

“Thy Kingdom Come” An Analysis of a Vision

*The AD2000 Movement has a profound mission statement, and it is more profound than meets the eye:
“A Church for Every People, and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000.”*

by Ralph D. Winter

Do the three phrases in the above mission statement give us a crystal clear mandate? The Bible says “if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound...” Especially note the final phrase: “By the year 2000.” It is the most electrifying phrase in the statement; it also causes the most hesitation. No one objects to the idea of goals for the year 2000, but here we see “every people” and “every person.” Doesn’t the presence (twice) of the word “every” make these goals for AD 2000 seem audacious and perhaps even foolish?

Suppose we could arrive at the place where we were absolutely confident that every *person* on earth has heard the Gospel and understood it; that is, everyone who is over 2 years old, say, and also not so old as to be unable to hear, or so sick as to be unable to think. In any case, suppose we could come to the place where every “hearing” person has heard. At midnight on a certain night we would have finished the job!

One day later, over a million more tiny tots have arrived at the age of two, and over a million more people have plunged beyond a condition of intelligibility. Note that God must know what to do with all such people. There are probably 500 million children in the world at any given time under the age of two. Who knows how many older or sick folks there are?

But this is the point: is God really playing with statistics...watching curves on a computer graph? Is He mechanically waiting for a certain number of souls to be saved? Is counting peoples and persons the name of the game? Is that all He expects us to shoot for by AD 2000?

What CAN be done by the year 2000? What is it that we can all pray for? Well, what did Jesus tell us to pray for? He said that we must pray “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

What this means is that our concept of God’s desire to reach all peoples and persons must somehow be part of His desire for His Kingdom to come on earth. Other verses say that He looks toward the time when all the nations of the world will declare His glory.

What does it really mean for His Kingdom to come? Jesus once said, “If I with the finger of God cast out devils, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). Is this what it means for the Kingdom of God to come? Is it possible that we have become so tied up with our measurements of evangelism, social reform, and economic growth that we have forgotten that God is primarily in the business of conquering Satan?

We look forward toward the time when “the Kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Surely He seeks to vanquish the “rulers of the darkness of this earth” (Ephesians 6:1)?

But this is not simply a case of political or military conquest. Jesus made that plain when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” So we are not looking for a Christianized United Nations any more than we are looking forward to every human being converted to Christ, or even all social wrongs righted. Indeed, in Revelation 21 we note that AFTER He returns “He shall

wipe away every tear...”

Is it possible that the essence of the return of Christ will inevitably be a moment when “measurable” evangelistic goals will be overwhelmed by a total newness of God’s own design?

Certainly we should take our evangelistic measurements seriously, but not as ultimate parameters of God’s purpose and plan. We must look forward to the year 2000, knowing that He may evaluate things by measures we cannot fully comprehend. His thoughts are higher than ours. Meanwhile, with regard to His known will, we can and must do all! Can we be overly concerned about bookkeeping tallies in heaven and less concerned about declaring His glory on earth? Can souls get saved without His name being glorified? I actually believe that brilliant evangelical thinkers who are wrestling with front-line science are part and parcel of the global struggle to glorify His name.

And, this is why breaking through into every people has got to be a precursor to reaching every person Satan *holds whole peoples in bondage*. We can’t wrestle a single soul out of his hand without challenging his authority in that particular people group.

In those groups where Satan’s hold has already been broken, it is well understood how to win souls. But, in groups where no real breakthrough has occurred, the contest is still a “power encounter” between the Spirit of God and the powers of darkness. This is why the front line of missions must be prayer! This is why Asian evangelists say they must first “bind the strong man” before entering a village that sits in darkness waiting for the great light to

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appear. We must remember that taking the light into dark places will meet fierce resistance. In the Bible the concept of *darkness* is not merely the absence of light but the presence of a malignant, destroying evil person. That is why the kingdoms of this world will not easily yield.

Kingdoms of Darkness

The phrase “Every People” refers to these kingdoms of darkness. This is why this phrase comes first in the slogan. Only when the gates of those kingdoms are broken down can the Gospel be available “for every person.”

What does a darkened kingdom look like? How can we tell when a kingdom has been brought under God’s way? Isn’t this the definition of spiritual mapping?

Satan wields his control over individuals by dominating their *groups*. Most people follow the lead of their own group. Very few individuals are perfectly unrestricted free thinkers for themselves. Sometimes it is baffling to missionaries to know how to penetrate a people group. Often the break through comes through a miraculous healing or the unaccountable conversion of a key person, not through normal evangelism. Yes, normal evangelism only becomes possible after that breakthrough occurs.

Back to our point: It may be therefore somewhat artificial to try to figure out how many individuals are, or aren’t, won to Christ. *Maybe what we face is a much more direct question: are there still kingdoms of this world where His name is not glorified?* Every people and every person are stepping stones in that direction and are the result of the invasion of God’s glory among them. But the conquering of the kingdoms of this world is both more and less than every *people* and every *person*.

That this is primarily a spiritual battle certainly does not mean we can set aside careful planning for evangelism

and pioneer penetration and just pray that God will go out and do His thing.

What it does mean is that “We fight not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).

And we know that it is our fight, not just His, and that He is fighting with us. We do not need to worry about losing. We know that in every place on earth the key effort is not going to be our wisdom or even our hard work. It will be all of that plus His sovereign power breaking down the very gates of hell. We know that He is still doing miracles.

All of this cannot be brought together into a single human plan; yet it calls upon every planning effort, all creative approaches, and all the sacrifice we can muster. We do know that our measurements of our peoples and persons are merely concrete goals. We know also that He is with us and we are acting in obedience to the call.

We can be embarrassed by the outcome in the year 2000. But we will be embarrassed only if when that day comes we cannot say we have done everything in our power to find and approach and reach every people and every person on earth!

A Church for Every People

But what does “A Church for Every people” really mean? In the five-word phrase, “A Church for Every People,” the word “church” means much more than an empty building or even a small congregation.

The first five words of the AD 2000 Movement slogan were launched in 1980 by a global-level meeting of mission executives coming from both the Western World and the Two-Thirds World. At that meeting the fulfillment of the phrase “A Church for Every People by the Year 2000” was certainly not

for one symbolic congregation to be planted within every group by the year 2000. I was at that meeting and know that what was meant by this simple phrase was essentially “a church movement.”

The phrase “A Church for Every People” was actually based on a concept of Donald McGavran’s made famous almost thirty years earlier when he spoke of “a people movement to Christ.” He was there with us when a small group of people met in a private home a few months before the 1980 meeting and hammered out this new “watchword.” Dr. McGavran’s conviction which had influenced so many others was that *we cannot say that we have evangelized a person unless that person has been given a chance to unite with an indigenous movement within his or her own society*. Note that if we take this seriously we cannot even speak of the Gospel for Every Person without planning to achieve an indigenous “people movement to Christ” in every people group.

His concern for converts was that they ought to be encouraged to *reach* their own people rather than *separate* from them, and to do that he felt that they should stay within the social sphere of their own people. At this point we need to quote some of McGavran’s “little letter.” Here are two of the seven principles in McGavran’s short essay:

(One)... principle is to encourage converts to remain thoroughly one with their own people in most matters. They should continue to eat what their people eat. They should not say, “My people are vegetarians but now that I have become a Christian, I’m going to eat meat.” After they become Christians they should be more rigidly vegetarian than they were before. In the matter of clothing, they should continue to look precisely like their kinfolk. In the matter of marriage, most people are endogamous, they insist that “our people marry only our people.” They look with great disfavor on our marrying other people. And yet when Christians come in one-by-one, they cannot

marry their own people. None of them have become Christian. Where only a few of a given people become Christians, when it comes time for them or their children to marry, they have to take husbands or wives from other segments of the population. So their own kin look at them and say, 'Yes, become a Christian and mongrelize your children. You have left us and have joined them.

All converts should be encouraged to bear cheerfully the exclusion, the oppression, and the persecution that they are likely to encounter from their people. When anyone becomes a follower of a new way of life, he is likely to meet with some disfavor from his loved ones. Maybe it's mild; maybe it's severe. He should bear such disfavor patiently. He should say on all occasions, "I am a better son than I was before; I am a better father than I was before; I am a better husband than I was before; and I love you more than I used to do. You can hate me, but I will not hate you. You can exclude me, but I will include you. You can force me out of our ancestral house; but I will live on its veranda. Or I will get a house just across the street. I am still one of you, I am more one of you than I ever was before." (We must) encourage converts to remain thoroughly one with their people in most matters.

Please note that word "most." They cannot remain one with their people in idolatry, or drunkenness or obvious in sin. It they belong to a segment of society that earns its living stealing they must "steal no more." But, in most matters (how they talk, how they dress, how they eat, where they go, what kind of houses they live in), they can look very much like their people, and ought to make every effort to do so.

(Two) A closely related principle is to try to get group decisions for Christ. If only one person decide to follow Jesus, do not baptize him immediately. Say to him, "You and I will work together to lead another five or ten or, God willing, fifty of your people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior so that when you are baptized, you are baptized with them. Ostracism is very effective against one lone person. But ostracism is weak indeed when exercised against a group of a dozen. And when exercised against two hundred it has practically no force at all. (From Donald McGavran's article "A

Church in Every People: Plain Talk about a Difficult Subject." in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, pg D—103.)

The Upshot

The churches of the New Testament avidly sprouted up in part because of the impasse experienced by the Gentile "devout persons" attending Jewish synagogues out in Gentile territory. Many of the synagogues of the Jewish dispersion had generously invited

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Gentile seekers to sit in the back rows. But such invitees were not given an inch by the devout Jewish core of those synagogues when it came to laying aside the Jewish cultural tradition.

Like many Christians today, the faithful had to some extent confused their cultural tradition (diet, calendar, dress, etc.) with the faith itself. Their tradition had become traditionalism, to use Jaroslav Pelican's language: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

Paul came along and dared to call out all such (Greek) "devout persons" into what would become essentially Gentile-run synagogues. Now the fast-

growing traits of early Christianity began to appear. Once the faith was indigenized (or "contextualized") it grew rapidly. Within two centuries more than one third of the entire population in the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire had decided to follow Christ!

But a factor more important than mere culture was involved. Paul, referring to Aquila and Priscilla, spoke of "the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19), a situation (unnoticeable to many American readers) where family ties and church worship went together, where church authority and family authority were often indistinguishable, where church discipline and family respect were one and the same thing, where "honor thy father and thy mother" were not different from spiritual accountability in the church. In such a "church" it is unlikely that the ostracism McGavran fears would occur. It is likely that the synagogues of the New Testament period as well as the Gentile-run churches of the New Testament period mainly consisted of a cluster of extended families guided by the elders of those families.

Beware of the Americans

What is a church in the phrase "A Church for Every People"? In America—especially in urban America—churches have become more and more collections of unrelated individuals huddling together, individuals who for the most part have already been uprooted from their natural families with the church becoming a kind of substitute family. Married couples may have children and bring them to church (where they are normally segregated off into age-graded fellowships), but they are not often asked about their own parents. And people who are older are not asked about their children. Individual decisions in the church are as important as individualism has become in secular society. Thus, although the churches of urban America to some significant extent perform the functions of a family,

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they often do so in the absence of, or possibly even at the expense of, the natural families. For example, although I have attended evangelical churches in many parts of the United States, I have never heard a sermon on why or how to have family devotions. Personal devotions, yes; but not family devotions.

But as the church of Jesus Christ grows up in the soil of traditional societies around the world (most of which are not individualistic) it often becomes a movement which normally reinforces, not dismantles, natural families, which are part of creation. However, this result is not what the average American missionary always expects. Sometimes missionaries feel they must stress that people who come to Christ do so in *opposition* to their parents lest their decisions not be real. On the other hand I heard the story of a North Korean young person that came to Christ. His father asked him what Christianity taught him. He said that it taught him to honor and respect his father and mother. The father's response was, "Good!"

If we seriously seek "A Church for Every People" we must recover this biblical harmony between natural families and "church" families. It will probably be much easier for missionaries from the Third World to do this than for Americans, whose instincts may often lead them (in their haste to "plant a church") to establish congregations composed mainly of "loosened-up individuals," social refugees, or even social "deviants." But, in actuality, to work within the culture rather than against it may often be easier, not harder!

Nevertheless, there will still be times and situations when the American practice of putting together scattered family fragments in brotherly love will be a helpful technique, especially as urban conditions around the world may evolve into *the tragic degree of family fragmentation which we now have in the U.S.* The mission theologian, Howard

Snyder, in his new book *Earthcurrents*, says, "In the United States, the most dramatic change has been the drop in households headed by a married couple—from about one half to one tenth in just 40 years," (*Earthcurrents*, p 34.)

However, the global threat of American and Western hyper-individualism, so closely allied with Christianity as it now is, may more often pose one of the most serious obstacles to the realization of "A Church for Every People."

Missiologically Defined Peoples

In any case, only after we recognize clearly that "a people movement to Christ" should be the basic goal of missionary activity within a people is it possible to think clearly about what kind of a people we are talking about. If we see clearly that a "people movement" is highly indigenous, and that the members of the people feel a sense of belonging to each other, then it is possible to recognize the inherent barriers that result from rivalries or enmities within groups which may appear unified and without barrier to outside observers. Those of us who often count ethnolinguistic groups usually take very seriously the tangible differences in dialect or vocabulary of different groups but may not often take seriously the many different kinds of intangible "prejudice barriers" that define additional sub-groups.

In other words, if there are divisions which prevent all the people in a group joining in with a "people movement" that has grown up, it is likely that (from the stand-point of missionary strategy) there are really two or more groups, not just one, and that more than one people movement must be started to fulfill the goal of "The Gospel for Every People." This is what it will take for *every person to have access* to the gospel!

The Gospel for Every Person

What does it mean for us to try to take seriously the statement that *we cannot say that we have evangelized a person unless that person has been given a chance to unite with an indigenous movement within his or her own society?*

If it is imperative for there to be an indigenous church movement within every people in order for every person to have a reasonable opportunity to know Christ, then it is comes with equal force that if every person in a group cannot join an existing people movement, it is apparently true that such a group consists of more than one group needing the incarnation of an indigenous church movement. In other words, from the stand point of church-planting strategy there may be important subdivisions within the group which we have assumed is just one group.

This fact has caused a lot of confusion. It means we can't start out by counting how many groups there are except in a guess-work sense. Some or many of our groups may turn out to be clusters of groups. Only when a people movement gets going will it define the practical boundaries and allow us to be sure how many groups there actually are. It means that we can only count groups accurately after the gospel has come, and not before. We don't want to count more groups than really *can* be reached with a single people movement; yet we don't want to ignore silent, alienated minority groups which feel left out of a majority movement. The technical wording goes like this: a group with mission significance is "the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."

These words were framed by a large and representative group of mission experts at a Lausanne-sponsored meeting in March of 1982. Neither before nor after has there ever been a similar meeting to define such concepts and

terms, although people are free to ignore or oppose this definition. The most common objection is that this particular wording results in a people of a type defined by missiological criteria, which is meaningful primarily to mission strategists. Pragmatically, however, you can't find data of this kind in encyclopedias or world almanacs or reference materials coming from the United Nations. Secular researchers don't think in such terms. Rather, what you do find is data based on country units, which often (very often) split a single people group into two or more groups because of country borders.

Defining Groups by Ministry Tools

Christian workers may be confused partly because they naturally tend to define the world's population in terms of the groups which are reasonable targets for the particular tools of evangelism *in which they specialize*.

For example, those missionaries who hold in their hands immensely powerful radio stations have understandably concluded that they must limit their outreach to 280 groups of people in the world—those that are over 1 million in size. Missionary radio, the enormous and expensive tool in their hands, does not allow them to cope with the smaller groups within these 280 language spheres, smaller groups which have differing languages and dialects. The thought is that the smaller groups can understand through a trade language within the 290 main language groups.

Or, take Campus Crusade's amazing *Jesus* film strategy. Although the *Jesus* film strategists started out targeting the same 280 groups of 1-million or more, their indefatigable efforts have taken them deep into the grass-roots reality. As a result they have now devel-

oped less expensive ways of producing sound tracks for the film and as a result of this modification of their "tool" they are now able to focus on groups which are only 75,000 in number or larger. The new less expensive approach allows them a goal of just over 1,000 such groups. Within these groups are still smaller groups, which, if

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you were to count them all, would produce a much larger number. These still-smaller groups may be able to hear via the trade language of their areas.

Understandably, one of the oldest and largest missionary forces, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, has chosen its tool to be the printed page. That choice is the least expensive medium, and thus enables them to reach every group in the world. *Note that written materials are usable by more than one dialect!* If each dialect able to read the same text were to be pronounced out loud it very well might be unintelligible or objectionable to other groups which can nevertheless read from the same page! In any event, use of the printed page both allows and requires a total of more than 6,000 groups to be approached, only about half of which currently still need (printed) translation help.

By contrast, note the differing circumstances of the mission groups which employ the *ear-gate*. Take Gospel Recordings, for example. These marvelous people understand per-

fectly that several groups which can *read* the same printed page may *pronounce* what they see in discordant ways, and as a result the people speaking the different dialects simply will not all listen to audio or cassette that speaks one of the other dialect—even though its message may appear the same on the printed page. Accordingly, as long as Gospel

Recordings uses the *ear-gate* it has to take these sub-groups seriously. As a result, Gospel Recordings estimates more than 10,000 groups need to be reached—based on employing the *ear-gate* and the mother tongue. However, it is possible to put the minimal gospel message into cassette more easily than it is to produce a substantial portion of the Bible in printed form. Thus,

Gospel Recordings, with only a staff of 60, has already dealt with more than 4,500 groups! Peoples need the minimal gospel on a few cassettes. They also need a substantial portion of the Bible not necessarily just the New Testament.

If you ponder carefully the effect of using differing tools of evangelization, it will become clear that the goal of the gospel for *Every Person* will more likely require penetration by people movements into smaller groups—eventually, that is, into groups the size Gospel Recordings works with. Why? Because otherwise some small people groups in many places of the world will not feel part of any Christian movement.

Barriers of Prejudice

Tragically, near neighbors often hate and fear each other. Thus, in the early stages of evangelism such groups often refuse to become part of the same "people-movement church." In the early stages of evangelism such enmities will require such groups to be dealt with separately.

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Fortunately, however, it is true that virtually all such smaller groups are part of layer clusters of groups. This makes it possible to include all remaining unreached groups without listing more than 2,500 or so groups, some of which are clusters. These are a tangible list of targets for distinctively missionary strategy. Once these clusters are successfully penetrated it gives insight into how other groups within the same cluster may yield to the gospel, even though the Gospel may not automatically flow from one group in a cluster to its near neighbor enemies.

And history shows that eventually a large host of smaller, often warring, groups once they become Christian, start to coalesce into larger groups. For example, at the time Christianity first began to be adopted in the Scandinavian area, hundreds of mutually hostile tribes inhabited the region. The Norwegian, Swedish and Danish spheres today are the result of wide spread reconciliation and consequent unification resulting from the adoption of Christian faith on the part of many smaller, formerly warring groups. Christian faith did not quite prevent the Rwanda massacres, but it is clearly the only thing that unites the two groups. Satan simply took advantage of the over all good will between the two groups whose people were living side by side and unleashed a malignant minority to do his dirty work, exploiting a subtle situation of integration. Note that for the most part one group was not won to Christ by the other group but by people from a long way away.

It is valuable for the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement to have added "and the Gospel for Every Person" to the 1980 slogan, "A Church for Every People," because it may not be obvious that reaching every *people* is the essential means of reaching every *person*. It also may not be obvious that once that essential people movement to Christ has been created by the divine-

human effort of cross-cultural evangelism (which is what missions is all about), that central achievement then essentially makes accessible and available "the Gospel for Every Person," and is perhaps the best way to define it.

Measure to Verify

But how measurable is the presence of this "essential people movement to Christ"? It might perhaps be better to say "verifiable" than "measurable." We don't normally say a woman is partially pregnant, or that a person is partially infected by AIDS. Rather, in such cases we "verify" the presence or absence of a condition.

For example, measuring the percentage of the individuals in a group that seem to be active Christians may not be the best indicator of the presence or absence of a people movement to Christ. Two percent of a small group of 700 is only 14 people; 2% of the Minnan Chinese in Taiwan happens to be 400,000 believers in 2,000 congregations.

What makes it easier to verify the existence of an unreached people is the fact that we are looking for the groups with the least opportunity, the least access. While it may be difficult to say at just what point a people movement securely exists or not, it is certainly easy to identify those groups where there is no doubt one way or the other. You end up with three categories: 1) groups definitely unreached, 2) groups where there is doubt, and 3) groups definitely reached, which could be boiled down to 1) unreached, 2) doubtful, and 3) reached. Logically we expect to focus our highest priority energies on those that are definitely unreached. The only thing is that 2%, or any percentage, may be an indirect and misleading measurement.

But, unfortunately, it is still almost entirely theoretical to ask the simple question of whether or not a group has a people movement to Christ within it (e.g., is it reached or not by the 1982

definition?). Why? Because this is not the way the world's statistical machinery is working. The U.N. does not ask such questions. Neither do the secular encyclopedias, nor the military or political researchers.

Then who does? The three major Christian research offices, those of Patrick Johnstone, David Barrett, and Barbara Grimes, have been at work for years and control masses of data on the World Christian movement, drawing on sources all over the world but mainly upon annual publications of some kind or another, both secular and church publications, etc. These, understandably, are primarily sources for what is being done, not so much for what is not being done. Few of these sources render information on peoples with whom they do not yet work, and if they do, still fewer ask this particular, specific "unreached peoples" question. The very concept is still fairly new. Thus, there is inadequate information at the present time.

In the Meantime

As a result, we must be content with the best we can do with the data available. This is where the kind of "less than 2% Christian" type of "available data" comes back in as better than nothing. The AD 2000 Movement has drawn together a fine group of willing researchers and has put together a list which combines differing criteria that may all be significant. These source have drawn upon data from mission agencies, from individual missionaries, from church publications and lists gathered for other purposes and with other criteria. Some research agencies tabulate the percentages of different religious adherents, some tabulate degrees of ethnicity, and so on. Thus, the practical thing to do is what AD 2000 Movement has done in this still early state of affairs namely, to take lists from various sources and various criteria and make up "a list of lists," giving all of the available information about a now fairly com-

prehensive list of peoples. This is a practical and temporary shift of attention away from the simple, missiological question, "Is this group reached?" that is, is there a "people movement to Christ" present? Rather, the question has temporarily become, "is there published information about this group which could give us light of some sort on the missiological question?"

Note that the goal has not changed! It is still "A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000." One of the most exciting things to see happen, following GCOWE '95 in Korea, is the vast increase of information which is bound to be uncovered in the months and years ahead.

Conclusion

One thing is sure, we have all the information we need for the new outreaches for which we are prepared right now. The more we penetrate the pioneer peoples the more we will know. We don't really need to know more than we can digest right now. We will find out a lot more about a lot of the details when we get out there and get to work!

The world is now incredibly small. There is no place on earth you cannot go in a few hours. We must keep our goals clearly in mind and not worry too much about the details. We need not suppose that everything depends on us, but we must understand that God is asking everything of us. That, in turn, is the same as saying that He wants to touch our tongues with a live coal from the altar. It means He wants our love for all the world to reflect the compassion of His love for all the world, which has already profoundly benefitted us. Therefore, Paul's motivation must become ours: "Christ died for all that those who *live might no longer live unto themselves* but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (II Cor. 5:15).

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