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**UAV ARAD INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL**  
**PHD PROGRAM "EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY"**

*An analysis of the image of Jesus in Islam from a  
Protestant-Evangelical Christian perspective.*

**Summary**

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## **MOTIVATION**

*An analysis of the image of Jesus in Islam from a Protestant-Evangelical Christian perspective* is a study relevant to any person interested in theology, regardless of its religion, but it is aimed especially at Christians and Muslims, Jesus being recognized within both religions as a very important person. This paper presents an analysis that does not intend to display a partisan spirit about Jesus in Christianity in relation to Jesus in Islam, but only an honest presentation of what each religion involved in our endeavor speaks through its primary or secondary sources about the person and work of Jesus.

Today the need to study this topic has arisen against the background of the growing migration of Muslim believers to Western Europe. The uniqueness of this theme derives from the reality that, at present, there are relatively few writings that address this subject in international theology and not at all in the Protestant-Evangelical theological literature in Romania. In the recent history of mankind, Islam has been in the spotlight through the attacks of September 2001, through all the acts of terrorism committed by the ORGANIZATION ISIS and not least through the uncontrolled spread of the Muslim population at European level. The wonder is very great for a Christian when he hears that Jesus is an important prophet for the faith of Muslims. Given that Islam is a minority

religion in Romania, this subject is insufficiently addressed and known by Christians. The foray into Muslim theology regarding Jesus according to the description in the Qur'an is analyzed from the perspective of Christian theology that is based on the Bible. In other words, we will try to observe where Islamic Christology resembles and differs from Christian Christology. Jesus in Islam aims to be a unique scientific approach in the Protestant-Evangelical theological environment in Romania, due to its major importance in inter-religious dialogue.

## **OBJECTIVE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK**

*Analyzing the image of Jesus in Islam from an evangelical Protestant Christian perspective* aims to discover who Jesus is beyond Christian horizons. As it is a duty of the Christian to carry on the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth, I consider it necessary to know Jesus as his person is described in other cultures and religions. The present work envisages the discovery of Jesus the Qur'an taking into account Christian Christology and to what extent it can be a bridge between Christianity and Islam with the aim of understanding the person of Jesus and fulfilling the Christian's mandate at the same time. This research is intended to be a **constructive, informative and pioneering** work both in the Christian academic environment and for Christian missionaries who are involved in the areas where Muslims live. We started from the

following working hypothesis: *the Islamic Jesus is not the same as the biblical Jesus*, from the desire to understand who Jesus is and in a culture other than the Christian one, we draw three other hypotheses:

- The Islamic Jesus is a reinterpreted Jesus in the light of his own Islamic revelation;
- The Islamic Jesus exhibits similarities and differences from the biblical Jesus;
- The Islamic Jesus is a good starting point in interreligious dialogue.

The theological research to be carried out will be essential to evangelization among Muslims, making an original contribution to the missiology in Romania. The analysis of Jesus in Islam is a necessary theological approach in the Romanian evangelical literature, given that there is currently no comparative christological study between Christianity and Islam of the proposed scale. It also adds to originality through the sources they research in order to reach a certain conclusion, which are written by both Christian theologians and Muslims who have approached Islamic christology.

## **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study starts from the idea that there is not a single image of Jesus in the world, but each religion emphasizes how it is perceived in the socio-cultural context in which the individual develops. Islam and Christianity offer two different perspectives of the same person—Jesus Christ. We set out to particularly discover Jesus as described in the Qur'an, taking into account Protestant Christian Christology in general and the way it is described in the Hadith. Methodologically, the present study manages to use the method of contextualization thus taking into account what the Quran says in the context of its appearance and to the persons to whom it addresses regarding the image of Jesus. In dialogue with the Christian perspective on Jesus we will consider one of the fundamental principles of this method, namely, we contextualize the message to where the truth of the gospel does not deform. If it is flawed, this work aims to signal these deviations from Christian Christology.

The method of approach is also one of a comparative nature, without trying to prove which Jesus is "better", the Islamic one or the biblical one. We will show what the Qur'an and Hadith are saying broadly about Jesus by examining how Islamic Christology is understood. We intend to compare those events or sayings of Jesus in the Qur'an that have an evangelical



correspondent and even with certain apocryphal Christian writings. Through this approach we will try to find out what are the external sources of the Islamic Christology with which Muhammad came into contact.

From a methodological point of view, four sources have shaped my scientific argument. The first is Geoffrey Parrinder's *Jesus in the Qur'an*, which I used with specific reference to the distinction between the image of Jesus in Islam and the image of Jesus in Christianity. This relationship is a well-constructed one described both in Islam's primary source, the Quran, and in the Islamic tradition, the Hadith. I believe that a clear delineation is needed for a more effective dialogue, which is why I presented the primary source about Jesus, then I presented the hermeneutics of Muslim theology regarding that title or event presented, and then, in another chapter, I analyzed and presented the Christian doctrine regarding what the Qur'an affirmed and interpreted by Christian theologians.

The second source I used to construct the scientific argument of this thesis is *The Muslim Jesus*, written by Tarif Khalidi, which I used to compile an image of Jesus from a specifically Islamic perspective. Tarif Khalidi's work *The Muslim Jesus* was used to provide an overview of Jesus in hadith. Tarif Khalidi takes passages from Islamic literature and tradition that he

places in chronological order, but also comments on them briefly, without trying to prove their veracity, however, trying to relate them with quotes from the Gospels or apocryphal writings. I started from Khalidi's way of presenting Jesus in the Islamic tradition, trying not to distort the Hadithic image of Jesus, but only to describe it as it appears. We have identified a Muslim Jesus present in society and even described in terms of his appearance, an aspect that Protestant-evangelical Christendom is wary of to some extent.

The third source used to reinforce the scientific argument is volume 3 of Carl F. H. Henry's series *God, Revelation and Authority*. I used this source in a predominantly dogmatic manner to outline a specifically Christian image of Jesus, especially as evidenced by the primary sources of Christianity, which the Protestant-Evangelical tradition considers to be the Holy Scripture. Carl F.H. Henry presents a Jesus faithful to Christian doctrine and in some situations even comes to counteract certain distorted images of Jesus within Christianity. His work is of real use in building the Christian position in the Islamo-Christian dialogue. Through it I investigated the Christian image of Jesus that I was able to contrast with the Muslim image (another distorted image of Jesus, but in a different religious context).

The fourth source of information used is the writing of baptist theologian Thomas R. Shreiner *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory*

*in Christ*. This source helps me in delineating the Christian argument about the image of Jesus in Christianity from the perspective of one of the apostles who wrote most of the epistles in the New Testament and who describes Jesus Christ and his importance in Christian thought and living. Schreiner emphasizes how important it is for first-century Christians, according to the writings of the apostle Paul, to be in Christ and with Christ Jesus. Schreiner's perspective on the apostle Paul is of real use in the parallel between Christian and Muslim thought because, both Paul and Muhammad, they did not meet with the incarnate Christ, but with the glorified one (Paul) and the one confessed in the Christian and Jewish community of the Arabian peninsula (Muhammad).

Another important and useful secondary source in the development of critical thinking on the theme is Corneliu C. Simuț *Critical Essays on Edward Schillebeekx's Theology*. The author critically approaches Schillebeekx's theology, but shows a form of respect for his writing and thinking, while expressing without a doubt his beliefs and position, perhaps totally different in some cases from Schillebeekx . From this work is outlined the way of approaching this subject, namely that it must be highlighted and supported with respect, without endangering the dignity of the religious concepts with which we are in dialogue, so the mentioned

work represents a good example to follow as a method of approach for the theme proposed in the present study. <sup>1</sup>

When interpreting a text, two ways of describing identity are necessary and available: external observation and internal self-definition. Butcher Marcel states that when it comes to *external observation, the definition of identity includes those characteristics of a group that can be observed from the outside*. It consists of landmarks of identity that delineate the specific characteristics, in this case religious, of the Arab world. *As an internal self-definition, the description of identity refers to how the members of the group define themselves.* <sup>2</sup> Consequently, we analyzed what is seen from the outside about the identity of Jesus in Islam and how Jesus defines himself in the Qur'an and in the Hadith, according to his sayings, the titles attributed to him and the miracles he performs.

*Analyzing the image of Jesus in Islam from a Christian perspective* tries to present the teaching of the Quran and the Islamic tradition about Jesus compared to the teachings of the Bible, where they intersect. Throughout Islamic history different attitudes have developed towards the person and work of Jesus (of respect,

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<sup>1</sup> Corneliu C. Simuț, *Critical Essays on Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology: From Theological Radicalism to Philosophical Non-Realism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel V. Măcelaru, *Identity between burden and privilege: representations of the holy people in deuteronomy literature* (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint, 2012), 17.

appreciation, or unbelief to the reality of His death and resurrection). As we will see, some are taken from the Qur'an, others from hadith and comments to them. Each of the parties involved in this dialogue defends their own Jesus from their own sources, the important thing being that they do not have the purpose of denigrating each other, but only of explaining exactly what each one thinks when they say something about Jesus and his person.

Another perspective on this material is that of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva defines the concept of intertextuality as the transposition of one or more sign systems into one another. I personally find this method of approach effective in interreligious literary dialogue. In studying a certain concept, in this case the person of Jesus, it is necessary to pay great attention to its meaning and function in the two contexts in which it appears, both coranic and biblical. This intertextualization incites a dialogue that respects the position and dignity of each party, even if studied in depth and put into context the christological meanings present the risk of revealing intentions partially or completely hidden in the presentation of either party.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in poetic language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 59.

## **Structure by chapter**

The first part is devoted to methodological considerations and reviewing the literature relevant to the subject (and to which we have already referred in the previous section), so that the ground is prepared for the analysis itself.

**In the first chapter** we referred to 4 major aspects:

1. The identity of Jesus in Islam
2. The name of Jesus in the Qur'an
3. Titles attributed to Jesus in the Qur'an
4. The Miracles Of Jesus

I noticed that in the Qur'an Jesus is not of a divine nature, as he is in Christianity, but he is a devout man, worthy of respect, and as far as his mission is concerned, this is a very clear one – he came to announce the coming of another greater and more important than him, Muhammad. As for his death, from the Qur'an perspective, Jesus did not die on the cross, or even did not die at all, let's talk about his redemptive death that there is no word about in the Qur'an discourse. The proper name of Jesus in the Qur'an is 'Īsā which is used in a strictly personal sense, without any explanation. The shape of the name has given rise to considerable commentary, but still there is the general admonition that 'Īsā comes from the Syriac Yeshū which derives from the Jewish Yeshua. Some Western

writers, such as Parrinder, thought that the modification of the final vowel was influenced by the analogy of Mūsā, the Arabic name for Moses. As for the titles, they were classified in relation to the specifics of his Quranic description: <sup>4</sup>*from the point of view of his position, his spirituality and the relationships that Jesus had in society*. Nothing in his title leads to a form of divinity but only to his ministry as the Messiah, chosen to bring as a prophet the message of Allah, and his special piety among men. He is a prophet, even a very important one, but no more important than Muhammad, who bears prophetic seal. The miracles performed by Jesus we have divided into two major categories: <sup>5</sup>*Jesus as the subject of the miracle and Jesus as the object of the miracle*. Tarif Khalidi makes the following observation regarding the Quranic miracles compared to the biblical ones, namely in the Qur'an all miracles go to the past, to the moment of Jesus' birth, and those in the Bible all lead to his sufferings. The Qur'an miracles have different New Testament correspondences (the multiplication of loaves of bread) or are found only in certain Christian apocryphal writings (the making of clay birds). All demonstrate the special role of Jesus in Islam, even the

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<sup>4</sup> Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 287.

leading place among Islamic prophets, but none leads to show the divinity of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

**The second chapter** addresses the person and the work of Jesus Christ as it is seen and interpreted within Christianity in general, the New Testament Christology, the titles and wonders that the primary source of Christianity presents about him. the work and nature of Jesus Christ, the One who represents for Christianity the "cornerstone" and on which the salvation of the fallen human being according to the Christian faith is based. Christian thinking on Christology is a complex and mystical one at the same time. Alister McGrath believes that for Christians Jesus is the most important person because (1) from him historically starts the existence of Christianity as a religion, (2) through him God makes himself revealed, (3) he is the bearer and doer of the salvation of all people, and (4) he is the supreme example for living the Christian life. One of the first controversies within Christianity about Jesus and his person took place at the Council of Nicaea. Here was established a very important element pronounced by the church and which was never given up: Jesus is <sup>78</sup>*homousios* (of the same substance as the

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<sup>6</sup> Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> David Mathis, *Rich Wounds: The Countless Treasures of the Life, Death, and Triumph of Jesus* (South West London: Good Book Company, 2022), 84.

<sup>8</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016) 208-9.



Father), thus showing that he is not only human but also God<sup>9</sup>. I begun the observation of Jesus with His *incarnation* , *kenosis* and *deification*.

For Christians, christology is that *loghia* that explains Jesus Christ from all points of view, basically reveals God through all that He is and does. One fact that gives implicit authority to Jesus is that he is the Son of God, an incomprehensible aspect in Islamism, which is why from the perspective of this title, which does not appear in the Qur'an, but is presented in the New Testament, we will demonstrate the divine identity of Jesus – if He is the Son of God then his authority is undeniable in every way. The Muslim interpretation is different about this claim of Jesus to be the "Son of God". There are many passages in the Qur'an that deny that God has descendants. Probably the most famous passage is Sura 112 – Unity – <sup>10</sup>al-Ikhlāṣ: Where the Quran says: "He is God, One; The eternal God; he did not bring forward, neither was he brought forward; Equal to him was never anyone." They are interpretations overlooking the phrase *Son of God* as the result of a physical

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard L. Ramm, *An Evangelical Christology: Ecumenic and Historic* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1993), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Gerard H. Luttenberger, *An Introduction to Christology: In the New Testament and Early Church* (New York: CreateSpace Independent Publisher, 2012), 36-9.

relationship<sup>11</sup>. In support of this misunderstanding, Muslims appeal to Sura 19.35/36, which says: "It is not proper for God to give birth to a son. His greatness! If he decides one thing, he says 'To be' and it is." Here there is a clear differentiation between Christianity and Islam, as we will see, for Christians the title of <sup>12</sup>*son of God* is the capital being part of Christian christology. But I didn't stick to that title.

In addition to this specific title of Jesus in Christianity, we have placed in the mirror those titles and wonders that are found in the Qur'an to analyze their significance in the Protestant-evangelical context. I presented Pauline Christology separately because both Paul and Muhammad did not meet with Jesus incarnate but with the glorified one, and I saw a Christ in Pauline theology more than a Jesus. The conclusion was that in Christianity Jesus is the Christ, he is 100% God and 100% man.

**In chapter 3** we continued the analysis on Hadith following the same steps. The Quran itself as a revelation (*wahi*) does not tell us a story of Muhammad's life. Some passages in the Qur'an refer to Muhammad as the ideal Muslim, to be followed by

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<sup>11</sup> Leander E. Keck, *Why Christ Matters: Toward a New Testament Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 65.

<sup>12</sup> David M. Freidenreich, *Jewish Muslims: How Christians Imagined Islam as the Enemy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2023), 76.

other believers (6:161-163, 39:11-12). Consequently, the need arose to remember Muhammad's life, his actions and words, in order to delineate the Sunna (the path) to be followed in order to imitate the ideal Muslim. The technical term for the collection of extra-Qur'an sayings and actions is called Hadith. This is the second basic source, after the Qur'an, that regulates how a Muslim should live. In Muslim history it is noted that in the viii century d.Hr. they were the only sources of authority in Islamic society.<sup>1314</sup>

In the Hadith collection the references are not normally attributed to Christ – al-masih, but to Jesus – Isa. In Bukhari's hadith, most references to Isa are found in the book of Kitab al- anbiya (The Prophet), but he refers to Isa and many of his other writings. In the writings of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, reference is made to the so-called merits of Jesus Christ that can be found in Kitab al-fada-il (the Book of Merits of the Holy Prophet and his companions) as well as in Kitab al-fitan wa-artat al-saa (The Book of The Troubles and

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<sup>13</sup> William A. Graham, „The Study of the Hadith in Modern Academics: Past, Present and Future,” in *The Place of Hadith in Islam: Proceedings of the Seminar on Hadith to Celebrate the 1200th Anniversary of the Great Muhaddith Imam Bukhari*, ed. Muslim Students' Association of the United States & Canada (Takoma Park, MD: International Graphics Printing Service, 1977), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 33.

Forebodings of the Last Hour). <sup>15</sup>Studying the Quran and the Hadith traditions, I could see that Jesus is assigned many names and titles, such as: Son of Mary, al-Masīh (Messiah), 'Īsā, Abdullah (Servant of God), Rasulullah (Messenger of God), Kalimatullah (Word of the Lord) and Ruhullah (Spirit of the Lord). While 'Īsā, al-Masīh and The Son of Mary are considered names, all others are rendered as attributes. Although in the Qur'an Jesus has the most famous title, Islamic theology insists that he was but a man whom God chose as a prophet. Even though Muslims and Christians agree with most of the names and qualities of the Lord Jesus, historically and theologically a line of demarcation is clearly seen between the two religions. <sup>16</sup>

## **SCIENTIFIC CONCLUSIONS**

The Islamic view of Jesus is clear - there is an insurmountable theological gulf between Christianity and Islam. No religion can be merged into the other. The Qur'an and hadith have some specific objections to Christianity. Given the Islamic teachings about Jesus' relationship with God and human beings, the denial of his crucifixion and resurrection, and the total rejection of the Trinity,

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<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith* (Leicestershire, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2014), 34.

<sup>16</sup> E. M. Wherry, „Christ Superior to Mohammed: Fourteen Reasons from the Koran,” *The Muslim World* 9, nr. 3 (1918), 21.

Muslims and Christians must understand that any interreligious relationship will be limited.<sup>17</sup>

There are some Christians who consider themselves the only ones whom God will save. For these Christians, Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and bodily exalted to heaven and became the only way to salvation. They argue that God is known only through Jesus. According to this position, other religions do not have the power to bring salvation to people, although they contain something good in them. They come to the conclusion that interreligious dialogue has absolutely no value, because no religion other than Christianity has any true message. Instead, they are convinced that any interreligious conversation is undertaken with the aim of converting others to Christianity<sup>18</sup>.

As has been shown, Christianity and Islam are and will remain two different religions. However, any interreligious dialogue and cooperation is mandatory to engage in the contrasting views of Jesus held by Christians and Muslims. According to Walter Wagner, one area that Christians and Muslims can explore together is the spirituality attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, the Qur'an, and the Hadith. The Muslim view of Jesus' focus on spiritual depth, mercy,

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<sup>17</sup> Larson, *Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 215-226.

<sup>18</sup> Fatih Harpci, *Gülen's Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue* (Somerset, NJ: Tughra Books, 2013), 1-10.

and compassion, as well as the end of this world and the beginning of the Afterlife, have good prospects for Christians. They can help them revise the New Testament and then review programs and structures.<sup>19</sup>

It is also important for Muslims to recognize that the other 23 books of the New Testament, especially Paul's letters, Acts, and Revelation to John, can determine how the Gospels are interpreted. Moreover, the struggles in the New Testament were with the Jews and believers of Jesus who wanted to preserve Jewish practices. Those who believed in Jesus had no idea that there would be another religion that would accept Jesus to some extent and have another prophet-messenger. As we have seen, the doctrine of the unity and oneness of God is vital to the Muslim religion, that anything that may seem to weaken it is undoubtedly rejected. This is what, Robson writes, sometimes makes it very difficult to converse with Muslims, "for Christians and Muslims do not understand the same things by the terms they use." Basically they use the same language but give it a completely different nuance and interpretation.

Another major struggle is that the Hadith and the Quran "do not always match the New Testament." For a Muslim, this simply means that the carelessness of Christians has led them to modify or

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<sup>19</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'ān*, 336.

corrupt their Holy Scripture. So Islam persists in giving us a very different picture of Jesus than the one we find in the New Testament. Today, although many Muslims are not prepared to believe in all the accounts of Jesus that are found in the Bible, they still claim that Jesus was a messenger and deny his death and resurrection, which means everything to Christian theology.<sup>20</sup>

So we can say, for Muslims, Jesus is the latest messenger of the people of Israel. *His Injīl* (Gospel) proclaims *the Tawhid* (The Oneness of God) with a special emphasis on spiritual matters such as divine mercy and compassion. From their statements it follows without a doubt that Jesus is totally man without divine essence. He is, however, alive in God's heavens, and his return is a sign of the Impending Day of Judgment. And for Christians, Jesus is God incarnate who came to take away the sin of the world, was crucified, rose again the third day according to the Scriptures and then ascended into heaven, where he intercedes for all who believe.

### **POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH**

I personally saw this theological foray resembling a sea departure by boat in which I let the best wind guide me and no wave to stop me. The destination was to *analyze the image of Jesus in Islam from a Protestant-evangelical Christian perspective* as

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<sup>20</sup> Robson, „Muhammedan Teaching about Jews,” 54.

generally presented by the Qur'an and Hadith. The trip was one that contributed to my understanding of who Jesus is to Muslim believers, in contrast to Christian teaching. Many titles and events are strikingly similar at first glance, but if analyzed thoroughly one can see a colossal difference in understanding, as far as I could see, devoid of any divinity in Islam and divinized in Christianity.

The journey should not stop there, there is still much to discuss, dispute and analyze about Jesus in Islam. I think it requires an analysis of Jesus' utterances in the Qur'an, in the events that are also found in the New Testament, which will lead to an understanding not only of the person, such as the present study, but also of the message of Jesus in the Qur'an, and to what extent there is a logical correlation between what Jesus says and does in the Qur'an. this study can be contrasted with the understanding of Christian Jesus.

Another direction in which one can go is about future events. Muslim eschatology, like Christian eschatology, affirms a return of Jesus. Both Christianity and Islam believe in a future judgment. The road can continue with a parallel between the Muslim tradition and the Christian tradition, two sources of information very important for both Islamism and Christianity, by analyzing what each one tells about what Jesus does and says in the two traditions and to what extent the stories are authentic.



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