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THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY FOR MISSION*

Some Orientations after *Veritatis Gaudium*

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I. Loyola School of Theology (LST) Through the Lens of Our Alumni

Over a month ago, I wrote to some LST alumni requesting them for some information regarding their current ministry and a few thoughts about their experience in LST. I thought of introducing some of them to you today. We hope to come, through our alumni perhaps, to a lived appreciation of our mission today at LST even as we also try to reflect on LST's future directions.

A. Alumni from Africa and Europe

Martin Waweru Kamau, S.J. (Kenya), STL 2017. Fr. Martin is the Headmaster at the Loyola Secondary School in Wau, South Sudan. A school at the frontier, LSS forms students many of whom are displaced, together with their relatives, and live in camps where they took refuge after the civil wars. Fr. Martin, who studied Migration Theology, wrote: "LST empowered me to develop resilience and pliability to work with

*Inaugural Address of the 10th President of Loyola School of Theology (August 28, 2019).

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displaced and forcibly uprooted people who, in many cases, remain in a state of despair."

Christian Schenker (Switzerland), MA 2017. Christian works at the Student Chaplaincy under the supervision of the Jesuits at the University of Zurich. He said:

> LST prepared me well for this ministry by letting me imbibe both the aura of Jesuit intellectuality as well as Ignatian spirituality. Some of the challenges I face in my work are obviously greatly influenced by my particular context here in Switzerland: secularization, individualism, relativism of truth, challenges that make us rethink what it means to *be* Church and *belong* to the Church.

Pablo Munoz, F.M.V.D. (Spain), STL 2013. Pablo has been ministering to many Verbum Dei groups in and near Rome since he graduated from LST in 2013. He wrote: "I always remember LST as a great experience, a very wonderful family that I will always treasure in my heart."

B. Alumni from Latin America

Walter Diaz, C.S. (Mexico), STB 2014. After his studies at LST and ordination, Walter was sent to the Scalabrinian-run Holy Redeemer Parish in London. In particular, he was blessed to share with the Filipino community in London his own experience as a migrant in the Philippines during his theological studies in LST. "With great honor and gratitude," Walter wrote, "I gave these people back a small portion of the human and academic formation that I've gained from the Philippines … I'm very thankful to my former classmates, professors and to all the beautiful people of LST."

C. Alumni from Asia and the Philippines

Francis Xavier Nguyen Hai Tinh, S.J. (Vietnam), STB 2003. Tinh is the Formation Delegate of the Vietnamese Province and teaches theology full-time at St. Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate in Ho Chi Minh City. Fr. Tinh wrote:

> At LST my mind was widely opened to new knowledge and experiences that challenged and renewed me, making me into what I am now. Much of what I'm teaching and the way I'm thinking [are] from what I learned and experienced during my time at LST and Arrupe International Residence.

Gerald Kong Teck Wee (Singapore), STL-MA 2012. Gerald is the Executive Secretary of both the Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Ecumenical Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore. He strives to build bonds of friendship, understanding, and respect among believers of different religions that bring Catholics and the interfaith community together.

Antonetta Pereira, F.M.M. (India), STL 2015. Sr. Antonetta is a professor of theology at a women's theologate in India. She is Tertian Instructor and in-charge of Junior sisters in her congregation, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Lee Jeihui, S.O.L.P.H. (Korea), STB 2016. Sr. Teresa is Editor-in-Chief at a publishing company in Korea called "Living with Scripture" that is run by their Congregation, the Sisters [of] Our Lady of Perpetual Help. She also lectures on theology and Scripture to lay people and sisters in formation, frequently using her LST class notes on Revelation and Faith, Christology, Ecclesiology, and others. She wrote: "Everything I experienced in LST is a priceless treasure: the knowledge, experience, and friendships with classmates from many countries."

Christina Elias, M.A. (Caroline Islands), MA 2011. Sr. Christina currently works in the Vicariate of Pohnpei-Kosrae, a vicariate in the Caroline Islands, located on the island of Pohnpei. She is the youth and catechesis coordinator, accompanying the youth in their faith formation and training. She also gives retreats to the youth and catechists.

Ferry Susanto (Indonesia), STD 2017. Fr. Ferry is the head of the Biblical Commission of the Archdiocese of Jakarta and is formator at the major seminary of the Archdiocese. He teaches Scripture courses with a focus on the Old Testament at the Driyarkara School of Philosophy in Jakarta. Fr. Ferry wrote:

> LST gave me wonderful experiences in studying the Sacred Scriptures using some contextual approaches, including the point of view of the Asian Church. In my teaching, I share with my students some biblical approaches that I learned in LST such as feminism and post-colonial criticism. Thanks to all my professors who helped me in my doctorate program.

Also among our many graduates from the Philippines are recently-appointed bishops. Five have been appointed by Pope Francis just this year 2019 to serve the People of God in the Philippines. They are:

- Most Rev. Cosme Damian R. Almedilla, D.D. (Seminary Program 1987) as Bishop of Butuan
- Most Rev. Midyphil B. Billones, D.D. (STB 1994; Seminary Program 1995) as Auxiliary Bishop of Cebu
- Most Rev. Marvyn A. Maceda, D.D. (STB 1995; Seminary Program 1996) as Bishop of San Jose de Antique
- Most Rev. Leo M. Dalmao, C.M.F., D.D. (STB 1996; Seminary Program 1997) as Bishop of the Prelature of Isabela, Basilan
- Most Rev. Jose R. Rapadas III, D.D. (STL 2007) as Bishop of Iligan

We also have so many other lay alumni like our amazing theology professors here in the University, family counselors, and retreat directors. Just seeing how much service our alumni provide to the various churches around the world brings a lot of consolation and pride to my heart and to our faculty. We at LST are doing something worthwhile; we are carrying out an important mission in this part of the world.

II. The Mission of LST

LST's mission of formation is threefold: as an ecclesiastical faculty of theology, as Asian and international, and as Jesuit.

A. As an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Theology

As an ecclesiastical faculty directly under the supervision of the Holy See, LST serves the particular churches of the Philippines, Asia, and even beyond in the preaching of the Gospel. Connected with but definitely not the same as catechesis or religious education, which is an initiatory and a continuing way of formation in the basic tenets of the faith, theology helps believers "to understand ever more fully that which they believe … to assimilate the intelligible content of the Word of God, so that it may become light and nourishment for their faith.… This is the way of the understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*)."[1] Indeed, theology is faith seeking understanding, *fides quaerens intellectum,* but also faith seeking deeper and creative understanding.

Hence the mission of our faculty is not so much to catechize our students but to theologize with them in a way that is profound, creative, beautiful, attractive, inspiring, and even disturbing. Together, professors and students "seek to understand better, further develop and more effectively communicate the meaning of Christian Revelation.… They investigate the ways in which theology can shed light on specific questions raised by contemporary culture,"[2] many of which are so complex, difficult, and at times disconcerting. At LST and in any ecclesiastical faculty of theology, these questions deserve carefully-nuanced answers and not memorized lines from the text of the catechism, and not even carefully memorized paragraphs from the class notes of your professors.

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[1]International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria* (November 29, 2011), no. 17.

[2]John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (August 15, 1990), no. 29.

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As an ecclesiastical faculty, LST commits itself to this mission of theologizing in communion always and intensely with the hierarchy and with the local, particular, and the universal Church in the whole work of evangelization.[3] In fact, the Fathers of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus held in 2008, in its Decree 1, quote Pope Benedict XVI when he said in his allocution that "the Church's evangelizing work … relies heavily on the Society's responsibility for formation in the fields of theology, spirituality and mission."[4] "In an era of complex social, cultural and religious challenges," the decree states, "the Pope asks us to faithfully help the Church.… What the Church expects from us is sincere collaboration in the search for the full truth to which the Spirit leads us, in full adherence to the faith and the teaching of the Church."[5]

Indeed, as an ecclesiastical faculty of theology and ministry, LST was originally established primarily for the formation of future priests. Nevertheless, through these past 50 years, LST has intensely committed itself as well to the professional and ministerial formation of the laity and religious sisters, who are companions of the clergy in mission.

Out of our current student population of 463, we currently have 56 laymen, 53 laywomen, and 39 religious sisters in our various degree and non-degree programs. In fact, as expressed by one of our professors, Fr. Arnel Aquino,

> our day-to-day classes in Loyola School of Theology have become all the richer because of what laypeople and women-religious bring: feet-on-the-earth, deeply pastoral, and refreshing narratives and experiences … more appropriated to the real-time needs of today's people, closer to the sheep.[6]

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[3]Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (January 29, 2019), no. 3.

[4]Benedict XVI, Allocution to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (February 21, 2008), no. 6.

[5]Society of Jesus, *General Congregation 35* (2008), Decree 1, no. 7.

[6]Arnel Aquino, in the brochure for the LST Scholarship Fund for the Laity and Religious Sisters. Text available at https://www.facebook.com/loyolaschooloftheology/.

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Pope Francis in fact tells us that theological centers should

> encourage as much as possible in addition to seminarians and religious, the participation … of lay people and women both lay and religious. In particular, the contribution that women are making and can make to theology is indispensable and their participation should therefore be supported.[7]

In this regard, we are launching today our fundraising project, the LST Scholarship Fund for the Laity and Religious Sisters, that will help our prospective students in the masters and doctoral programs to respond to the inspiration and challenge of Pope Francis. With the generous assistance of those who support our cause, LST hopes to bring in twenty-million pesos (PhP 20,000,000.00) as capital for this scholarship fund. Please pray for the success of this campaign.

B. As an Asian and International Faculty of Theology

LST is and will always be a Filipino school of theology. The Philippines serves as the immediate context or the precise formative-educative backdrop of theological and ministerial formation at LST:

- our rich and complex Filipino cultural heritage that many observe is altogether "Asian" and "Western";
- those varied expressions of lived faith and popular religiosity by Filipinos—Quiapo's *Jesus Nazareno*, the 9-day *Simbanggabi*, the novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help;
- the complex socio-political and economic landscape during this time of Duterte and its lights and shadows;
- *baha*, *bagyo*, *habagat*, traffic, and Chicken Joy and Jollibee.

[7]Francis, Address at the Meeting on the Theme "Theology After *Veritatis Gaudium* in the Context of the Mediterranean" (Naples: June 21, 2019).

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However, LST is and has always been international as well because of the global character of Jesuit mission. "From its very beginning, Jesuit mission has considered 'the entire world' as 'the object of our interest and concern'" *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.[8] One of the early Jesuits, Jerome Nadal, used to say, "For the Society, the whole world is our home."[9]

Here in LST in 2009, through the efforts of our former President Fr. Jose Mario Francisco, S.J., we institutionalized a program called the Asian Theological Program. Its goal is to ensure that preparation for ministry in Asian contexts, including the Philippines, remains an integral part of LST. This formation requires "enabling our students to understand and communicate the Gospel within their contexts, to reflect critically on these contexts in the light of the Gospel and to enrich the Catholic tradition with concerns arising from these contexts."[10] For the majority of our students who are from the Philippines, this Asian and global perspective in theologizing can serve as a powerful experience of the Church as both "particular" and as "universal" as they reflect on the Gospel of Jesus *locally* in the context of their parish or city or the entire country but always with an *Asian and global perspective*, never narrow nor parochial.

Just to share some statistics with you: from 65 international students out of 350 students in Academic Year 2008–2009 (18.6%), the number of international students has swelled to 187 out of 463 students this current First Semester (40.39%). As LST has been experiencing not just growth in enrollment in general but more significantly the increasing internationalization of the academic community over the last 9 or 10 years, so has LST thereby responded by updating its curriculum, course offerings, and pedagogy in accord with our Asian Theological Program.

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[8]Jose Mario C. Francisco, *Summary Brief on the Asian Theological Program of Loyola School of Theology* (Loyola School of Theology: November 23–25, 2009), here quoting *General Congregation 35*, Decree 2, nos. 23–24.

[9]Francis, Allocution to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (October 24, 2016).

[10]Asian Theological Program of LST.

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Since most of our graduates, when back in their field of mission, will be working with and ministering to peoples of Asia and its various cultural and religious traditions, so also do we strive to prepare them for mission in such a context through various ways, among which are:

- offering courses that have explicit Asian content like Asian Church history and Asian religions,
- offering courses that discuss issues common to Asian contexts like migration and care for our common home, and
- offering courses like "Contextual Theology" and "Liturgical Inculturation" that highlight the importance of context in understanding Christian doctrine and practice.

Two years ago, LST took a step further in our commitment to our international students and to contextual theologizing by instituting what we call "Theology in an Asian Language Series." We have offered theology and psycho-spirituality courses in the Vietnamese, Bahasa Indonesian, and Korean languages through the assistance of our visiting professors from abroad. Fr. Luigino Marchioron of the Xaverian Missionaries is currently offering a course in Mandarin on "Reading the Scriptures from the Chinese Perspective." Next semester, not one but three professors from Vietnam will offer a course on "Psycho-Spiritual Growth in Religious Formation." Pending student interest, we will offer similar native language courses in the future, including Filipino- and English-based courses that address questions that are being asked by our international students from Africa and Latin America.

LST's Asian Theological Program is definitely still a work in progress. It would be a good step forward if our international students can participate more in organizing our bi-monthly Theological Hour sessions and bring faith and life issues arising from their own cultures and contexts so that, with the help of experts from their respective countries, we can reflect on these concerns together.

I thank the members of our faculty who, according to the nature of their respective courses, continually strive to commit themselves to our Asian mandate by way of their instruction and research. I am also especially grateful to many of our professors who have patiently and competently guided student research that has produced theses and dissertations with topics that promote creative dialogue between the Christian faith and local cultures. Congratulations to our 20 student researchers who successfully defended their masters, licentiate, and doctoral theses and dissertations last Academic Year: 6 from the Philippines, 3 from Indonesia, 2 each from Vietnam, India, and Zimbabwe, and 1 each from the Benin Republic, Singapore, Myanmar, Korea, and Bangladesh.

C. As a Jesuit Faculty of Theology

As one of the key ministries of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines, it is incumbent upon LST to take an active part in the reflection of the Society on our Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) from 2019–2029. The UAP are the fruit of a process of discernment led by Fr. General Arturo Sosa, S.J. that serve as the road map of the Society of Jesus in our mission:

1. *To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment.* "The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola are a privileged instrument for making the life and action of the Lord Jesus present in diverse social contexts of today's world."[11] The Society of Jesus commits itself to share our spirituality with others, namely discernment and the Spiritual Exercises, as a means to lead others to God.

2. *To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.* "Sent as *companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice*, we resolve to walk with individuals and communities

[11]Arturo Sosa, *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019–2029* (June 2019).

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> that are vulnerable, excluded, marginalized, and humanly impoverished.… [the abused] … The path we seek to follow with the poor is one that promotes social justice and the change of economic, political, and social structures that generate injustice.…"[12]

3. *To accompany [the young] in the creation of a hope-filled future.* "Youth is the stage of human life when individuals make the fundamental decisions by which they insert themselves into society, seek to give meaning to their existence, and realize their dreams. By accompanying the young in this process, teaching them discernment and sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ, we can show them the way to God.…"[13]

4. *To collaborate in the care of our Common Home.* "We resolve … to collaborate with others in the construction of alternative models of life that are based on respect for creation and on a sustainable development capable of producing goods that, when justly distributed, ensure a decent life for all human beings on our planet."[14]

The process of assimilation and implementation of the UAP which Fr. General enjoins all Jesuits to do also pertains to all of us at LST—faculty, students, and staff—who are, in the words of Fr. General, "our partners in mission … who also share our mission and hopes."[15] It will make LST even "more Jesuit" in practice if we strive to align our course offerings, the topics of our bi-monthly Theological Hour sessions, the activities of the Student Council, our students' personal choice of courses and electives, etc. with the Society's Universal Apostolic Preferences.

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[12]Sosa, *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019–2029*.

[13]Sosa, *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019–2029*.

[14]Sosa, *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019–2029*.

[15]Sosa, *Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019–2029*.

III. The Missionary Renewal of Theological Studies After *Veritatis Gaudium*

We have reflected on the mission of LST according to its identity as an ecclesiastical faculty of theology, as Asian and international, and as Jesuit. I propose for our consideration at this point the missionary vision of Pope Francis for the renewal of ecclesiastical studies in his 2018 Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (The Joy of Truth) on ecclesiastical universities and faculties. The path he laid out in *Veritatis Gaudium* is the path that LST is called to take if we are to be "always and intensely" in close communion with the Holy Father, the hierarchy, and with the local and universal Church in the whole work of evangelization.[16]

Pope Francis points out three fundamental criteria or requirements for the renewal of ecclesiastical studies in its service of a missionary Church.

A. Contemplation on the Kerygma, the Gospel of Mercy

First is contemplation on the very heart of the *kerygma*, or the core Gospel proclamation of salvation in Christ, and to discern how it "continues to take flesh in the life of the Church and of humanity."[17] Renewal begins with the theologian's encounter with the mercy of God, grounded on the initial proclamation made by Jesus himself. From there, Pope Francis encourages us on

> to study how the various disciplines—dogma, morality, spirituality, law, and so on—may reflect the centrality of mercy [in the Gospel.] Without mercy our theology, our law, our pastoral care run the risk of collapsing into bureaucratic narrow-mindedness or ideology, which by their nature seek to domesticate the mystery.[18]

[16]Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, no. 3.

[17]Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword no. 4.

[18]Cf. Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Grand Chancellor of the "Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina" for the 100th Anniversary of the

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Indeed, for Pope Francis, compassion especially with those who are suffering is an indispensable component of authentic theologizing: "Without compassion constantly nourished by prayer … theology not only loses its soul, but also its intelligence and [the] ability to interpret reality in a Christian way." Moreover, theologians who "prudently place themselves outside the world and share nothing risky with the majority of humanity" are merely engaging themselves in "a laboratory theology, a pure theology," like distilled water "which understands nothing."[19]

When theologians grapple especially with difficult, non-"black or white" questions facing humanity today in the light of the Gospel, Pope Francis acknowledges the need for them to enjoy theological freedom because "without the possibility of experimenting with new paths, nothing new is created, and there is no room for the newness of the Spirit of the Risen One."[20] At the same time, Pope Francis clarifies that true freedom in teaching and research is necessarily based upon the firm adherence to God's Word and deference to the Magisterium. Such fidelity to church teachings is guided by the hierarchy of truths in the Catholic Church[21] and the various degrees of authority with which these truths are taught by the Magisterium.[22]

Nevertheless, Pope Francis says that in their exercise of creative fidelity, in harmonizing theology with the pastoral needs of the People of God, theologians should proceed "with trust, and without suspicion, but [at] the same time with prudence and without rashness, especially in teaching.…"[23]

Founding of the Faculty of Theology (Vatican City: March 3, 2015).

[19]Francis, Address in Naples (June 21, 2019).

[20]Francis, Address in Naples (June 21, 2019).

[21]Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964), no. 11c.

[22]Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 29.

[23]Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Art. 38.

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B. A Culture of Dialogue

The second fundamental criterion in the renewal of theological studies is the cultivation of an authentic culture of dialogue among believers and non-believers. Dialogue for Pope Francis is not a tactical approach but is a method of discernment. We are able to discern by dialogue when we are able to experience the God of Mercy in the context of communion and are able to appreciate more fully the meaning of such an encounter and its practical implications. Through dialogue, theologians are able to discern "new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us … [and they] … reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed.…"[24]

C. Interdisciplinarity, Cross-Disciplinarity, and Networking

The third impetus for the renewal of theology is interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity carried out with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation and assisted by networking. This criterion is still connected with dialogue. A theology that dialogues and adopts discernment requires theologians who are rooted in the heart of the Church and, at the same time, "open to the inexhaustible novelties of the Spirit"[25] that can be present in various sources and ways of understanding and transmitting the truth. Pope Francis thus encourages interdisciplinarity either in what he calls its "weak" form—as a simple multidisciplinary approach wherein an object is studied from the viewpoint of different disciplines—or its "strong" form—as cross-disciplinarity, viewing all disciplines from the perspective or against the backdrop of the Gospel.[26]

Networking and cooperation not just among ecclesiastical faculties and schools of theology worldwide but also with other secular academic

[24]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Nov. 24, 2013), no. 74; Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword no. 4.

[25]Francis, Address in Naples (June 21, 2019).

[26]Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, Foreword no. 4.

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and non-academic institutions will serve the push towards inter- and cross-disciplinarity of our ecclesiastical faculties.

In summary, theology after *Veritatis Gaudium* for Pope Francis is a kerygmatic, mission-oriented theology that never tires in proclaiming the Gospel of love and mercy. It is a theology that leads the Church to always "go forth," constantly finding opportunities *to serve instead of being preoccupied with preserving itself in its past glories.* It is a theology of discernment that inspires us to be compassionate, to be welcoming, and to be always in dialogue with society, cultures, and religions and shunning isolationism so that together we may realize the peaceful coexistence of individuals and peoples.[27]

Conclusion

As I begin my own mission as President of Loyola School of Theology, I ask for your prayers not just for myself but for all of us here at LST—faculty, administrators, staff, and students. We need your prayers as we set about this journey of renewal to which Pope Francis beckons us.

Before I conclude, I would like to express LST's deep gratitude to the many bishops of the Philippines and Asia, and to superiors of religious congregations and administrative superiors of our lay students, for their trust and confidence in LST and in the Society of Jesus in sending their men and women to study with us.

Finally, thank you, Fr. Joe Quilongquilong, for the past six years of exemplary service you have rendered to LST. You have left an indelible mark on LST. Your contribution to LST will always be remembered!

[27]Francis, Address in Naples (June 21, 2019).

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