

The Church of God



This article consists of the two forewords and the first chapter of a book written in 1941 entitled, "[Our Priceless Heritage Christian Doctrine In Contrast With Romanism](#)" by Henry M. Woods, D.D, LL.D. I've been skipping around the book and posting the chapters I think are important for all Christians to know. Chapter I is important because it teaches the true biblical meaning of the word, *Church*. I told one of my friends once that he can define Church far better than the pope can.

DEDICATION

of the First Edition

TO PROTESTANT STUDENTS EVERYWHERE, THE FUTURE LEADERS

OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

"The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God." –I Tim. 1:11.

'The Word of Truth, the Gospel of Your Salvation.–Ephesians 1:13.

"If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." "If the SON therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." –John 8:31, 32, 36.

"Sanctify the LORD GOD in your hearts; and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."– I Peter 3:15.

Foreword TO THE FIRST EDITION

THERE are many urgent reasons why the great doctrines of the Christian faith, as set forth in Holy Scripture and re-affirmed at the Reformation, in contrast to the errors of Romanism, should be proclaimed, and their truthfulness and reasonableness be made plain.

It is most regrettable to see the woeful ignorance which prevails, even among intelligent Protestants, regarding the grounds of our faith and the grave errors of Romanism. Romanists are drilled from childhood in the rudiments of their creed, and can give some reasons for their belief. Both belief and

reasons may be far from valid—but can the average Protestant do as much for the Truth?

The Church of Rome carries on an incessant propaganda to draw Protestants away from the true faith. Five recent cases came to the writer's mind, in which the usual appeal for "Mother Church," the showy ritual, and attractive music were much in evidence. Rome shrewdly calculates that if Protestants are not actually won as converts, *favorable impressions may be made which will blind them to the irreconcilable antagonism between papal error and Scripture truth*, and thus at least active opposition may be disarmed. The writer recalls the conversion of two wealthy Protestant sisters to Romanism, who gave a large sum of money to found a Romanist institution in Washington, D. C., but were soon disillusioned by discovering the painful discrepancy between profession and practice which they found in the Roman Communion. They *returned to their Protestant faith, though their wealth did not return with them!* "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird!"

At the present time Protestants need to be specially alert, because the three most powerful agencies which mold public opinion are largely under Romanist influence, viz.: the secular press, motion pictures, and radio broadcast. The pope is allowed to broadcast Romanist propaganda to the world, even attempting to justify the gross medieval superstition of Indulgences. But no Protestant leader would be allowed equal opportunity to state the truth in reply, for that would be called "controversial," and "intolerant!"

This book is written in no unkind spirit, for the author has had warm friends among Roman Catholics. It is written with the sole desire to tell the truth, and to warn Protestants of a real danger, a danger to true religion, and a danger to free government; for genuine allegiance to a foreign prince, as the pope claims to be, is inconsistent with wholehearted allegiance to one's government. Young people especially need to be put on their guard, and no mistaken notion of charity should lead one to remain silent, when the welfare of the Christian Church and free Government are at stake.

Christians should be more active in spreading the truth, and in circulating attractive Protestant literature. Fox's Book of Martyrs, and the glorious history of heroic Protestants who died for the faith, like the Huguenots and Covenanters, should be in every home and Sunday School Library; and prizes should be offered to encourage children to read such books and to write short accounts of what they have read. Never for economy's sake, or for any other reason, send children to Romanist schools. *Mixed marriages should be earnestly opposed*, for in most cases they will destroy the happiness of the home. Truly "perpetual vigilance is the price of Liberty!"

"WATCH YE, STAND FAST IN THE FAITH, QUIT YOU LIKE MEN, BE STRONG! AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST!"

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is truly remarked that the great enemies of the Christian Faith are *not outside*, but *inside* the camp, viz.: Indifference and Lack of Vigilance. On all sides there is much discussion of Fascism, Nazism and Communism, while

the most subtle enemy of all, dangerous to the soul's salvation, and dangerous to civil and religious liberty, is entirely overlooked. Why the most dangerous? Because the Papal Church is well-organized, well-advertised, and is such an adroit *counterfeit* of Christianity, that the casual observer fails to detect it! What is said of bank notes is true of religion, *the more skillful the counterfeit, the more dangerous it is!*

It is a matter for deep regret that during the past year overtures looking toward diplomatic relations with the Vatican have been made—said to be personal only—though the membership of the Papal Church is only about one-fifth of the population of the United States, or less, if the Church's mode of counting members be taken into account.

Inasmuch as this proposal, while well-meant, is not in accord with the wisdom of our forefathers, who rightly discouraged special favors or privileges to any religious organization, and thus may not be promotive of harmony and the welfare of the Republic, it is earnestly hoped that, in accordance with the sentiments of the large majority of American citizens, further overtures may be discontinued; especially is this important, as the Roman See has openly expressed sympathy with Totalitarian influences in Europe.

Therefore the warning of our First Edition may well be repeated:

AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST! WATCH YE, STAND FAST IN THE FAITH, QUIT YOU LIKE
MEN, BE STRONG!

Chapter I The Church of God

What is the true Church of God?

The true Church of God is that divinely established society among men, which worships the Holy Trinity alone; which trusts the atoning death and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; the Holy Spirit as Guide, Sanctifier, and Comforter; the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its sole rule of faith; and which proclaims the Gospel of God's free grace to all mankind.

The Church visible and invisible

The Church is often referred to as Visible and Invisible. What is meant by these terms?

The Visible Church is the organized society on earth of those who profess the true Gospel, together with their children. It is also called the Kingdom of Christ, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the family of God on earth. Eph. 5:5, Eph. 3:15, II Peter 1:11, Acts 2:39, 3:25, Westminster Confession of Faith XXV, 2. The Invisible Church consists of the whole body of the saved in every land and of every age, including the redeemed in heaven and all true believers on earth. Col. 1:13, Eph. 3:15, Confession of Faith XXV, 2.

Why is it necessary to distinguish between the Visible and the Invisible

Church?

Because the Word of God, though not using these terms, distinguishes between them; and because the Visible Church also contains many who profess faith in Christ who are not truly His; they show by their lives that they have never been "born again," and therefore are not saved. Matt. 7: 21-23, 25:12, 44-46, John 3:3, 5, Heb. 10: 25-29.

Does the Church of Rome distinguish between the Visible and Invisible Church?

The Church of Rome does not make this necessary distinction, because it holds a mistaken, mechanical theory of salvation; as if all who submit to the pope, receive the sacraments, and conform to the outward rites of the Church are thereby saved. They fail to grasp the all-important teaching of God's Word, that mere outward conformity to any Church cannot save, but that only through faith in the living Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, man must become "a new creature," bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. These fruits the Scriptures declare are necessary for salvation, not as the ground, but as the evidence of it. See Bellarmine on the Sacraments: Luke 6:46, 13:9-25, James 1:22, Eph. 2:10.

Why should all true Christians love, honor and unite with the Church of God?

Because the Church, unlike all other societies in the world, was established by God, not by man. He purchased it with His own precious blood. By uniting with the Church, believers confess Him before men; and because the Church is God's agency for the spread of His saving truth, for the conversion of perishing sinners, and for the instruction, sanctification and comforting of believers. Matt. 10:32, Acts 20:28, II Thess. 2:16, 17, I Tim. 2:15.

Can the Church save men?

No, the Church, its ordinances, sacraments and ministry, though highly important, cannot save men. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can save. Sinners must come in faith, and repentance to Him alone, to receive forgiveness, "the new heart," and eternal life. John 14: 6, Acts 4:12, Ezek. 36:26, John 3:16, 36.

The Marks or the Church; not infallible; not perfectly holy

Is the Church of God on earth Infallible?

No. The Church is not infallible, nor is it perfectly holy; because its members, while sincere, are yet sinful, erring men. *Only Christ* its Lord and Saviour is infallible and holy; but at last the Church will be perfectly holy, for Christ will present it before the Father's throne "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Eph. 6:27.

What grave error does the Church of Rome teach concerning infallibility?

It teaches that the Church is infallible; by Church generally meaning the pope. Bellarmine *de Eccles.* 3, 14, *De Rom. Pontif.* 4:4.

Having no sure Scriptural anchorage, the Roman Church has drifted about in

perplexity, now affirming that infallibility resides in one place, now in another. The Jesuit writer Schrader speaks of the disputed question whether "the pope in his own person is infallible in matters of faith, or whether he can claim infallibility only at the head of a Council." (Krueger 237.) For nearly two hundred years the Roman Catholic bishops, clergy and laity of England and Ireland *denied* that the *infallibility of the pope and his claim to temporal power over civil governments were doctrines of the Church*.¹ Keenan's Catechism went so far as to call this dogma "a Protestant invention," insisting, "It is no article of Catholic faith!" Trusting to this assurance of Roman Church leaders, the British Government granted political rights to Romanists.

¹ Commenting on the solemn assurance, repeatedly given by Roman Catholic bishops and laity, that the temporal power and infallibility of the pope were not doctrines of the Roman Church, that eminent authority, the Honorable William E. Gladstone wrote: "Either the See and Court of Rome had abandoned the dream of enforcing infallibility on the Church, or else by willful silence they were guilty of practicing on the British Crown one of the blackest frauds ever recorded in history."

Attempting to bolster the pope's usurpation of the position which belongs only to the Lord Jesus Christ, it has been alleged that there is need of "an infallible living voice" to interpret Scripture, and decide what is the truth. But there is no need of an infallible human voice, because all true believers have Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit to "guide them into all truth." John 16:13. That there is no need of "an infallible living voice" is proved from the history of the Jewish Church, to whom God gave a revelation 1500 years before Christ, yet they had no "infallible living voice" to keep them from error in interpreting the Old Testament. As they did not have Christ's teaching and example, nor the fullness of the Spirit in the Jewish Church, they needed such an infallible guide much more than Christians do now." Littledelela, page 162.

The Church or God indestructible

Will the Church of God ever perish?

The true Church can *never perish*, but at last will surely triumph over all obstacles and foes, because it is founded on Christ, the Rock of Ages, who has "all power in heaven and in earth," and has declared that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matt. 16:18, 28:18, Dan. 2:44.

The Church Apostolic

Is the true Church of God apostolic?

It is; because the doctrines of the Reformed or Protestant Church are the same as those taught by *Christ and His apostles*, all of which were given by God in the *Holy Scriptures*.

The Church of God Universal

Is not the true Church also universal or catholic?

It is; because all mankind being lost sinners, the Gospel of salvation¹ is

provided for the whole human race. Our Lord's command was universal, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature"; "make disciples of all nations." Obeying this command of our crucified and risen Lord, His faithful followers are publishing the glad tidings of redemption and establishing His Church in every land. Matt. 28: 18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24: 46-48.

¹ Only the Gospel of Christ can save men. There is no other way. Heathen religions and human philosophy, while they may contain some good, cannot save men. Teaching as they do the worship of false gods, men and devils, and providing no redemption from sin, they lead men away from God and righteousness, and deceive with false hopes. Acts 4:12, I Cor. 1:21, 28, 24, 10:20.

To whom does the name "Catholic" rightly belong?

The name Catholic² rightly belongs to that body which obeys God's Word and has carefully kept the apostolic faith; The Church which does this is the Reformed or Protestant Church. The Roman Church desires to appropriate this name, but because it dishonors the Word of God in many important respects, and has departed far from the doctrines delivered by the Saviour, it has forfeited all right to be called Catholic and Apostolic.

² Concerning Catholicity as a mark of the true Church, St. Chrysostom says: "That may not be considered Catholic which appears to be contrary to the statements of Scripture." Hom. de Adam et Eva. St. Augustine declares, "Faith in Scripture is the most catholic mark of all." Sermon XIV, De verb. Apost.

The Jesuit Véron, in his Rule of Catholic Faith, Paris 1645, lays down as a test of Catholicity, that is, to make any doctrine Catholic or binding on the consciences of Christians, it must be: 1. revealed in the Word of God. 2. proposed to the faithful by the whole church. Note that *not one of the papal doctrines*, like the worship of Mary, saints and angels, the Mass, Transubstantiation, Purgatory, papal Indulgences, human merit, holy water, forgiveness of sins by a priest, etc., etc., *can stand this test!*

The Seat of Authority

Is the seat of authority, as the Church of Rome teaches, in the Church? That is, should believers accept as final and binding what a Church, or its human leader, declares to be the truth?

Not at all. The seat of authority which binds the consciences of men, is not in any Church or man, but only in the Sacred Scriptures, the Word of God,¹ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures being "the Very Word of God," infallibly reveal God's will to men, and they alone are binding on the conscience.

¹ At the opposite extreme from the blind submission to human authority of the Papacy, lies the equally dangerous error of rationalism or Modernism, which makes reason and experience the supreme arbiter and guide in religion. But reason and experience by themselves are untrustworthy guides, for they spring from our sinful nature and cannot escape the warping effect of ignorance, desire and prejudice. Though opposite extremes, Romanism and rationalism meet on common ground; Romanism bowing to a pope as supreme authority; rationalism making Self the supreme authority. Thus both are forms of Humanism, exalting man instead of God. Between these extremes lies the truth; the Protestant faith of Holy

Scripture, allowing a proper use of reason and of all human faculties, but *controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.*

If the Church is not the seat of authority in religion, what is the meaning of the Scripture, "The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth?"

This Scripture means that it is the duty and privilege of the Church of God faithfully to *proclaim, preserve, defend and transmit, God's Holy Word and the saving Gospel it reveals.* It does not mean that the truth derives its authority from the Church, nor that the Bible and its saving doctrines are true because a pope or Church Council declares them to be true; they are true because they are revealed by the God of truth, and partaking of His nature, they will stand forever. Psalm 19:7-9, 119:89, 142, 160, John 5:39, 17:17.

The Roman Church inconsistent

Are not our Romanist friends when discussing authority guilty of reasoning in "a vicious circle?"

They are guilty of this error. Like a squirrel revolving in his cage, they try to prove the Church by the Bible, and the Bible by the Church!

The Protestant Doctrine true and consistent

Is not the Protestant doctrine concerning the seat of authority true and consistent?

The Protestant doctrine concerning the seat of authority is undoubtedly true and consistent. It declares that the Holy Scriptures are not dependent for their authority on the witness and sanction of a Church, but are self evidencing to the reason and conscience of men. Their infallible truth and divine authority are directly impressed upon the heart of the believer by their Author, the Spirit of truth, who bears witness by and with the Word. John 16:13, 14, I Cor. 2:10, 11, Confession of Faith I, 1, 4-8.

Does not history show that the Church of Rome at different times has wavered and shifted her position concerning the seat of authority?

Papal writers show that the Roman Church has shifted its position regarding the seat of authority. At one time it held that authority resided in the Church Councils. Three Councils that of Pisa in 1409, of Constance, 1415, and that of Basle, 1432, decreed that "even the pope is bound to obey the Councils." At another time the Church held that authority resided in the Councils together with the pope. At still another time that it resided in the pope alone.¹This opinion was finally decided upon in 1870, when, as a last hope of bolstering the tottering chair of the papacy, the Vatican Council declared Pius IX infallible, against the strong opposition and greatly to the distress of many of his ablest followers. It may well be asked, which pronouncement is "infallible?"

¹It would be difficult to find a dogma less accordant with Holy Scripture and reason than papal infallibility. Does calling a mendicant a millionaire make him a millionaire? Neither

does declaring an erring and fallible man infallible make him infallible. And how is he made infallible? By being chosen by and from among, a body of fallible men! The Emperor Ferdinand I discussing this point once said with perfect truth—"As the cardinals are not good, how can they choose a good pope?" Ranke, *History of the Popes*, Vol. 1, page 208. The testimony of pope Adrian VI ought to settle the fiction of infallibility. After confessing that the root of all evils in the Roman Church was found in the priesthood and in the pope, he declared, "it is certain that the pope can err, even in matters of faith, asserting heresies in his decrees; for many of the Roman pontiffs were heretics." *Dictates on the 4th Book of Sentences*.

Bishop Strossmayer in the Vatican Council of 1870 strongly opposed the dogma of infallibility, pointing out the many contradictions by popes of their own deliverances and those of other popes. He said, "I should never finish my speech, venerable brethren, if I were to put before your eyes the contradictions of popes in their teachings. If you decree the infallibility of the present bishop of Rome, you must also decree the infallibility of all preceding popes."

The Creed of Pius IV that the Roman Church is the "Mother and Mistress of all Churches" is clearly untrue. The New Testament declares that the Church at Jerusalem was the first Christian Church organized on earth. (Acts 1:4, 2:41-47.) The second Church was founded at Samaria (Acts 8:14) and the first Gentile Church was established at Antioch (Acts 11:20). It was from Jerusalem and Antioch that the Gospel first came to Rome, a good while later. In the early Church the highest officials of the Eastern branch were called Patriarchs, the three chief Patriarchates being those of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople, which later numbered 80 million Christians. The Eastern or Greek Church, the official title of which is the Catholic Orthodox Eastern Church, has always repudiated the claims of Rome. It later became the established Church of the Russian Empire.

The True Church of God is one

Did the Lord Jesus Christ teach the unity of all believers—that His true Church is one?

Our Lord clearly taught the unity of all true believers. In His last intercessory prayer before His crucifixion the Saviour prayed, "That they all may be one." John 17:21, 23.

Was this unity for which our Saviour prayed an external unity, a oneness of ecclesiastical organization?

Not at all. Just here is where the Roman Church errs. The unity for which our Lord prayed was a spiritual unity, a oneness of heart, of faith, love and obedience to Him.

What Scripture proves that this unity was spiritual, and not of ecclesiastical organization?

The same intercessory prayer proves it; "that they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee." The oneness of Christ and the Father was not an external, visible oneness, but an *invisible, spiritual oneness*.

Did the apostles, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teach the same invisible, spiritual unity?

They did. St. Paul exhorted believers to “keep *the unity of the Spirit*.” This spiritual union of believers is based on their spiritual union with Christ. “Christ dwelling in your hearts by faith.” “Rooted and built up in Him.” “One body and one Spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism (of the Holy Spirit).” There is no hint of external, ecclesiastical unity, but only of unity of the Spirit, the unity of the Father and the Son, the unity of the believer with His Lord, the unity of all true believers in Christ, dwelt and guided by one Holy Spirit. Eph. 4:3-6, Col. 2:7.

Does the papal conception of an external, visible oneness of Church organization, submitting to absolute authority of a pope, agree with the true Scripture doctrine of spiritual unity in Christ?

No. The Church of Rome’s dogma of unity, that is, of visible oneness in one Church organization is wholly different from that of Scripture; for there may be oneness of external organization, without real spiritual unity; and there may be, and actually is, real spiritual unity without oneness of organization.

Not perceiving this important fact, does not the Papal body often wrongly accuse the Protestant Church of schism, of dividing the body of Christ?

Yes; but this accusation is wholly groundless. For in spite of different external organizations, there is a real and growing unity of spirit among Protestant bodies, both in the Homeland and on Foreign Mission fields.

The Protestant Church in Essentials Is One

Do the differences of belief or practice among Protestant bodies concern essential or non-essential doctrines?

The differences in belief or practice of Protestant denominations concern *non-essentials only*. Regarding the great vital doctrines of Christian faith, like the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the deity and atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross, His resurrection, and coming again in glory; the work of the Holy Spirit; salvation not by works in any degree, but only by the righteousness of Christ; the Bible doctrine of heaven and hell, with no intermediate Purgatory, and no delusive masses for the dead; in these and other doctrines, the Reformed or Protestant Church is One. Denominational distinctions are like the differences in the various branches of service in an army; infantry, cavalry, artillery, air service, each has its own organization, its uniform, badge, and equipment, yet all are *truly one*.

Examples of true unity

What examples of true spiritual unity may be seen in the Protestant Church?

The various declarations of Christian faith, like the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, and those of the

Methodist and Baptist denominations, are all essentially the same. In practice, there is an increasing cordiality and sympathy between pastors and congregations of different denominations; the transfer of members from one denomination to another; a brotherly exchange of pulpits; union evangelistic services; joint Communion of the Lord's Supper; and hearty cooperation in the work of Bible, Tract, and Temperance societies, and in charitable welfare service.

What examples of the true spiritual unity of the Protestant Church are found in the Foreign Missionary fields?

Protestant missionaries in China, Africa, South America, and other lands are closely drawn together not only in preaching services, but also in famine-relief and medical work, and all forms of cooperative endeavor. Protestants thus form a striking contrast to Roman Catholic Missions in China. In earlier times there unfortunately existed such a spirit of jealousy and strife among the various ecclesiastical Orders of the Church of Rome, as the Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, etc., that the pope was compelled to separate them, assigning a different province to each Order! No such lack of concord has ever existed among Protestant bodies. Though belonging to different societies, Protestant missionaries have uniformly shown an admirably fraternal spirit toward fellow workers of other denominations, because they feel that all are truly one in Christ. Gal. 3: 28.

Unity in Diversity

Is not the unity in diversity, which is taught in Holy Scripture, clearly seen in the Reformed or Protestant Church?

Protestant unity is clearly taught in Holy Scripture, and is a part of that precious "liberty wherewith Christ hath made His people free." Gal. 5:1. This liberty consists of oneness in essentials and a reasonable latitude in non-essentials. St. Paul illustrates this by the human body, which has many members each differing from the other, and each having its own special function, as the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot; yet all sympathizing and cooperating, and together constituting one living organism. Variety of members so far from hindering the action of the body, really helps it, and makes it more useful. So, says the apostle, with the Church of God and its members. God in His wisdom has bestowed on different groups of men various gifts of thought, character, education, etc. These various gifts He allows to have play within reasonable limits, so that each denomination contributes something which the others do not possess, and the sum total brings to all variety and enrichment of Christian faith and service. Variety in the branches of the Church no more militates against true spiritual unity than variety in the members of the human body militates against the oneness and efficiency of that body. While it is acknowledged that the principle of unity in diversity has been abused by the forming of needless subdivisions of the great branches of the Church, the rightness or value of the principle is not thereby disproved; for what good gift of God has poor, erring humanity not abused? Rom. 12:4-8, I Cor. 12:4-21.

How else may the true unity of Holy Scripture, as contrasted with the Church

of Rome's mistaken conception of oneness of ecclesiastical organization, be illustrated?

According to Scripture, the unity of the Protestant Church is that of a living organism, Christ being its Head and Life. Col. 3:4. The unity of ecclesiastical organization, as found in the Roman Catholic body, is mechanical and forced, because it depends upon the autocratic will of one who controls as he sees fit. The Church of Rome's unity is that of a barrel, whose separate staves are held together by an iron hoop. Remove the hoop, the staves fall apart, and the barrel no longer exists. There is no life in any of its parts, no natural connection between them, all depends on the compelling force of the iron band.¹ How different is the conception of Holy Scripture! The Church is a living organism whose Head is Christ; all its parts are living members, joined in one living body to the living Head. "Grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together,—maketh increase of the body,—till we all come in the unity of the faith unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. 4:13, 15, 16.

This is the unity of the Protestant Church; the true spiritual unity of Holy Scripture, a unity in diversity.

¹Dr. J. J. Dollinger of the "Old Catholic" movement, wrote: "The papal idea of the Church is a universal empire, spiritually and where possible, physically, ruled by a single monarch; an empire of force and oppression, where the spiritual authority is aided by the secular arm in summarily suppressing every movement it dislikes." Janus, Preface XV.

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