehensive initial and on-going formation for all the members because they participate in the mission of Jesus in the Church and in the world” (GS, Art. 41).
- “**Each member**, in order to live fully their vocation in the Union and to better serve the Church and all of humanity, **is responsible for personal formation...**” (GS, Art. 42)
- “The task of providing initial and on-going formation for its own members lies primarily with the **communities of the Union**” (GS, Art. 43).
- “**The General Coordination Council establishes** the fundamental common principles of formation for the entire Union, establishes guide-lines for it and defines its objectives” (GS, Art. 44).
- “**The National Coordination Councils are entrusted** with the following responsibilities for formation, within their area of jurisdiction: the implementation of the fundamental principles of formation established by the General Coordination Council...” (GS, Art. 45).
- The members of the Union, in order to deepen and preserve communion with God and with each other in following Jesus Christ as St. Vincent Pallotti did:
  - a) study, meditate on and share Sacred Scripture as their source of inspiration;
  - b) make the celebration of the Eucharist the centre of their lives;
  - c) are assiduous in personal and community prayer;
  - d) share reciprocally their experiences of life and of faith;
  - e) live forgiveness and reconciliation as a pathway to permanent conversion (GS, Art. 23).
- “The specific spirituality of the Union is the following of Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. In faith and in charity the members of the Union are determined to remain united with the crucified and risen Christ ever present among them (cf. Mt. 18, 20); they strive to imitate his love for the Father and for all persons, seeking to live his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible (GS, Art. 19).
- “The members of the Union in communion with Mary, Queen of Apostles, commit themselves to prepare the way to Christ in the hearts of persons. Like the Apostles in the Cenacle they unite with her in prayer asking for the strength of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts. 1:13-14), to enable them to receive and to give the love that renews all things” (GS, Art. 20).

The formation in the Union is a deep spiritual and apostolic journey, leading to personal transformation. Jesus, Apostle of the Eternal Father, is the divine model of perfection and the only rule for our lives and apostolate. The contents of the formation will include common elements like the Word of God, Eucharist, Sacraments, faith-sharing, etc. The unique characteristic of the formation in the Union can be found in the Cenacle, as envisaged by our holy Founder. The Cenacle is a place of transformation of ordinary men and women into apostles of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and accompanied by Mary, Queen of the Apostles. The breaking of the Word and the Bread are essential elements of such a formation in the community of believers. Finally,

transformed and filled with the apostolic spirit, the members go out as missionaries to the reality of the world. Pallotti remains the inspiration and spiritual guide throughout this spiritual process. Following these general guidelines, programmes of formation are to be prepared, also taking into account the particular ecclesial and cultural situations of various countries.

My special thanks to Fr. Vijay Thomas and his collaborators for bringing out a Formation Manual for India. It is very well done and can certainly be improved with lived experiences. It is important that all the members of the Union have a certain prayer habit and prayers that are typically Pallottine. For example, the Prayer of Pallotti to Mary, Queen of the Apostles, is something that can bring about a common spirit and identity. The “infinity cross” of the Union can be another symbol that can create a common identity and spirituality. Fr. Antony Roswan had produced once a lot of such materials. The Pallotti Museum in Prabodhana and Pallotti Bhawan, the Cenacle grotto in Bilaspur and PAC, Nagpur, etc., are also excellent means to promote Pallottine formation. There are many more such examples.

## **2.5. Missionary Commitment: Go Forth to the Peripheries**

“The Union of Catholic Apostolate participates in the mission of the Church to reawaken faith and an awareness of the vocation to the apostolate, to rekindle charity among all the members of the People of God, so that they be ever more united in a commitment to spread charity...” (GS, Art. 12). The Statutes describe a great variety of apostolic and missionary activities that can be undertaken among the Catholics, with the Christians and in collaboration with people of good-will (GS, Art. 14-16). The important point is to enable all the members of the Union to engage in concrete apostolic and missionary activities, without which the Union can turn out to be an association of people only with pious desires and empty words. The common projects of charity undertaken by various National Coordination Councils like Poland and Australia are good examples for it.

The world is hungry spiritually, morally and physically. Let us realise that there is little time, energy and money for only meetings, conferences and discussions, without producing tangible spiritual and corporeal fruits. This is precisely one of the criticisms against the Union. People will feel frustrated and meaningless if they come together only for fellowship, without offering them challenging and concrete apostolic and missionary outlets. This is an area for further reflection and action.

In this regard, I would rate the Union activities in India as quite realistic and mission-oriented. The entire Union in India, including the Core Communities, is involved in a multitude of corporeal and spiritual acts of mercy. In a country like ours, the Union can never remain limited to mere conferences and pious desires. There are so many needy people all around us. Interreligious dialogue and the common search for peace and religious harmony are matters of great significance in the Indian context. Our numerous schools are run with a great sense of collaboration with all persons of good-will. India is the only country where we have even non-Christians as collaborators of the

Union. Here is the unique gift that the Union in India can give to entire world - to work with all persons of goodwill - in the common search for the Almighty and to promote genuine welfare of the human persons, created in God's own image and likeness, going beyond the barriers of caste, culture, language and religion. It means building up God's Kingdom here on earth.

This paper does not elaborate further the other structural elements of the Union like the functions and responsibilities of the Local, National and General Coordination Councils, the Assemblies, Congresses etc. Each structure has its own importance and the whole body of the Union will function well and bear fruits only when we pay attention to all of them. That is why we all together must make a concerted effort to make the Union as functional and fruitful as possible, always in service of the mission of the Church.

### **3. Towards Effective and Fruitful Future**

- a) The Union is the fruit of a spiritual journey of a saint and mystic, Vincent Pallotti, and hence the experience of the God of infinite love and mercy must be the aim and the starting point of a life in the spirit of the Union. The true and authentic disciples of Christ follow the same path of the Master, deeply rooted in the Paschal Mystery. God is and should be the source and foundation of the UAC.
- b) The focus of formation for members of the Union must be a deep understanding and experience of the spirituality of St. Vincent, leading to God experience. Hence, we must focus on the spirituality of Pallotti in the formation of members of the Union at all levels. The structural and organisational elements of the Union are important, no doubt, but we must not lose the spirit of the whole spiritual patrimony of Pallotti amidst our preoccupations with meetings and structural organisations.
- c) The Cenacle, as envisaged by St. Vincent Pallotti, contains all the elements - spiritual, apostolic, communitarian and pedagogical - for preparing a unique model of formation for members of the Union. Some members must make a serious study of this topic from the formation perspective for the good of the whole Pallottine Family.
- d) Each Union group needs to have concrete and realistic apostolic and missionary projects. The corporeal and spiritual acts of mercy must go hand in hand with the life and formation of UAC members.
- e) The three Communities founded by St. Vincent Pallotti - the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate and the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate - have the responsibility to promote unity and apostolic efficiency of the entire Union (GS, Art. 35). This means, we need to do everything possible to make our members aware of this special and added responsibility for the entire Union.
- f) The Rector General of the Society is the "guarantor of the fidelity to charism" within the Union; as Ecclesiastical Assistant, he is the "Spiritual Director" and

must ensure that all members of the Union make a spiritual journey and get adequate human, Pallottine and Christian formation.

- g) There is the need for close collaboration between the Presidents and the Major Superiors of the Core Communities at all levels. They must meet together periodically to assess and plan out the development of the Union.
- h) All the members must be taught to make financial contributions to the activities of the Union. This applies both to the Core Communities as well as to the lay members of the Union. It is not only a matter of money but also of correct formation. The Core Communities using the lay members for material gains or the lay members becoming members of the Union for material benefits can be greatly detrimental to the development of the Union. Material properties and money can become specially areas of misunderstanding and conflicts and hence they need to be carefully managed according to Church and civil laws.
- i) In addition to the many administrative concerns of the Union, it must be remembered that the Union is a spiritual and apostolic endeavour within the Church, in order to be and to form authentic apostles of Jesus Christ. Union or Communion is the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit. Hence wherever there is the presence of God, there will be Union and Communion and the spirit of charity. Hence in one sentence, there is nothing as important as being rooted in the God of infinite love and mercy. We all have to be focussed in following Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father, and making him the only rule for our life and apostolate.

I conclude with these strong and challenging words of St. Vincent: "Charity, exercised as the Apostle describes, gives form to all the substantial constitutive of the Pious Union; if this should be lacking, it will no longer be in itself, a Catholic Apostolate, therefore, woe or shame to him who although belonging to the Pious Union, tries to offend or sin against charity; but blessed is anyone who tries to protect it perfectly, because he will have the merit of his works, progress, and of all the evangelical works of the pious Union" (OOCC III, 134-137).

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