

WORLD MISSION COUNCIL SPECIAL REPORT ON LESSONS FOR SCOTLAND FROM CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AFRICA MAY 2018

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the report.
2. Give thanks for the Christian witness of the Church in Africa.
3. Encourage members, congregations and Presbyteries to engage with the report and consider how each may respond.
4. Instruct the Council of Assembly, in its strategic planning for the whole Church, to fully consider the recommendations of this report, and the best way of sharing these with congregations and Presbyteries.
5. Instruct the World Mission Council, in conjunction with the Ministries Council, the Mission and Discipleship Council, the Church and Society Council and Ecumenical Relations, to continue to explore how the church in Scotland might apply relevant learning from the world church context.
6. Instruct the World Mission Council, the Ministries Council, and the Mission and Discipleship Council to continue to explore how they may encourage and equip members in the leadership of worship and in different forms of worship.
7. Encourage congregations to engage with the materials produced by the Mission and Discipleship Council to engage in Bible study, prayer, testimony, discipleship and evangelism.
8. Encourage congregations to twin with a congregation of one of the churches with which the World Mission Council works.
9. Instruct the World Mission Council, in partnership with the Mission and Discipleship Council, to explore contextual Bible studies with partners in the world church.
10. Instruct the World Mission Council and the Ministries Council to explore exchanges between recognised ministries and members in Scotland with their counterparts in Africa.
11. Instruct the Ministries Council to include consideration of this report in developing its programme for Initial Ministerial Education (IME) and Continuing Ministerial Development as part of the Initial Ministerial Education review.

Report

1. DELIVERANCE OF THE 2016 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly, given the current rapid growth of the church in sub-Saharan Africa, instruct the Council to prepare a report for a future General Assembly, in consultation with our partner churches in the region, detailing what is happening, how we might respond to this move of God's Spirit and what we might learn from their experiences. (Reports to the General Assembly 2016, 6/2)

2. THE TASK

The task of assessing what is happening in Sub-Saharan Africa is a huge one. The continent itself is one of contrast and extremes. It is vast: it has a surface area of 30.37 million km², from deserts, to tropical coasts and savannah to mountains. It is the birthplace of modern humanity and consists of 54 countries, over 1.2 billion people, between 1,500 and 2,000 languages, and some 3,000 people groups. North Africa was home to early Christian communities and some of the most influential figures in the early Church. This report draws on a number of conversations with partner churches and a review of current literature on what is happening, pulling out key themes for consideration and making recommendations for future engagements. It cannot represent a comprehensive overview of developments on the continent, but raises some pertinent areas of insight in seeking to respond, specifically, to the questions asked in the deliverance. In listening and learning about what the Church in Africa has to teach us, it is important to look at our own context and respond and engage in ways appropriate in Scotland.

3. CHURCH GROWTH IN AFRICA

Christianity is now rooted in the global south. Twenty six percent of the global Christian population lives in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has 15% of the world's population. The Pew Research Centre expects this proportion to grow to more than 40% by 2060, driven by a combination of demographic factors, including fertility, age and migration. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/19/sub-saharan-africa-will-be-home-to-growing-shares-of-the-worlds-christians-and-muslims/>) Despite political, social and economic upheavals, the Christian faith has served as a bulwark for cultural defence and identity. The increasing

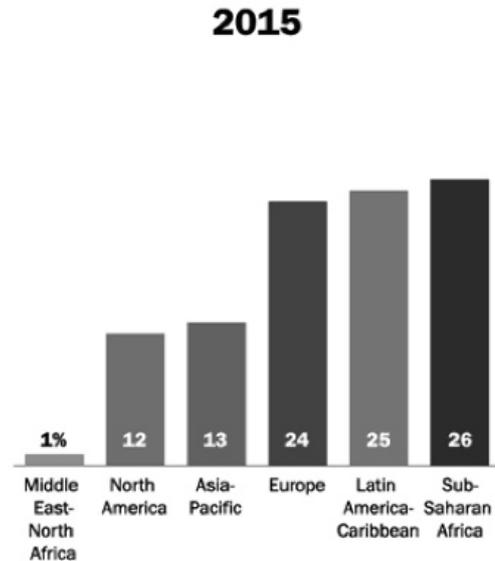
number of professing Christians in Africa today, together with patterns of international migration, represents one important reason for taking Africa seriously (Hanciles 2008). Christianity is in the ascendancy in Sub-Saharan Africa (Zandt 2011).

There are three main groupings of Churches in the region: African Independent Churches, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (in which growth appears greatest), and those churches and denominations which had their origins in the missionary movement, but which have long since been independent. All three traditions have learned from one another. All are part of a culture which acknowledges supernatural and spiritual powers; God as the Creator; and the inseparable nature of the sacred and secular. Within this context, there appear to be some core elements of Church practice considered key to growth by African partners from which lessons potentially applicable to the Church in Scotland are considered below.

Philip Jenkins argues that the essence of modern Christianity is not found in America or in the West, but is found primarily in the global South (Jenkins 2011). He suggests that we should step outside our preconceived notions of Christianity and look to other cultures in order to see how modern-day Christianity is impacting the world as we know it. Although the term Christendom has Western overtones, he defines Christendom as having supranational and antinational implications in that one is no longer primarily an African or Asian or European as much as one is a Christian first. For Jenkins (2011) the global south is the new seat of Christianity, and this means there is a need to understand Christianity within the global community in new ways. Central to his understanding of the spread of Christianity is the power and persuasiveness of Pentecostalism, with Pentecostals being, in general, the most active in mission work and evangelism. Some Pentecostals preach a message with a promise of health and wealth, which is appealing to many in Africa who are looking to escape their poverty. Although this message draws large numbers of people into the church, and makes this part of the church a force to be reckoned with in Africa (as increasingly, elsewhere), it is seen by many as a distortion of the Gospel message.

By 2060, more than 4-in-10 Christians expected to live in sub-Saharan Africa

Estimated share of global Christian population living in each region over time



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections.
See Methodology for details.
"The Changing Global Religious Landscape"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 The Christian Hope

Everyone experiences God's revelation from their own standpoint, context and experience (Schreiter 1985). The Gospel is performed and lived out in contexts radically different to those of our own spiritual formation (Walton 2015). God's revelation takes place in the ordinary things of life and the lived lives of ordinary people. Getting alongside partner churches and seeking to understand how they experience and articulate their reality (Pui Lan 2011) – what the Council does with all its partners in every continent, and

what it calls attentive accompaniment - is key to beginning to interpret what might be transferrable from the African to the Scottish context. Faith is something that is incarnate in situations and contexts. Reality is not just "out there," rather, reality is "mediated by meaning," in the context of culture and historical settings and interpreted through "particular thought forms" (Bevans 2008, 4). Knowledge, therefore, is co-created by listening to and working with partner churches and organisations.

4.2 Theological Understanding

Robert Schreiter (1985) draws a distinction between theology as sure knowledge (*scientia*) and theology as wisdom (*sapientia*). A critical, rational account of faith characterises the former, while theology as wisdom focuses on the interiority of human experience as the basis for understanding a holistic view of the world. Wisdom theology is not only concerned with the meaning of "text and human experiences but is also concerned to extend those meanings to encompass the cosmos" (Schreiter 1985). Theological understanding in Africa proceeds along non-Western, non-enlightenment lines. There is no split between the sacred and the secular (Magesa 2013); John Mbiti, a Kenyan theologian, asserts that the concept of God the creator, sustainer and giver of life predates Christianity (Mbiti 1970); evil and its manifestations are understood in spiritual terms, not just as structural, economic, and social injustices (Okello 2003); and the Christian is in the midst of a spiritual battle (Lindhardt 2009 (b)). A *sapientia* approach focusses on human experience; it looks at idiographic events in the daily lives of people – answered prayer, a cured relative, a relationship restored. Change is at the heart of this work. This means it is not possible to simply interpret the world in various ways, but that we all need to be part of the change as we consider what we can learn from what is happening in the Church in Africa.

4.3 Method

The *sapientia* approach, embracing and open to the radicalness of change, leads to the method. The World Mission Council consulted with the proposer of the deliverance, hosted a meeting with scholars and practitioners with African backgrounds and experience, and sent questionnaires to partner churches and organisations in Africa to identify core themes for consideration, recognising the importance of context. A meeting was organised with representatives from some partner churches to clarify and prioritise themes. Six key themes were selected:

- Bible Study;
- Prayer and Testimony;
- Discipleship, Evangelism and Commitment;
- Repentance and Reconciliation;
- Faith in Social Action; and
- Worship and Lay Participation.

Six Africa-based scholars and practitioners were asked to write on these themes for further consideration. There was also discussion with representatives of the Ministries Council and Mission and Discipleship Council regarding relevant learning and proposed responses.

5. THE CRYSTALLISATION OF TEXT AND LITERATURE

The listening and engagement with the experience of African life as articulated by the scholars and church partners bore the following fruit:

5.1 The Word is Life: Bible Study

Scripture and preaching are central to Christianity in Africa. Firstly, Bible study is at the heart of personal devotion and church life. Bible studies are a way of nurturing the faithful. There is an “openness of the people to the Gospel” (Clapperton K Mayuni, Malawi). Reading the Bible, however, is more than a “cognitive” exercise; it is grounded in ‘lived lives’ of people and is affective. It has practical application to the daily lives of people (Kalu 2008). The Word is life in the context of a very different view of the world – there is no division between the sacred and the secular; there is a particular understanding of spiritual warfare; and people have an appreciation of the precariousness of life. Secondly, the spoken word of the preacher applies Biblical texts to the daily realities of life and, in some cases, reinforces the notion of spiritual warfare. This encourages people to be “in the daily habit of reading God’s Word” (Clapperton K Mayuni, Malawi).

5.2 Prayer and Testimony

Related to the Word is the importance of spoken prayer. The Devil is recognised as very real in Africa. (Fabella and Oduyoye 1988). The spoken word has power - conveying more than a message – it is an extension of a person’s “life force”; words exist beyond being uttered (Nyang 1990). Prayer has the power to protect and bring about healing as well as to ask

God for the daily needs of life. The petitioner is utterly dependent on God (Magesa 2013).

Prayer is also acknowledged as having healing and transformative power. “It brings the community of suffering together...ushers supernatural power....and releases the energy for participatory worship” (Kalu 2008, 263). There is an immediate reality to the words from James 5:14 “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” Prayer, closely related to Bible study, is a dialogue. God “speaks through God’s Word” and through visions (Margaret Marsden, Tanzania). Others have noted that African Christians are also open to God speaking to them and reassuring them through dreams. Testimony about what God has done in answer to prayer is a key feature of the expression of faith. God is able and does answer prayer. Testimony encourages others who are facing challenges and further builds the community of believers (Nell 2012).

5.3 Evangelism, Discipleship and Commitment

According to South African David Bosch (2011, 10) “evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ’s earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit”. In line with this, many church fellowships and Christian student organisations such as Scripture Union, Youth Fellowships and others often organise evangelistic events during which the participants spend a week or two or even a month reaching out to people who are not yet committed to the Christian faith and directing them to churches.

Setri Nyomi reports, “I have often been approached by the leaders of one of the youth groups in my church to have an evangelistic event in a place where they sense a need.” In addition, some churches in Africa see attention to the needs of suffering persons as evangelism; therefore, there are church programmes on hospital visits and gathering of used clothing to give to families in communities that face extreme poverty. Such churches make it clear that the motivating factor is evangelism. The team that visit the hospitals, for example, openly share a message of Jesus and His work of redemption and call on those who wish to respond to put their faith in Christ or renew their faith in Christ. Many African churches understand that it is one thing to spread the

gospel and reach out to the many who respond, and another to retain them and nurture them in faith. A close look at the African scene demonstrates that there is quite a high level of commitment to, and enthusiasm for, evangelism coupled with disciple-making. These contribute to the increasing growth of Christianity in Africa.

5.4 Repentance and Reconciliation

Public confession and repentance has been a feature of Christian expression in Africa, particularly in the Pentecostal churches (Anderson 2007). Repentance and reconciliation are closely related to the idea of community and the expression of *Ubuntu* (humanness). Churches are healing communities where forgiveness and reconciliation take place (Josephine Boitumelo Gabarone, South Africa). The issue of public expressions of repentance, may however, lead to pressures to focus on what David Bosch has called “micro morality” (Bosch 2011). These are seen as particularly important themes in Rwanda, South Sudan and South Africa, amongst others. Real repentance and reconciliation, along with restitution, are recognised as vital for these nations to move forward after conflict. This is seen not only at a national level but also at a personal level.

5.5 Faith in Social Action

Community is at the heart of African life and religious experience (Bujo 2003). This aspect of community was underscored in the aftermath of the imposed World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes which resulted in the rolling back of the state. It was often the church that filled the gap. There is no one model of faith in social action, but it is rooted in church teaching (Mulambya Kabonde, Zambia). It is an expression of the practicality of Christianity and the African ideal of *Ubuntu*. A person with *Ubuntu* is fully human, generous, open and affirming of others, belonging to community and in relation with others around him/her (van Schalkwyk 1999) (Stückelberger 2016).

Contemporary African theologians start with a rejection of the Cartesian formula, *Cogito Ergo Sum* (*I think, therefore I am*) and an embracing of *Cognatus sum, ergo sumus* (*I am known/related, therefore we are*) (Pobee 1979). Contemporary African theologians have used African traditional religious values, particularly that of community, to seek to articulate the liberating character of God’s Kingdom as a counter-narrative to the legacy of colonialism, the injustices of daily life, as a challenge to patriarchy, and the setting for the manifestation of *Ubuntu* (Manus 1993).

God’s Kingdom, of which the Church is an expression, is likened to a household (*oikos*) of peace and freedom marked by the Old Testament idea of shalom, a radical discontinuity to the world. Salvation in this context is about *Ubuntu* - about human beings being “open to relation, beautiful and healed” - and the Church is the “community adorned in freedom” (Marais 2015, 95). Following on from the example of many missionaries, the Church in Africa still actively ministers to the “sick and oppressed” (Margert Masden, Tanzania). The church is a healing community and a key “component in the healing of the entire society” (Josephine Boitumelo Gabarone, South Africa).

5.6 Worship and Lay Participation

Worship is conceived of as God’s initiative, as a dialogue between God and humankind, as involving the totality of creation and the totality of our experiences and exposures, and changes to the world in which we live. In this way, an understanding of worship must include not only what believers do in gathered worship, but also what they do when they depart from the place of worship. The worship life that is discussed, therefore, includes the life of faith of worshipping people when they are outside their designated places of worship. In this sense, worship is found not only among those who lead gathered worship but also and, perhaps even more, among those who are led in worship.

While the clergy continue to play prominent roles in churches, the life of the churches in Africa is centred on the laity, especially women. They, along with children, are often the larger number in almost every church congregation. The basic arrangements for lay participation in the life of the churches in Africa are fellowship structures, mission structures, administrative structures and charismatic structures. Churches seek to provide space to both the clergy and the laity to express their God-given spiritual gifts in the Church. Worship is essentially experiential, Spirit-led, and communal, with worship often leading into times of prayer for healing and deliverance (Kalu 2008).

6. LESSONS

Through talking to partners, it became apparent that generally throughout Africa, there is a much greater awareness of, reliance on, and appreciation for the spiritual as opposed to material dimension of the created world and a recognition of the existence of good and evil forces.

In general, within Africa there is a much more intentional approach to **Bible Study and Prayer**, which are recognised as essential means of grace - both on an individual and community level - to enable personal growth in faith and, following the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19-20, to share the good news of the Gospel.

Evangelism, on both an individual and congregational basis, is given much greater emphasis and is often enriched by unashamed and unapologetic personal testimony by ordinary church members in everyday conversation as well as in services. In a number of African countries prospective ministers are expected to establish new congregations before completing their training, so that outreach, evangelism and growth are “built into the DNA” of new ministers.

The need for **Repentance and Reconciliation** for individuals and communities, freely offered through God’s Grace, is frequently preached and seen in congregational worship, and is appreciated as crucial to the spiritual healing on a personal and societal basis.

The importance of an holistic message of God’s love - demonstrated by **Faith in Social Action** through education and practical care for the poor, sick, hungry, dispossessed, displaced, widows, and orphans - is especially powerful where government services are often lacking.

Worship is generally wholehearted, joyful, and spontaneous, and embraces local and contemporary music and dance. Whilst appreciating a well-trained ministry, ministers are in relatively short supply, and there is more reliance on the priesthood of all believers, with responsibility for much of the preaching, teaching, conduct of worship and pastoral care entrusted to lay evangelists, elders and other members.

7. OUR RESPONSE

While recognising differing contexts and challenges and varying levels of growth in churches in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a challenge to re-examine some of our established practices in light of the African experience of growth. These lessons from Africa can add to and enhance the many good initiatives within the Church of and in Scotland. Perhaps one of the most crucial things is to re-examine our attitudes and assumptions about what we think we might learn from our African sisters and brothers.

Within the Mission and Discipleship Council, the issue of discipleship has been emerging as of prime importance. Over the years there have been many discipleship resources created, some of which have been transformative, but one cautionary note is that the culture which is shaped by this can become one of education, information and programmes, rather than creating a culture of deep, radical discipleship which transforms individuals, congregations and communities. The Mission and Discipleship Council believes that mission, evangelism, social action, worship will all flow and develop from a culture of discipleship. The focus now is not necessarily on creating resources; we must ask what is needed to allow a culture of discipleship to thrive.

Against this background, the factors which have been identified as crucial to the growth of the African churches strike notes of familiarity, encouragement and challenge. Familiarity, because none of these factors are new; they have been key elements of the Christian faith since its beginning. Encouragement, because we can see from the global south that the normal state of church in the world is growth. This is alien to many here who have lived in a national context where the decline of the church seems inevitable. To know that growth is normative, and has been achieved by things which are already part of our Christian heritage and culture, is incredibly encouraging. It is challenging, because it raises questions about where these factors sit in the Church’s present priorities. Have our conversations been dominated by a desire to share with others what God is doing? Has our money been spent on providing for those who have less than us? In church we think we know how to pray – how much time have we spent teaching those inside and outside the church who do not? How much have we looked for from our ministers instead of developing and using the gifts of the whole people of God? If we are serious about the growth of the kingdom, and of the church, in our nation, we would be wise to listen and respond.

7.1 Themes

7.1.1 The Word is Life: Bible Study

The Word is life giving. Bible Study is part of everyday life for our African sisters and brothers. They study the Bible in youth groups, schools, Scripture Unions, and work places as well as in Church. We would encourage members to take time to study the Bible personally but also to study it with others. Study guides can be provided to help take us through passages. We would encourage everyone to make Bible study part of everyday life, gathering with friends over coffee whilst

reading the Word together. Set up Bible study groups in all spheres of life, in your workplace, at church, in the family, and with your children, encouraging them to share with their friends at school. If your congregation is involved in a twinning, develop a contextual Bible study, which could be done by video-link or email; this may lead you not only deeper into the Word but will also deepen the twinning.

7.1.2 Prayer and Testimony

Prayer and testimony are powerful tools in every cultural context. They are a normal part of life for our friends in Africa and whilst for some in Scotland, in some settings, prayer and testimony are also part of life, for many it is not. The weekly worship service is still the single biggest teaching opportunity in the Church, as thousands gather around the Word of God. Mission and Discipleship has many tools and platforms (www.resourcingmission.org.uk) to help individuals and congregations give testimony to what God is doing and has done in their lives. The practice of giving testimony and thanking God for God's daily provision should be encouraged, along with establishing active prayer partnerships between Scottish Churches and those in Africa (which could be enabled by internet sharing).

7.1.3 Evangelism, Discipleship and Commitment

Evangelism, outreach, and a yearning for spiritual and numerical growth should also be key characteristics of all members and congregations in Scotland. However, it is recognised that there is a lack of confidence in talking of personal faith. Speaking to others about what our beliefs are, or how our faith affects our everyday decision making, can feel daunting. There is a lot of conversation about confident disciples, but the reality is that we will always encounter situations that leave us anxious. How do we continue to live out our faith and share it at these times? It is not the absence of fear, but the knowledge that there are others to support us, which can enable us to move forward. Over the last 12-18 months the Mission and Discipleship Council has produced a number of resources and events which we would urge congregations and members to engage with (www.resourcingmission.org.uk; www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources). Alongside these we should establish a more methodical and intentional approach to nurturing and evangelism – from crèche through to youth groups and beyond.

7.1.4 Reconciliation and Repentance

Reconciliation and repentance are subjects we do not often talk about. The Church, corporately, has attempted to grasp the nettle on a number of issues, from Brexit and Independence, to matters of human sexuality. It is, however, a time of change, at local as well as national level. Changes in ministry, linked congregations and unions, building closures, etc. are all events that leave a sense of loss and hurt. Which people or changes do each of us need to be reconciled to? Who do we need to ask forgiveness of, or to forgive? We can engage with organisations such as "Place for Hope" (www.placeforhope.org.uk) to help with work on reconciliation.

7.1.5 Faith in Social Action

Due to the lack of Government facilities across Africa, responsibility often falls to faith communities. Churches step in where governments are unable to. This is part of the Church's mission, the holistic care of the flock. Whilst different in Scotland, there are many needs facing our communities, from the impact of growing inequality to social isolation, and loneliness. We encourage those congregations who are already engaged in the important work of social action and urge those who are not to explore the possibilities within their communities. There is an urgent need for transformation in our society, to reach out and embrace the other (Volf, 1996). Recognising the good work that the Church and Society Council and CrossReach (www.crossreach.org.uk) do in Scotland with local congregations we would see opportunities for shared learning and partnership with African Churches.

7.1.6 Worship and Lay Participation

It is crucial to recognise the place of members within the Church and the gifts that God has given to all. In conjunction with the Ministries Council and the Mission and Discipleship Council it would be worth exploring the possibility of offering ministers and members opportunities to spend a period of time with one of our partner churches. This would offer congregations the possibility to experience worship with our partner churches, to look at the engagement of youth, and to be open to embracing the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. We see the move of African brothers and sisters to Scotland as part of a greater move of God and would encourage congregations to engage and learn from the African diaspora. The formation of ministers is vital; it is, therefore, important to seek to strengthen existing academic partnerships, and to

build new ones with partner churches, and their associated institutions, to support theological training and explore the possibility of offering a module on Christianity in Africa as part of the undergraduate BD, or to embed contemporary African theology and practice as part of undergraduate courses in ecclesiology, practical theology, and Christology. It is encouraging to see that some presbyteries and congregations are already training and equipping members to engage and participate in the delivery of worship and ministry within the parish.

8. CONCLUSION

This report is not a full and comprehensive study. It necessarily limits itself to the more positive aspects of what we can learn and does not unpack areas where there are challenges within the life of the church in Africa. Nevertheless, there are lessons to learn. To touch and smell and feel for ourselves gives us a deeper understanding than to read, hear and learn from others. Therefore, a key response to this report is to encourage both visits and exchanges to our partners in Africa, and more widely. This of course already takes place in different ways, so how can the existing activities be built on? There are opportunities to engage in a Twinning where partnership is the core focus and not the giving of aid; to have probationers spend a summer placement with a partner and bring our partners' probationers to Scotland; to offer sabbaticals or other in-service opportunities to ministers, elders and youth workers from our partners internationally, and send our ministers, elders and youth workers for an international experience; to invite African Ministers and their families on pulpit exchanges while Church of Scotland Ministers and their families go to Africa.

Visiting is not always possible, but with modern technology there are possibilities of sharing over video links experiences such as: contextual Bible studies, worshipping in new ways together, sharing academic material, praying for one another and sharing testimony. Local congregations might also be able to engage with an African diaspora in their own communities.

Although there is already much happening within the Church of Scotland, we should not be complacent. Resources will not change things. Using them as tools for learning, encouragement, support, and going deeper in our faith will. Christianity in Africa has much to offer Scotland. There is a

continuing challenge to humbly listen, learn, and share experience and insight with our African brothers and sisters, including those who have moved to Scotland.

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In the name of the Council

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