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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

N. N. Glubokovsky: Lay Theologian and Educator*

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It has recently been observed that 'the exceptional vitality of Russian intellectual life in the later nineteenth century was without parallel in any other historically Orthodox society' and that Russia in this period 'was the setting for the first serious encounters between traditional Eastern theology and Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought'.¹ It is undoubtedly more than mere coincidence that the faculties of the seminaries and elite theological academies of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose members were among the chief participants in these encounters, were composed of increasing numbers of laypeople in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1912, 20 of the 29 faculty members at the Moscow Theological Academy were laymen, and at the St Petersburg Academy there were only six clergymen in a faculty of 33.

The purpose of this paper will be to present the life and work of one of the most prominent of these lay Russian Orthodox theologians, not so much as a thinker on the subject of the laity but more as an example of someone who, as a layperson himself, was active at the highest levels of the Russian Orthodox Church's educational system, in the capacity of both educator and administrator, and who was also one of the most accomplished Orthodox theologians of his time, a scholar whose achievements were acclaimed both at home and abroad. As such he provides one model of a role for the laity in Russia, and a role distinct from that provided by the better-known examples of lay theologians like Aleksei Khomyakov, Vladimir Solov'yev or Lev Tolstoy, in that this role was an official one within the Russian Orthodox Church.

On 6 December 1863 Nikolai Nikanorovich Glubokovsky became the last of seven children to be born into the family of a parish priest in the village of Kichmengsky Gorodok, more than 500 miles due east of St Petersburg in Vologda province. Scarcely two years after his birth his father died, leaving his family impoverished and depriving young Nikolai Nikanorovich of the instruction in basic literacy normally given by parish clergy to their children. The youngest Glubokovsky thus attended a church-parish school in the nearby village of Kobyl'sk, after which he received his primary education at the district ecclesiastical school in Nikol'sk. Following six years (1878–84) of seminary in the provincial capital, Vologda, Glubokovsky went on to attend the Moscow Theological Academy (1884–89), where he proved to be an

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outstanding student, taking a particular interest in church history. He spent an extra (fifth) year at the Moscow academy writing his candidate composition under the noted early church historian A. P. Lebedev, followed by a year as a professorial stipendiary in general church history, at the end of which he published the work for which he would be awarded his master's degree (1891).² In 1891, after spending a year teaching Holy Scripture at the Voronezh seminary, Glubokovsky was invited to fill the vacant chair of New Testament at the St Petersburg Theological Academy. He was to remain in this position until the academy was closed in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1894 he was promoted to the rank of extraordinary professor and in 1898 to the rank of ordinary professor after being awarded his doctorate.

Glubokovsky's master's thesis was a massive two-volume work on the Eastern Church Father Theodoret of Cyrrihus (c. 393–c. 466), the chief opponent of Cyril of Alexandria in the Christological controversies surrounding the Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils of the early fifth century.³ In his speech at the defence of his thesis Glubokovsky stated that his intention had been to set the record straight concerning Theodoret, who was long tainted in the early Church by his association with the Nestorian heresy. More recently in the West, Glubokovsky asserted, Theodoret had been unfairly condemned by Roman Catholics for his opposition to the *filioque* and his supposed antipapalism, and at the same time unfairly exalted by Protestants as a precursor of Luther because of his outspoken opposition to the dominant Church of his day. Glubokovsky, by contrast, saw in Theodoret the chief representative of the 'unsatisfied "East"' following the Council of Ephesus in 431, whose theological opinions were essentially orthodox, even if his personal views of Cyril of Alexandria were not always just.⁴ A foreshadowing of Glubokovsky's later work in the field of biblical studies can be found in the consideration of Theodoret's exegetical works. Although Theodoret is usually considered one of the major representatives of the Antiochene School of biblical interpretation, Glubokovsky found in his work an Orthodox synthesis of that school's literalism with the allegorising tendency of the Alexandrian school.⁵

Because of its extensive treatment (based on original sources) of a long-neglected yet significant subject Glubokovsky's work on Theodoret received attention even outside Russia – a rare occurrence in this period. The famous German church historian Adolf von Harnack considered it an exceptional work even by western standards, asserting that it was 'one of the most significant patristic monographs to appear since [Joseph Barber] Lightfoot's *Ignatius* [1885]'.⁶ Moreover, as late as 1982 it was still cited under the entry for Theodoret in the second edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

Glubokovsky's *magnum opus*, the first section of which served as his doctoral dissertation, was an expansive and detailed defence of the authenticity and divinity of Pauline theology against rational biblical criticism which saw it as a natural development of certain strains of Jewish and Greek thought.⁷

The area of Glubokovsky's activity that best reveals his vision of the Church, and perhaps by implication his view of a role for the laity, was his writing on the educational system of the Russian Orthodox Church. This system, in which Glubokovsky was to play such a prominent role, owed its basic structure to reforms instituted at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the reign of Alexander I. Between 1808 and 1814 the Commission for Ecclesiastical Schools drew up a series of statutes which created a hierarchically arranged educational system with a twofold mission: to provide a general education for the children of the clerical estate (*sosloviye*) and to

train priests and other church functionaries.⁸

The first level of this system was the parish school (*prikhodskoye uchilishche*) which taught reading, writing, maths, grammar, church singing and catechism. The Commission intended that there should be approximately 30 of these schools in each diocese (*yeparkhiya*), although only six or seven per diocese were actually ever created owing to the fact that most children of the clergy, especially those in the countryside, received their early education at home.⁹

For all practical purposes, then, the actual institutional base of the Church's educational system was the second level of the Commission's plan, the district school (*dukhovnoye uyezdnoye uchilishche*), which actually served several governmental districts (*uyezdy*). The main function of the district school was to prepare students for the seminary (the next level of the system), though it also attended to the specific vocational needs of those students who would not go on to the seminary but would take positions in parishes as deacons, sacristans or psalmists.¹⁰ The six-year curriculum of the diocesan seminary, usually located in the provincial capital, was divided into three two-year divisions or grades (*otdeleniya*), comprising respectively rhetoric, philosophy and theology. Included in the last division was instruction in Holy Scripture and biblical languages, Greek and Hebrew, although these latter subjects were considered auxiliary and largely neglected by both students and teachers.¹¹

The top level of the system was the theological academy, which was intended to prepare a select number of the best seminary graduates for positions of leadership in the Church. Graduates of the academies would become bishops, abbots, or teachers and administrators at the seminaries and academies. The academy's four-year curriculum essentially echoed that of the upper two divisions of the seminary, but covered the subjects more thoroughly. Moreover, in comparison with the two lower levels of the system the academies enjoyed better resources and a more favourable student-to-teacher ratio. Initially three academies were created through the reform of existing institutions in Kiev, Moscow and St Petersburg. A fourth was added in Kazan' in 1842.

During the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55) an attempt was made to make pastoral training more relevant to the practical realities of parish life, and subjects like medicine and agriculture were added to the seminary curriculum. The era of the Great Reforms, which began with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, produced new seminary and district school statutes in 1867; these generally retained the structure and curriculum of the 1814 statutes, dispensing with the additions made under Nicholas I, but gave greater administrative control over the seminaries to the faculty and local clergy.¹²

The 1869 statute for the theological academies implemented administrative reforms similar to those of the seminaries and increased the number of professional chairs devoted to Holy Scripture from one to two, one each for the Old and New Testaments. It also raised the academic standards for the faculty, requiring that the eight extraordinary professors at each academy hold master's degrees, and that the nine ordinary professors hold doctorates.¹³ Taking its cue from the 1863 university statute, the new academy statute also divided the academies into three departments: theology, church history and philosophy. This arrangement allowed students to specialise, and thus better to prepare for careers as teachers. Much of the fourth year came to be devoted to the writing of a thesis, after which a public defence was held.

The 1867–69 reforms, however, were shortlived. Following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 counter-reform swept the Russian Empire. In the Church the

chief architect of counter-reform was Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, the *ober-prokurator* of the Holy Synod from 1880 to 1905. In 1884 new statutes were enacted for the church's educational institutions; they undid some of the more progressive administrative changes of the previous reforms, although they left the reformed academic structure largely intact. Rectors and inspectors of the academies and seminaries were again to be appointed by the Synod, and bishops regained control of the seminaries in their dioceses. Rectors of the academies were appointed exclusively from the monastic clergy during Pobedonostsev's tenure in office, and eventually came exclusively from the ranks of the episcopate.¹⁴ The number of students subsidised by the state was reduced, and the departmental structure of the academies was substantially modified. Students were now allowed to specialise only in philology or church history, and strict rules were implemented concerning the subjects of dissertations and theses.

In the wake of the 1905 Revolution and the resignation of Pobedonostsev, Nicholas II agreed to allow preparations to be made for a Local (*pomestny* as opposed to ecumenical) Russian Church Council which would consider fundamental reform of the church's polity.¹⁵ Glubokovsky was chosen to represent the St Petersburg Theological Academy on a special reform commission formed by the metropolitan of St Petersburg, for which he wrote an essay proposing radical reform of the church's educational system. In this essay Glubokovsky declared

The time has come, it seems, to look directly into the face of reality and – not judging the ecclesiastical school but thanking it for fulfilling its mission – to state that the root of evil lies in its very existence, from which arises the principal question: have not the existing church-educational forms had their day?¹⁶

He believed, as had many before him, that the chief problem of the Church's educational structure was that it possessed not one but two fundamental goals – to provide a general education for all the children of the clerical estate and to train pastors. Consequently, he claimed, it failed to achieve either goal satisfactorily.¹⁷

At the lower levels of the system this dual mission was of little concern since the lower schools were not immediately responsible for producing pastors and church leaders. At the seminary and academy levels, however, its consequences were significant. On the one hand, the secular subjects which predominated in the earlier years of the seminary curriculum did not adequately prepare students for the all-important theological emphasis of the final two years, while on the other hand that very theological emphasis interfered with the proper development of secular subjects. 'It is not for nothing' observed Glubokovsky, 'that not a single [other] theological faculty in the world has such a conglomeration of subjects'. But even if it were to receive the attention it deserved, the study of theology alone, Glubokovsky believed, was insufficient preparation for teachers and leaders called to serve the mission of the Church. Even in Protestant Germany, he noted, the title 'Doctor of Theology' was not awarded on the basis of a doctoral dissertation alone, but required the invitation of a theological faculty functioning as a representative of the Church at large, and in England a Doctor of Divinity was legally required to be ordained, although there had been exceptions.¹⁸

According to Glubokovsky, theology was a science; but, like all sciences, it was a human endeavour, subject to human limitations, and by itself could never produce dogmatically authoritative results. It is clear that what Glubokovsky meant in this instance by theology, or more precisely 'theological science', was the investigation

by human reason of the content of belief, as distinct from dogmatics – those teachings established by divine revelation by the Church. As a science theology required ‘scientific freedom and scientific independence’. The lack of such freedom and independence had kept theology from developing properly in Russia and had thus deprived the Russian Church of ‘the helpful aids of human reason’. Something similar had been observed by the Moscow Theological Academy’s professor of Hebrew, Ivan Gavrilovich Troitsky, at his inaugural address in 1883. Troitsky asserted that the study of Hebrew in the educational institutions of the Church had for the most part been limited by a utilitarian approach to the subject. The philological study of Hebrew for its own sake, rather than as merely a tool for deciphering the Old Testament, he suggested, would lead not only to a better understanding of the language itself, but also, as a result, to a better, more sophisticated understanding of the Old Testament.¹⁹

Glubokovsky went on to suggest that the cloistering of theology in the Church had also conveyed to the Russian public the impression that theology was important only for the ‘professional requirements of the “clerical estate”’, leading most people either to misunderstand theology or to ignore it altogether.²⁰ Thus he observed,

It is not surprising that even religious revival in secular society is more often aroused by secular theologians (A. S. Khomakov, V. S. Solov'yev, Count L. N. Tolstoy) than by church officials [*prisyazhnye*], and the people, deaf or indifferent to the voice of professional teachers and theologians, enthusiastically listen to the self-called, to their own destruction.²¹

In other words, by confining theology to that which was dogmatically acceptable the Church had deprived it of a public voice and imperilled the salvation of the Russian people.

The solution proposed by Glubokovsky was to devote the Church’s educational institutions to the exclusive task of preparing pastors and teachers, and to place the study and teaching of ‘theological science’ in the public universities. The lower schools should be reformed along the lines of classical gymnasia, still providing a broad general education, but giving greater attention to religious and philosophical subjects. The Church’s seminaries should admit children of all estates, but only those who expressed a sincere desire to devote themselves to service in the Church. All others should be educated either in secular schools or in separate church schools. While the study and teaching of theology in the seminaries should be in strict conformity with Orthodox dogmatic tradition, wrote Glubokovsky, in the university setting it was to be entirely free and independent. To the objection that such freedom would make theology more prone to error, even perhaps leading to the kind of scandalously capricious theology that had developed in nineteenth-century Germany, Glubokovsky responded first that the Church would not be responsible for such works, and second that as long as the Church remained the bearer of truth, serious and honest theology, which was also concerned with truth, could not be a threat to the Church. He went on to invoke the example of Roman Catholic theological faculties in Germany, which existed alongside Protestant ones, and from which the Catholic Church ‘had derived only benefit’. ‘Why’, he asked, ‘should we have such a low opinion of Orthodoxy that we imagine something evil or harmful would unavoidably come from [Orthodox faculties] being in analogous institutions?’²² At the same time, Glubokovsky assured his readers that the creation of theological faculties in the universities would not obviate the need for theological academies: the academies would still have their place as Orthodox apologetic institutions.

In the event, the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church proved unwilling to undertake a radical reform of the educational system, and Glubokovsky's proposal for separating pastoral preparation from the general education of the clerical estate was narrowly defeated in the Preconciliar Commission which had been formed to prepare for the promised Church Council.

Deprived of an ideal solution to the problem of the Church's educational system, Glubokovsky nevertheless remained active as a member of the fifth division of the Preconciliar Commission, or the division charged with the task of proposing reforms for ecclesiastical institutions above the parish level.²³ In this capacity, he turned his attention to fundamental reform of the academy curriculum. The current system with its 'conglomeration of subjects', he asserted, lacked a central, unifying principle. Since all true knowledge of God comes to human beings by means of divine revelation, and since the primary locus of that revelation is Holy Scripture, Glubokovsky reasoned that the curriculum of the ecclesiastical academies must be built upon a foundation of biblical studies. While one may be tempted to attribute this choice of emphasis to a natural bias in favour of Glubokovsky's own area of specialisation, it is important to recall the emphasis placed on biblical studies, at least in principle, in the most significant reforms of the Church's educational system dating back to the time of Peter the Great. For example, the *Ecclesiastical Regulation (Dukhovny reglament)* of 1721, noting that heresies often arose from 'a false understanding of Holy Scripture', directed that 'a teacher of theology should read Holy Scripture'.²⁴ The 1814 statute for theological academies stated that the Bible was the foundation of theology and that 'without a doubt, the best method of theological instruction must be the reading of Holy Scripture and the examination of its true sense according to the original exposition and best explanation of the Holy Fathers.'²⁵ Such precedents aside, Glubokovsky certainly also had in mind his first-hand experience with biblical studies at the academies, and particularly with the shortcomings in that area, when he wrote that 'Our academies have significantly lost a biblical spirit and are pervaded by a character of abstract dogmatic doctrinairism, in which the biblical text, invoked in unsystematic fragments, is used mostly for external-authoritative illustrations, even [to support] theses which are biblically questionable.'²⁶ Without a genuine biblically-oriented core, Glubokovsky maintained, academy education loses its authority and vitality. Since the district schools did not require any direct reading of Scripture, and in the seminaries students read only excerpts of the Bible – not even reading through the entire New Testament – it was up to the academies in their first year to provide a thorough biblical introduction. This introduction was to include both general information about the biblical canon as a whole and information about each book in turn, including such topics as authorship, time of writing, and original audience, along with a detailed analysis of each book's content. It was to be supplemented by courses in the biblical languages, with particular attention paid to the characteristics which distinguished biblical from classical Greek. Glubokovsky also sought to require courses in the history of biblical interpretation (exegesis) and translation, as well as courses which would familiarise students with the broader context of ancient Christian and Jewish literature.²⁷

In spite of the undoubted influence of Protestantism in the founding documents of the Russian Church's educational system mentioned above, most notably in Peter the Great's *Ecclesiastical Regulation*, Glubokovsky's emphasis on biblical studies as the foundation of the theological academy curriculum must not be seen as an acceptance of the Reformation motto *sola scriptura*. Although scripture was the primary means of God's revelation, it was not the only one. The fullness of divine truth, he insisted,

was preserved by the divinely-established Church. 'This truth', he continued, 'is conveyed to humankind in revelation, which is secured in the word of Scripture and explained from the *inexhaustible source of authentic church tradition*. The second is actually *inseparable* from the first and should occupy a place alongside it in scientific knowledge.'²⁸ Thus, suggested Glubokovsky, a thorough study of the Church Fathers should be required alongside biblical studies, and the first division of the academy curriculum would properly be called the 'biblical patristic' division.

Glubokovsky's reform plan for the academies received favourable responses from many of his academic colleagues, including at least one foreign scholar, a professor at the University of Göttingen. There were, however, some objections to the breadth of the subject-matter, including the increase in required theological subjects at the expense of secular ones. For Glubokovsky the obligation of the academies to provide first-rate leaders and teachers for the Church made this arrangement unavoidable. The difficulty of the proposed curriculum, he suggested, would be mitigated by admitting only those students who were well prepared academically. Moreover, after the first year students were to be evaluated thoroughly on their preparedness for further study and only the most suitable allowed to continue. Although he continued to insist upon allowing the admission of children from outside the clerical estate, Glubokovsky acknowledged that he was not optimistic about their suitability for theological study at the academy level. Experience had shown, he believed, that the theological education received in the lower ecclesiastical schools, however deficient, was much more likely to produce successful academy students than was the curriculum of the secular schools. The issue here for Glubokovsky was one of competence, not of equal rights.

It is necessary to open wide the doors of the academies, without limitations of estate, [prior] institution, and the like, but only for those who are worthy and capable. In this regard a completely incorrect and extremely pernicious view has been formed in our society, that since the salvific Christian faith is available to all, all Christians are competent to study theology – even having the right to judge, ordain, and evaluate theological science without appropriate systematic preparation There is nothing more dangerous, for both sides, than this confusion of faith and knowledge²⁹

In 1906 the Preconciliar Commission was disbanded and the promised Church Council postponed indefinitely. Although Glubokovsky's ambitious reform of the academies would never be implemented, a new statute enacted in 1911 proclaimed that the exclusive goal of the academies was to prepare a Christian intelligentsia for service in the Church.³⁰

Glubokovsky's disappointment at the Church's failure to undertake significant reform of its educational system was reflected in an article written for the centenary jubilee of the St Petersburg Theological Academy in 1909. In the article, entitled 'Faith and theology: a jubilee confession', Glubokovsky noted that while jubilees were usually occasions for fondly remembering past accomplishments and looking forward to future successes based upon them, the past hundred years of Russian theology had been far from 'bright and happy'. Progress in theological science, if one could indeed call it progress, had occurred in fits and starts, separated by periods of neglect and outright hostility to the discipline. In those periods, Glubokovsky wrote,

Candid appeals for theological simplification, which were always so

pleasing to the prevailing ignorance, were raised loudly. Scholarship ruined one's reputation and gave one a bad name in the judgment of its empty detractors, who were vainly accepted as competent managers of matters unknown or antipathetic to them. Amidst such vacillation, the cord of scholarly succession was continually snapped, and the boat of theology was borne in confusion upon a stormy sea, disappearing without a trace among the heaving waves or manhandled by pirates, who with usurping insolence sailed about under a tattered flag.³¹

As a result, he continued, a century after the establishment of its educational system the Russian Orthodox Church still did not have a well-developed scholarly tradition in theology. The remedy for this situation, he again insisted, was autonomy for theology, but the support for that autonomy he now suggested should be sought not in legal or institutional solutions that varied with the mood of the times, but in the very object of theology, namely Christian faith itself. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the believer also becomes a child of God 'and possesses all hereditary prerogatives', chief among which were the 'nearness of contemplation of God and the *freedom of divine independence*'. Faith, then, provided theology with divine authority and gave it free rein in its field. Of course not everyone could plumb the depths of theological contemplation, Glubokovsky acknowledged, but there had always been 'heroes of faith' who could, and who had left behind 'monuments of revelation'.³² This emphasis upon faith as the true source of authority for theology was undoubtedly influenced by Glubokovsky's long and careful study of the Apostle Paul, in which he was immersed in June 1909. It also seems perilously close to the Protestant solution regarding authority in the church, a solution also derived from Paul, although it must be recognised that Glubokovsky's view of faith in this instance was more communally oriented, and had less of the emphasis on the individual so characteristic of much of Protestant theology.

Certainly Glubokovsky would never have admitted any sympathy with Protestantism as he understood it. In 1913 he was invited to write an article for the newly founded American journal *The Constructive Quarterly* introducing Orthodoxy to a western audience.³³ In the article he contrasted the Protestant rational approach of thinking about the Christian faith with the Orthodox living out of that faith. He also emphasised, as have other Orthodox theologians, that Orthodoxy is not merely some middle way between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, but something altogether different. Whereas other denominations represented Christianity only in part, Orthodoxy, he believed, was Christianity in its fullness.

The Russian Orthodox Church is only now emerging from 70 years of repression under the Soviet regime. The past it must reclaim includes a period in which lay people were among its most prominent scholars and teachers, theologians who made significant contributions in the encounter of Orthodoxy with modern western thought. In Glubokovsky's case, as, one must expect, in others, lay status played an important role. For him it was most certainly at least one factor, if not the determining one, in his willingness and ability to criticise both the recent history of the Russian Church and its contemporary position in the scholarly and educational spheres. Perhaps the best evidence for this can be found in his private letters, where he revealed a deep distrust of both the parish and the monastic clergy in matters of church governance, defending the Synodal structure as the lay person's best means of participation in ecclesiastical affairs.³⁴ Indeed, whether or not the Russian Orthodox Church can embrace the legacy left by Glubokovsky and his lay colleagues depends

in large part on whether the Synodal period is seen as an aberration or as a legitimate variant of Orthodox polity. But that is the subject of another paper altogether.

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- ¹⁰ Freeze, *op. cit.*, p. 120; Smolitsch, *op. cit.*, p. 589.
- ¹¹ *Polnoye Sobraniye Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 1st series (45 vols) (St Petersburg, 1830) (hereafter *PSZ* [1]), vol. 32, no. 25, 674; Freeze, *op. cit.*, p. 121; Smolitsch, *op. cit.*, p. 589.
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- ¹³ Smolitsch, *op. cit.*, p. 648.
- ¹⁴ Gerhard Simon, *Konstantin Petrovič Pobedonoscev und die Kirchenpolitik des Heiligen Sinod 1880–1905 (Kirche im Osten*, no. 7 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1969), p. 113. After 1909 rectors were required by law to be bishops.
- ¹⁵ For details, see James W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905–1906* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1981), pp. 83–126.
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- ¹⁹ Ivan Troitsky, 'Znachenkiye drevneyevreiskago yazyka v nauchnom otnoshenii', *Khristianskoye chteniye*, vol. 1, nos 1–2, 1884, pp. 85–112.
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²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 30. Emphasis mine.

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