

Book Reviews

Christian America?: Perspectives on our Religious Heritage. Ed. by Daryl C. Cornett. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011, 353 pp., \$14.99 paper.

Americans are deeply divided concerning the role that religion currently plays in American public life. Concern about religion in public life is driving renewed interest in the history of our nation's founding, especially Christianity's role in it. Witness a sampling of recent books that address these subjects, including John Fea's *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* (Westminster John Knox, 2011), Thomas Kidd's *God of Liberty* (Basic, 2010) and *The Founding Fathers and the Debate over Religion in Revolutionary America* (Oxford University Press, 2011), and John Wilsey's *One Nation Under God?* (Pickwick, 2011). Daryl Cornett has added a "counterpoint" book to the growing collection of books on these topics, one which presents a variety of viewpoints and rebuttals under one cover. David Barton, Jonathan Sassi, William Henard, and Daryl Cornett each provide their own perspectives on the role of Christianity in

American life in this book, with George Marsden contributing a forward.

The discussion in this engaging book centers on whether or not America is a "Christian nation." Marsden opens the book by highlighting the need to carefully define one's terms when addressing this question. Some might use such a label to mean nothing more than that most of its earliest citizens "were of [a] generically Christian heritage," while others might use it to assert that most of America's citizens or earliest leaders "were practicing Christians of a certain sort." On the other hand, some might call America a Christian nation to assert that "the nation's government [is] officially Christian in some specified ways." Some who assert this might only use the label "Christian America" in a "descriptive sense," thus affirming that "its ethos and laws were predominantly, or at least substantially, shaped by a broadly Christian heritage." Others might go further and press the point that "those laws and practices that were considerably shaped by a Christian heritage were therefore 'Christian' in the normative sense of being examples that

Christians today ought to follow” in national life (xvii). The various ways individuals may use the label “Christian nation” highlights the complexity of engaging the “Christian America” issue.

The essays of the four authors fall on a continuum, with Barton arguing that America is a “distinctly Christian” nation and Sassi arguing that America is a “distinctly secular” nation. Henard and Cornett seek mediating positions, with Henard arguing that America is “essentially Christian” (closer to Barton’s position) and Cornett arguing that America is a “partly Christian” nation. The sharply contrasting positions of Sassi and Barton illuminate the two fundamental approaches that can be taken in answering the “Christian America” question.

David Barton asserts in his chapter that America is a Christian nation, which by his definition is “a nation founded on Christian and biblical principles, whose society and institutions have been largely shaped, molded, and influenced by those principles” (4-5). Barton sees Protestantism as the purest expression of biblical Christianity, and he argues that America’s republican form of government grew out of the seedbed of Protestantism, with Montesquieu and Edmund Burke in apparent agreement (8-15). Barton credits Protestantism with breaking the medieval societal synthesis, eventually resulting in the separation of church and state in America (15-20). He also credits the principles of Protestantism with producing religious voluntarism, which “secures religious toleration and rights of conscience” (20-24), along with other aspects of America’s civic life. Barton reinforces his argument by quoting assertions from a vast number of historical sources that America is a Christian nation in one sense or another. His chapter contains almost four hundred footnotes altogether, and readers will feel that weight of his “Christian America” position when reading his selected quotations. Whether one believes that America is a “Christian nation” or not, all must agree that a large number of America’s political leaders and leading intellectuals from the time of

its founding have believed that it is.

In contrast to Barton, Jonathan Sassi argues that America was founded as a uniquely “secular” and “religiously eclectic” nation by design (102). Sassi asserts in his chapter that the founding fathers established the newly-formed government in America to be completely disentangled from ecclesiastical life, in contrast with most European countries. The founders did not seek to establish any particular religion in the Constitution, giving the nation a decidedly “secular” nature. According to Sassi, “the Framers of the United States Constitution chose a deliberately secular path in the interest of national unity” (103). Sassi asserts that American notions of religious freedom and toleration, along with the presence of diverse religious beliefs and practices in American life from the beginning, are enough to show the “distinctly secular” nature of America.

Henard and Cornett argue for mediating positions between Barton and Sassi, with Henard’s position differing little from Barton’s, though more vaguely stated. Cornett stakes out a more clear thesis, namely, that “the primary shaping ideology of the Revolutionary period was that of the European Enlightenment” (263). Christian influences played a role in establishing America, but non-Christian thought had a much bigger role. Cornett argues for his position in part by asserting that the Americans’ “rebellion” against Great Britain is a clear indication of “secular Enlightenment theory in regard to politics” (263). Echoing the position of historian Mark Noll and others, Cornett asserts that Americans were swept up into the Revolutionary fervor by Enlightenment thinkers in America and Enlightenment-accommodated clergy like John Witherspoon (281-285). According to Cornett, “Those Christians who supported physical resistance against the tyranny of Britain generally turned to Enlightenment rhetoric for validation, propped up by poor exegesis and application of the Bible” (285). Such an assertion ignores the well-established Puritan rejection “the divine right of kings” and the theological tradi-

tion of righteous resistance to tyranny found in Reformed Protestantism. Cornett also ignores the reality of English legal traditions adopted in America which were profoundly influenced by British Christianity and which provided a large part of America's legal and judicial framework.

Cornett's highlighting of Enlightenment influences in America's founding generation is not without merit, but one must be careful not to emphasize the influence of the Enlightenment in a way that devalues the role that Christianity has played in Western socio-political development, including in the development of America. The best nations on earth "during this present evil age" are a mixture of good and evil. America is no exception, exceptional though it may be, and yet it is all too common to minimize the role that Protestant and evangelical Christianity has played in making America great.

The Christian roots of America beg to be more fully explored, for the factors in a nation's political and societal development are extremely complex. For those wishing to begin such an exploration, a number of books abound, but Cornett's *Christian America?* is a great place to begin. Its "counterpoint" format is especially helpful for accentuating the many different perspectives on the idea of "Christian America" that are common among evangelical scholars today.

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Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. Ed. by Glen G. Scorgie. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011, 864 pp., \$39.99 cloth.

Zondervan's *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, released in 2011, provides an up-to-date and accessible reference for an ever-expanding area of study. The *Dictionary* consists of two parts: a series of thirty-four essays covering particular biblical

foundations, theological loci, historical periods, and even social-science interests. Each article, generally six to seven pages in length, surveys key literature and provides bibliographies for further research. The second part of the work contains dictionary entries ranging from several paragraphs to several pages on topics, movement, and individuals related to spirituality.

The articles of part one offer helpful summaries of critical issues in the academic study of spirituality. Glen Scorgie's introductory article overviewing Christian spirituality touches on the significant areas of the discipline: the ubiquitous-yet-slippery concept of spirituality; the narrower Pauline usage of "spiritual"; the integral relationship between theology and piety; the historical continuity of piety throughout the church's history; etc. (27-33). Charles Nienkirchen's essay on prayer includes an impressive collection of historical Christian positions (166-72). Robert Mulholland's treatment of spirituality and transformation is noteworthy for its biblical reflection. Bruce Hindmarsh's tracing of the contours of evangelical spirituality (146-52) accomplishes much in a short space.

The dictionary articles, which comprise the bulk of the volume, are generally accurate, succinct, and helpful. Simon Chan's overview of Quietism traces the significant seventeenth-century authors, theological commitments, and later evangelical appropriations, but also includes a critique of the tradition. Related articles on significant Quietist authors such as Miguel de Molinos, Madam Guyon, and François Fénelon list key writings along with even-handed assessments of their influence. Articles on key spiritual classics are present: Todd Johnson's treatment of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is spot-on and Bruce Demarest's overview of the *Theologia Germanica* is helpful, yet major works such as Augustine's *Confessions* or Thomas á Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* are surprisingly absent.

The *Dictionary* contains articles on the major figures one would expect to find: Augustine,

George Fox, Brother Lawrence, Teresa of Avila, and Thomas Merton. Yet the work also contains several figures one might not expect such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Hannah Hurnard, Brennan Manning, Flannery O'Connor, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Kalistos Ware. Twentieth-century authors, collectors, and analyzers of spirituality like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Urban Holmes are present, as are psychological writers like Norman Vincent Peale and M. Scott Peck.

The *Dictionary* contains an impressive collection of articles on specialized spiritual movements including Celtic spirituality, Quaker spirituality, Methodist spirituality, and Russian spirituality. Naturally there is some unevenness—some of these articles are disappointing. Apart from mentioning Bunyan, who is treated as a contemplative, there is little distinctively “Baptist” in Glenn Hinson’s article on Baptist spirituality. By contrast, Paul Peucker’s treatment of Moravian spirituality traces its key distinctives with admirable brevity.

Some articles, while certainly well-written and interesting, seem to fall outside the book’s scope, including Dudley Woodberry’s treatment of Sufism, Bruce Demarest’s article on midlife transition, and Mary Wilkinson’s survey of children’s literature.

Zondervan’s *Dictionary* fills a helpful niche in contemporary reference works on spirituality. It is certainly broader in scope than *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (2005) or *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (1993), though these latter works tend to have more substantive articles (compare Bernard McGinn’s treatment of mysticism in the *Westminster* dictionary with Evan Howard’s article in the Zondervan work). Overall the Zondervan *Dictionary* is a fine work, and its breadth is its most significant strength.

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LDS in the USA: Mormonism and the Making of American Culture. By Lee Trepanier and Lynita K. Newswander. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012, 166 pp., \$24.95 paper.

Trepanier and Newswander’s addition to the growing corpus of Mormon studies is an attempt by the authors to show the significant links between the development of culture in the United States and the birth, growth, and development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The authors claim that “Mormons have played a substantial role in the shaping of the social, cultural, political, and religious makeup of the United States, a role that is neither conspiratorial nor marginal and that has not been properly acknowledged in the academy or by the general public. This book is intended to remedy this deficiency” (1).

Chapter one is a brief, albeit helpful, summary of the way Latter-day Saints have been portrayed, and have portrayed themselves, in the American media. Surveying the Osmonds, Disney animator Don Bluth, Glenn Beck, Pixar co-founder Edwin Catmull, Stephanie Meyer, and Stephen R. Covey, Trepanier and Newswander offer a glimpse into the ways in which Latter-day Saints put their theology into practice outside the walls of the local meetinghouse. Chapter two is devoted solely to the historical issue of plural marriage and the ramifications felt by both American culture and the LDS Church. The chapter also offers a concise history of fundamentalist Latter-day Saints who still practice plural marriage. Chapter three discusses the nature of Latter-day Saint political aspirations and offers summaries of the political careers of Joseph Smith, former Michigan governor George Romney, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, former Utah governor and former United States ambassador to China Jon Huntsman Jr., and United States Senator Harry Reid. Chapter four summarizes some of the differences between traditional, orthodox Christianity and the theological beliefs of Latter-day Saints, and offers a

brief analysis of the political leanings of average Latter-day Saints. Chapter five is meant to argue one simple point: Latter-day Saint religion is the most American religion in the United States.

The main point of the work, that Latter-day Saints have not been given proper attribution for their contributions to American culture and politics, is interesting and altogether worthy discussion. Trepanier and Newswander are particularly helpful in their discussions concerning Latter-day Saint influence in contemporary media and Latter-day Saint political leanings. Mormons have exerted visible influence in many areas of American life in recent decades, but on the whole, this argument is overdone.

There are some faults regarding minor details. For example, the authors incorrectly title the LDS Church “The Church of Latter-day Saints” and incorrectly identify Lilburn Boggs as the governor of Illinois. The proper title of the LDS Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Lilburn Boggs was governor of Missouri.

The work seems to have an unacknowledged agenda. It repeatedly calls for social and religious tolerance in American culture. The entire work is riddled with authorial calls for tolerance, yet the work is touted as an explanation of the ways in which Latter-day Saints have contributed to American culture. Though discussions concerning tolerance may be needed, those discussions are outside the scope of this work as set by the authors. The authors seem to have a proverbial ax to grind regarding this subject (and regarding numerous others).

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My Name is Patrick: St Patrick's Confessio. Trans. by Pádraig McCarthy. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2011, 42 pp., \$6.50 paper.

It was C.S. Lewis who once argued that for every modern book a person reads, he or she should read two from the past. His reason for arguing thus was to avoid chronological snobbery:

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook ... Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny. They thought that they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united—united *with* each other and *against* earlier and later ages—by a great mass of common assumptions.... The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.

One of the challenges, though, to reading some of the oldest Christian literature, namely, that from the patristic era is finding this material in contemporary, readable translations. For example, Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, in some ways the most profound theological treatise by a Greek-speaking author in the second century, still lacks a modern translation. On the other hand, the fifth-century *Confession* of Patrick has not, however, lacked for translations. Since the 1990s, there have been five or six good English translations. This new one by Pádraig McCarthy is somewhat different, though. It was done for the Saint Patrick's *Confessio* Hypertext Stack Project, an online resource dedicated to the investigation of the historical and contemporary significance of Patrick of Ireland (see Anthony Harvey and Franz Fischer, eds., *The St Patrick's Confessio Hypertext Stack*, www.confessio.ie [Dublin: Royal Irish

Academy, online since September 2011]).

What is particularly exciting about this project is its determination to give people access to the historical Patrick, who needs differentiating from the legendary Patrick to whom medieval authors attributed such things as teaching the Trinity by means of the Irish shamrock and the expulsion of all snakes from Ireland. The site contains John Gwynn's transcription of *Liber Ardmachanus* (*The Book of Armagh* [Dublin/London, 1913]), the fundamental study of the only manuscript copy of Patrick's *Confessio* in Ireland (there are seven others extant, in England and France). The main Latin text on the website is Ludwig Bieler's "canonical" critical edition of the *Confessio*, which is translated into a variety of European languages (English, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, and German). Students of Bieler's text can use hyperlinks to access images of the relevant sections of the eight manuscripts of the *Confessio* to evaluate the decisions Bieler made with regard to variants in Patrick's text. The site also contains the most comprehensive bibliography of Patrician studies available (http://www.confessio.ie./more/bibliography_full#).

McCarthy's translation itself is well executed and accurately conveys Patrick's authentic voice, the voice of a man so gripped by the love of Christ that he gave himself body and soul to reach the Irish with the gospel. Moreover, this print translation is an excellent entrée into a fabulous cornucopia of resources that enable the reader to encounter one of the most remarkable early Christians.

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Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine. By Khaled Anatolios. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, 322 pp., \$39.99 cloth.

Contributing to the growing stream of Nicene and Trinitarian scholarship, Khaled Anatolios, professor of historical theology at Boston College, has provided a helpful introduction to the Trinitarian doctrine of several prominent Christian theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries. *Retrieving Nicaea* is a condensed version of the systematic thought of Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine, set in contrast to various anti-Nicene contemporaries. Anatolios recognizes that the critical importance of these theologians for the development and triumph of the pro-Nicene tradition. Their defense of the Nicene formulation, Anatolios argues, did not derive from arcane speculations, but rather involved a coherent interpretation of the entire Christian experience.

The burden of this book is to demonstrate that in order properly to understand Trinitarian doctrine one must observe how it came to be formulated in the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople and how such formulations were interpreted in the immediate aftermath of those councils (1). Anatolios insists that it is not enough to simply know *what* Nicene theology is. In addition to knowing what Nicene theology is, one must be aware of *how* Nicene theology was formulated. What were the premises and presuppositions that led the pro-Nicene tradition to their theological conclusions? As the title indicates, Anatolios beckons contemporary theologians to 'retrieve' Nicaea by tracing the logic of Trinitarian doctrinal development by re-performing the acts of understanding and interpretation that led to those statements (1).

In a unique proposal, Anatolios distinguishes between two theological commitments of the fourth and fifth centuries, the unity of will (evident in the thought of Arius, Asterius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Eunomius of Cyzicus) and the unity of being (evident in the thought of

Alexander of Alexandria, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Apollinaris of Laodicea). This suggestion differs somewhat from other recent proposals from Joseph Lienhard, Michel Barnes, and Lewis Ayres. While this proposal affords certain insights, it certainly has its limitations, its simplistic nature being the most apparent. However, it appears that Anatolios is aware of his proposal's limits and is disciplined enough to not push the hermeneutical device too far.

Following his proposal of unity of will and unity of being, Anatolios provides a systematic analysis of three pro-Nicene theologians, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine. Each of these chapters offers a useful investigation into the theological concerns that influenced each of these pro-Nicene theologians. The chapter on Athanasius, a condensed version of a previous work, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, provides a well-researched, yet basic, introduction to Athanasius's Trinitarian theology. The history of Christian doctrine in the fourth century cannot be comprehended without reference to Athanasius, since his writings were fundamental to the development of the Christian understanding of the Trinity and the incarnation. Anatolios presents the basic lines of Athanasius's theology with clarity and charity.

Anatolios provides a lucid presentation of the Trinitarian theology of Gregory of Nyssa, though this chapter would have been much stronger if Nyssa's thought had been set in the context of Cappadocian theology as a whole. Without discussing the Cappadocian achievement as a whole Anatolios risks divorcing Gregory from his context.

Finally, Anatolios's chapter on Augustine serves as a particularly helpful guide to Augustine's Trinitarian theology in *De Trinitate*. The three chapters on the systematic thought of Athanasius, Gregory, and Augustine are immensely helpful in tracing the Trinitarian logic of three prominent theologians. These chapters will help the reader understand the underlying the theological commitments that led Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine to

champion the pro-Nicene tradition.

A great strength of this book lies in its systematic approach and analysis of three of the most prominent fourth and fifth century Trinitarian theologians. This approach, in contrast to the standard diachronic method, allows Anatolios to explore deeply the theological commitments and the Trinitarian logic of these theologians which led them to pro-Nicene theologies. The systematic methodology employed by Anatolios allows him to discuss theological themes and concepts that would be restricted in a historical sketch of fourth and fifth century historical theology. In addition Anatolios' method further enables him to demonstrate that the Nicene tradition involves far more plurality and complexity than is frequently depicted by traditional historical narratives.

Although this distinctive systematic approach is a great strength, it appears to come at the cost of historical background, something that Anatolios is aware of and mentions in his introduction. Despite the disclaimers, more connections between historical and dogmatic theology are needed. The thesis of the book would have been strengthened if Anatolios had included more historical data. A reader who is looking for a historical sketch of the Trinitarian theology of the third and fourth centuries should look elsewhere.

This is nevertheless a valuable work. This book will prove immensely helpful to those who wish to gain insight into the premises and logic that led to the development of the pro-Nicene tradition. In addition this book demonstrates the significant influence that confessional theology and theological presuppositions have upon the task of exegesis. To understand more fully the life of the mind of the great Trinitarian theologians of the early church, I wholeheartedly commend this book to you.

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Ten Popes Who Shook the World. By Eamon Duffy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011, 151 pp., \$25.00 cloth.

Eamon Duffy, professor of the history of Christianity at Cambridge University, has produced an accessible and highly readable account of some of the most important phases in church history by viewing them through the lens of the careers of ten popes who changed the course of world history. Change history they did. The papacy has been one of the most powerful institutions in the world history. The actions undertaken by the popes and the ideas that developed around them shaped world history in profound ways.

Duffy's longer masterpiece, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (Yale, 2006), is among the finest histories of the long expanse of church history available. This shorter work, which originated as ten talks on BBC Radio, draws on the excellence and insights of *Saints and Sinners*, but stands impressively on its own as an excellent introduction to a vastly important part of church history. It is also wonderfully illustrated.

Duffy's ten popes are the Apostle Peter, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Gregory VII, Innocent III, Paul III, Pius IX, Pius XII, John XXIII, and John Paul II. Duffy acknowledges that Peter was not a pope in the later sense of the word, but explains how the biblical, historical, and legendary material combined to establish an ideal that the bishops of Rome developed into a powerful moral symbol of their office and authority. Duffy recognizes also that there were other popes besides these who similarly shook the world and who arguably could have been included in this work.

The book is weighted disproportionately toward modernity. Four of the nine popes held their office in the nineteenth or twentieth century. In support of Duffy's selection, the world in which the papacy operated changed so dramatically in the last two hundred years that this selection is reasonable enough. And the emphasis on the modern era is quite valuable. Insight into the vast

changes brought about by modernity is in some important respects more clearly visible when viewed through the experience of the Vatican. Duffy, a Roman Catholic, is sympathetic but not uncritical. He faults the papacy, for example, for its reactionary response to the emergence of political liberalism, especially democracy.

The gathering of ecclesiastical authority into a single bishop in the western church, Duffy explains, was a rather natural response of churches battling heresy, division, and diversity during the first three centuries of the church's existence. Truth claims, legitimacy, and credibility seemed to depend on unity. But Duffy's interest resides less in the origins of papal authority than in the ways in which the popes "shook the world" and reshaped it.

Duffy's arguments in each chapter are clear and insightful. Duffy for example argues that Leo the Great, who was pope from 440 to 461, "invented the papacy as we know it" (47). As the political empire of Rome collapsed in the fifth century, Leo transformed the very notion of Rome and put it to use in the service of the church. Rome would no longer serve as a symbol of a pagan empire—Leo reinvented Rome as a symbol of a religious empire led by the bishop of Rome. As Romulus and Remus had founded a pagan Rome that endured a thousand years, Leo argued, so Peter and Paul refounded Rome as the head of the Christian church, which would endure forever. Duffy argues compellingly also that as the classical world was crumbling around Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604), he "unwittingly created Europe" by sending a mission to England, resulting finally in the conversion of northern Europe and the establishment of churches that acknowledged the authority of Rome.

As Protestants, we tend to view the papacy as an institution that was committed to authoritarianism in principle and advancing tyranny in practice. And often it was. Duffy however offers a less obvious but no less insightful interpretation: The papal struggles with secular rulers from the medieval

era to the modern age helped establish freedom from an authoritarian secular state. State authority indeed generally exceeded church authority in most eras, even in church matters. Papal authority fell far short of its vaunted claims. Popes did not even possess broadly control over the appointment of bishops—arguably their most important claim to authority—until the nineteenth century.

So Gregory VII's eleventh-century conflict with emperor Henry IV should be viewed not merely in terms of the assertion of papal authority. Gregory sought to establish the church's right to rule its own affairs—in this case, the right of the pope to appoint bishops in papal lands. To the extent that Gregory succeeded, he struck a blow for an independent church. "Under this overbearing autocratic pope," Duffy concludes, "human freedom took one small, uncertain step forward" (69).

These autocratic popes energetically pressed their theoretical claims and gained considerable ground. But even during periods of the papacy's greatest temporal power in the middle ages, the pope's actual control over the church often met rather severe practical limits. In the modern era, however, the real authority of the papacy diminished dramatically. One of the great ironies of papal history, Duffy explains insightfully, is that as the papacy lost temporal power in the modern era, it finally attained the real power over the church that it long had sought.

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