

THE EUCHARIST IN RELATION TO THE THREEFOLD POWER OF THE CHURCH

THE Church is a mystery, wholly supernatural—a reality without adequate analogy or parallel. Perhaps the most fruitful approach to a definition of the Church is the Christological one. Here we know that the Church *is* Christ—the “*Christus Integer*,” in the words of St. Augustine. She is, in this conception, a Mystical Body. Her mystical personality—in the revealing words of Leo XIII, something less than physical, yet more than moral¹—is the personality of the Incarnate Word. Her soul, St. Thomas identifies without hesitation as the Holy Spirit.² The life’s blood of this body is, of course, sanctifying grace. And the bodily members are all those grafted on to Christ through faith and the sacraments of faith.

All this, of course, is theological and Christological; it is the Church mysterious and invisible. There is, however, another aspect to her—in the richness of her manifold being—no less mysterious yet visible. This is the Church-as-Institution; as Society; the Church in her hierarchy, organization, rituals and rubrics, her laws, ministries and powers. For convenience sake, we might designate a study of the Church from this direction as *ecclesiological* rather than *theological*. In this conception the Church is a great sacrament, that is, the sacrament of Christ. A sacrament is at once significative and causative (of grace). The Church-as-Institution is constructed in the image of Christ; further she “produces” Christ. She produces first the true body of Christ in the Eucharist; and then she produces in and through the Eucharist, the mystical body of Christ, in its perfect state.

By way of analogy—true as it is that Christ *is* God; is it not likewise true to speak of Him as, in an antonomastic sense, *the* sacrament of God? For He is God revealed in the sensible world of our flesh, and causing *ex opere operato* as conjoined instrument of divinity, all salvific grace. In somewhat similar fashion though

¹ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, (English trans. by Paulist Press, New York, p. 20 and following).

² *Exposito in Symbolum*, a. 10, (. . . *in Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam*).

the Church be Christ (His mystical body), she also is in her visibility the sacrament of Christ. This sacramentality is nothing more than the outward mode of being of the inner Church. It is thus the perceptible manifestation of the "new life in Christ," and at the same time the instrument of the realization of this. There is thus one Church whose inward being manifests itself in an organic society, but in such fashion that the inward Church is not separated from the outward Church which is its sacramental veil and vehicle.

It is commonly maintained that St. Thomas has no *ex professo* tract on the Church. It is obviously true that he left no *separate* treatise *de Ecclesia*; but could not this be deliberate on St. Thomas' part? Then it would not be too far-fetched to envision the entire Second Part of the *Summa* and much of the Third Part as ecclesiological. The total *reditus* of the rational creature to God thus involves invisible and visible elements, in which the latter is the sacrament of the former—distinct yet inseparable from the "new life" of which it is both the sign and the effective giver.

Thus we may define the Church ecclesiologically as "the sacrament of the unique mediatorship of Christ Crucified." However, integrally taken a sacrament involves three things. There is the *sacramentum tantum*; the *res et sacramentum*; and then the *res tantum*. The first of these is the Church in her outward organization, the hierarchical Church. It is the intent of this small paper to suggest that the second, (that which is at once *res et sacramentum*) is the Eucharist. Then as for the *res tantum*, St. Thomas replies: that which the Eucharist signifies and effects, the "*unitas corporis mystici, i.e., Ecclesia*."³ In short, if the whole Church be a great sacrament, its very heart is the Eucharist—the focal point of this manifestation and giving of Christ. If she, the Church, is the means of the construction of the Mystical Body, this is in and through the Eucharist. Because she has power over the true body of Christ, the Church achieves power over the Mystical Body. This is the very thought of St. Thomas, namely, that all powers over souls come to the Church solely from the power or ministry which she has

³ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 73, a. 1, obj. 2; q. 73, a. 3; cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1.

in the celebration of the Eucharist.⁴ The analogy can easily be pushed too far; but, in a very qualified sense, is not the Eucharist to the Church what the sacramental *character* is to those sacraments which confer a permanent character?

Nature lies revealed in action. Now the Church's realization of the Mystical Body is in and through an activity which is Eucharistic. For the Church produces the Eucharist and the Eucharist produces the Church. So much so that all her activity can be said to be Eucharistic—in this sense, that anything appears to be that which is pre-eminent in it (as man is said to be rational, though his being is by no means restricted to the operations of reason). This is true of the Church, since all her functions are either preparatory to the Eucharist or spring therefrom; it is this sacrament whence flow and whither tend all her other activities. Again we may cite St. Thomas by way of approval: "In this sacrament the whole mystery of our salvation is comprehended."⁵ This is the sensible reality—at once sacrifice and sacrament—by which and for which the Church was created. It remains therefore to show how the entire vital activity of the Church derives from the Eucharist on one hand, and on the other is directed thereto.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN GENERAL

The life of the Church can be considered first in general and then in particular—this latter being her three powers of operation: the Ministerial, the Magisterial, and the Regnative. In the former view the Church is the prolongation of Christ's redemptive life; in the latter she sanctifies, teaches, and rules. In all of these the Eucharist is both the source and the goal of her efforts.

As to her life in general, then:

First, it is the task of the Church to perpetuate the work of the Redemption. But that Redemption was, in the economy of God, by way of sacrifice. And so the Church cannot but share that sacrifice, which she does, of course, in her celebration of the Mass.

And indeed it is the whole Church Who offers each Mass. It is

⁴ *III Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 10; *IV Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; cf. *Contra Gentiles*, c. 74.

⁵ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 83, a. 4.

she who gives power and jurisdiction to the single human minister; and if the sacrifice be valid on his part alone, still in another sense it is the Christian community that offers, since the priest must continually conjoin himself to the body of the faithful. There is only one sacrifice, after all, which is the Head and His members. And in St. Thomas' words the priest consecrates "*in persona Christi*" while he offers "*in persona omnium*."⁶ Thus is the Church entire in each of its parts.

Secondly, the Church shares the life of Christ so that really there are not two lives but one. But the life of Christ was intrinsically sacrificial. The motive of the Incarnation was redemption; and all else in the life of Christ looked to His passion. "I have a baptism with which I am to be baptised and how I am straightened until it be accomplished."⁷ Thus sacrifice must be as central to the Church's character as it was to Christ's. It is, of course, the same sacrifice substantially, only the mode of offering being different. In brief, if Christ be above all the Redeemer, and if the Church be His sacrament, then the apex of all her functions must be that which most of all assimilates her to the self-immolating Christ.

Thirdly, the Church cannot share the life of Christ without sharing his priestly activity. And as for those who form the hierarchy in the Church, does not the supreme exercise of their power lie in the consecrating of Christ's Body?

Fourthly and lastly, it is in the very production of the Eucharist, by the Church, in her active aspect, the hierarchical Church, that the Mystical Body is fully formed. The Eucharist in its turn realizes the Church. So in a formal way the Church "constitutes" herself in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is when the congregation of the faithful are gathered around the pastor in the celebration of the sacrifice of the altar that all truly become the Mystical Body of Christ. And the consummation of this is in that unity of all to Christ and to one another achieved in Holy Communion, when charity, the bond of the Mystical Body, effectively proceeds from the Eucharist.

⁶ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2; and q. 80, a. 12, ad 3. Cf. *Mystici Corporis*, p. 27.

⁷ Luke 12:50.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE CHURCH'S LIFE IN PARTICULAR

The Church, one with Christ, shares in His prerogatives as Priest, Teacher, and King. In the unfolding of her life these are her proximate powers of operation, exercised in her role of sanctifying, teaching and governing. In her divine maternity she "brings forth" Christ in the Eucharist, and the members of Christ in the fellowship of the Mystical Body. But her motherhood demands further that she nourish her children with grace; that she initiate them into the Mysteries of God; that she offer exterior guidance and direction.

Ministerial Power

Of this threefold *potestas*, the power to sanctify is pre-eminent. The other two are ordered to it. The hierarchy teaches and governs only to this end that it might make holy the members of Christ. But is it not true that the Eucharist constitutes the high point of achievement of the Church's entire sanctifying power? For such power is either sacramental or non-sacramental. And the latter are all inferior to the former. Why? Because to sanctify is to cause grace—and the sacraments alone possess such causality *ex opere operato*. Then, within the sacramental totality it is the Eucharist which is obviously pre-eminent.

Every other sacrament is a participation in some power of Christ; the Eucharist is Christ Himself. The sanctifying power is transmitted to the matter of the other sacraments transiently—as, for example, to the waters of baptism. The Eucharist is uniquely a permanent sacrament.

Secondly, the other sacraments all bear an intrinsic ordination to the Eucharist. The sacramental graces which they confer are relative to that coming from the Eucharist. The imperfect is always ordered to the perfect. In this way there is really one single sacramental organism, whose heart is the Eucharist. There is an ordination of baptism to confirmation, for instance, and both in turn are ordered to the Eucharist. Baptism is ordered to the reception of the Eucharist (so that reception of the Eucharist *in voto* is necessary for salvation—because this is contained virtually in the reception of baptism). Confirmation is ordered to the identification of the

mature member of Christ with Christ in the sacrament. Holy Orders is for the consecration of the Eucharist; Matrimony is the figure of Christ's union with His Church, more perfectly symbolized in the Eucharist. Penance and Extreme Unction make possible the reception of the Eucharistic Christ. This is the thought of St. Thomas when he calls the Eucharist the "*sacramentum sacramentorum*," which exercises a final causality toward the others, and in which they are consummated.⁸ Without the Eucharist the other sacramental graces are in danger of atrophy.

Thirdly, whereas the recipient of other sacramental activity is *disposed* to union with Christ, in Holy Communion real and affective union is *achieved* at its summit, both with Christ and Christ's members. Thus is the Eucharist the sacrament of charity and so of unity.

Magisterial Power

Similar conclusions flow from a consideration of the Church's magisterial function. Christ was the Word of God, and the Church is the continuation of Christ. Thus does she propose and interpret anew the truth declared by Christ. "He who hears You, hears Me; He who despises you, despises Me."⁹ This infallible doctrine, however, both derives from Christ and regards Christ. That is, Christ is at once the source and the object of such teaching. From Him is communicated to her the very power of enlightenment. In fact, it is really Christ who teaches through His Church. The Magisterium is an action of Christ performed through men. And, moreover, what is taught is none other than Christ Himself. All her teaching is a manifesting of the truth which Christ substantially *is*. When Our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit upon His Church, He said, "And He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, *whatsoever I shall have said to you*."¹⁰ Christ and His Church, therefore, share one teaching power—there is "One Christ teaching Himself"; Christ continually revealing Himself to His Own, the members of His One Body.

⁸ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 65, a. 3; q. 73, a. 3; q. 63, a. 6; *Suppl.*, q. 37, a. 2.

⁹ Luke 10:16.

¹⁰ John 14:26.

Now in what sense does this function look to the Eucharist? First we shall consider Christ teaching, then Christ Who is taught.

The truth, which is communicated, is entirely from the mind of Him Who has brought us this doctrine through humanity united to the Word. Now the Fathers speak of the Eucharist as a kind of continuation of the Incarnation. So that Christ (and Christ-as-teacher) is immanent in His Church in the Eucharist. Thus the uniformity and the incorruptibility of the Church's teaching surely derives from Christ's promise to remain always with His Church. But He is with her not merely as *externally* safeguarding from error. Rather He is within the Church, for the Church is His Body. And it is as present in the Eucharist that Christ assimilates to Himself the members who form His Body. This assimilation involves the supernatural enlightenment of the mind by Him Who is Truth.

And in Holy Communion is there not a true enlightenment of the member by the Head? Through the reception of Eucharist, Christ comes as Teacher to the mind and heart of the communicant; in short He enters the soul as the author of faith.

Lastly, faith in and love for the Eucharist are, for the Church teaching—the hierarchical Church—a motive and vital impulse in the proposing of sacred doctrine.

The same truth suggests itself in regarding Christ as object taught. Holy Communion is surely in itself a major profession of faith. It involves acceptance of the Incarnation, the Trinity of Persons, the doctrine of the Real Presence, Original Sin, Redemption, Sanctifying Grace, the Church, and the Sacramental system. It necessitates an act of actual faith in the mysteries proposed by the Church in her magisterial function. Yet, beyond this, it is also a vital impulse towards fuller acceptance of Christ. For faith, though substantially an assent on the part of the intellect, is *prae-suppositive* to be found in the will. Lacking evidence the intellect must needs be moved to its assent by the will. Therefore love of the Eucharistic Lord can be causative of a process whereby faith is deepened and rendered more actual.

Briefly, the Eucharist effects a vital assimilation of minds and thoughts to the Truth—Who is Christ. And is not this the Church's purpose in teaching?

Regnative Power

Lastly there is the Church's power of jurisdiction, her capacity to rule. This is hers through her identity with Christ in the prerogative of His Kingship. Christ is the first principle of supernatural life, supernatural knowledge, and supernatural conduct. And the Church is the continuation of Christ. "Thus is she charged with transmitting to the faithful the precepts of Christ—with interpreting them, expounding them, applying them in more precise regulations, according to diversities of times, places, and circumstances."¹¹

Interior Rule

Regnative power is first of all internal and invisible. It is the New Law, the law of Christ, i.e., the law of love, of charity. It is the perfect internal law. It involves both *exercise*, the doing of the law, its fulfillment, for charity is a motive force; and *specification*, direction, for charity involves enlightenment and illumination. St. Thomas, for example, explains how the Gift of Wisdom though formally of the intellect, at once speculative and practical, arises out of charity. This interior law enables the members of Christ to evaluate, judge and will with the mind of Christ. It is Christ exercising an invisible guidance upon those in whom He resides—in the whole Church and in each of her members. But it is in and through the Eucharist, sacrament of charity and unity, that Christ unites Himself to His Church and to all His members. In the reception of Communion, Christ comes to exercise His interior guidance and, by way of the charity which Communion supposes and effects, brings about the joyous response of the Christian to the sweet yoke of obedience to Christ's will. Thus, the Eucharist brings Christ to the Christian to effect the observance of all things whatsoever He Himself has commanded.

Exterior Rule

This law, inscribed in the hearts of the faithful, is but one aspect of the Church's power of jurisdiction; the other is its correlative, the written, exterior law. This, too, is essentially related to the Eucha-

¹¹ M. Hérís, O. P., *The Mystery of Christ*, p. 178.

rist, whether considered actively on the part of the Church ruling or passively from the side of the Church ruled.

As to the former, the goal or final cause of all governing by the hierarchical Church is union with Christ. But the consummation of such union in this life is in the sacramental reception of Christ. Thus the entire legislative, judiciary, disciplinary operation of the Church is directed, ultimately at least, to determining a certain fitness for Communion.

Secondly, while those who personally exercise authority within the Church, derive their power from the office rather than from the Eucharist, still on the human side, the Eucharist is needed. The proper exercise of authority committed to an individual by Christ requires wisdom, courage and prudence which have their roots in a deep and personal holiness. It is the union with the true Body of Christ in Communion which insures not only the zealous exercise of power but a zealous discharge of the office tempered with charity which flows from a spirit of sacrifice.

Regarding now the Church-Ruled, the concern is not with authority but with obedience. This is the jurisdictional power as it is cherished in the heart of the Church, believing, loving and acting. This cherishing is a kind of terminal holiness for it is the precepts of Christ that are obeyed. Sacramental communion means union between the soul and Christ, between the Body and its Head. And union is a formal effect of love, it means oneness of will in which the lover seeks to do the bidding of the beloved, in word, to obey. The will to obey springs most of all from the Eucharist; when one obeys as a member of Christ, this must be in complete attachment to Christ. Such attachment the Eucharist signifies and achieves.

CONCLUSION

Since the structure and function of the visible Church is analogous to that of her sacraments, it may be said that the proper act of the sanctifying Church is itself a sacrament. The most proper act, then, is that which focuses upon the Eucharist, as sacrifice and sacrament. So much so that in producing the Eucharist the Church

realizes herself. This sacrament is the climax of the life of the Church.

As sacrifice, it joins the members of Christ to Him in His supreme moment; as sacrament, it means Christ immanent in His Church as the Way, the Life and the Truth—as King, Head, and Teacher. From it comes her powers to rule, sanctify, and teach; and in it do these three powers attain their purpose. These three organs of the Church's life are all exercised with regard to the Body of Christ. But first the true Body of Christ, and then the Mystical Body—the "*Corpus-in-Mysterio*" of which it is the sign and the effective cause.

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Digest of the Discussion:

Monsignor George W. Shea of Darlington, N. J. opened the discussion by remarking that, if he had understood Father Hill correctly, the latter had made a distinction in his paper between the visible, hierarchical Church and the Mystical Body with the implication that the Mystical Body is invisible. He went on to say that the Mystical Body is not an invisible something. He added that the hierarchical Church is the Mystical Body.

Father Hill replied that he had not made such a distinction. That he had merely meant to bring out the fact that in the Mystical Body there is an invisible as well as a visible element.

Monsignor Shea then took exception to another statement in Father Hill's paper that the Church produces the Eucharist and the Eucharist produces the Mystical Body. He added that it would be more correct to say that the Church produces the Eucharist and the Eucharist produces a growth in the Mystical Body, in as much as there is an initial incorporation into the Mystical Body by Baptism.

Father Richard Doherty of St. Paul, Minn., inquired what concept Father Hill had in mind when he said that the "*res tantum*" of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is the unity of the Mystical Body?

Father Hill replied that the Holy Eucharist, in uniting the individual members of the Mystical Body with Christ who is the Head cannot help but strengthen and tighten the bonds which unite them to one another. In this way it both signifies and effects the unity of the Mystical Body.

Father John F. Sweeney, S.J., of Woodstock College requested that Father Hill expand a bit on his idea that the Church is a great sacrament.

Father Hill replied that in this concept the visible Church would be the "sacramentum tantum," Christ, really present in the Eucharist, would be the "res et sacramentum" and the "res tantum" would be the unity of the Mystical body.

Father Edward R. Callahan, S.J., of Weston College inquired if the unity of the Mystical Body in any wise embraced those who belong to the Church merely *in voto*. In his reply to this question *Father Hill* seemed to make the possession of sanctifying grace a condition for membership in the Mystical Body. This statement occasioned protests from *Father Callahan*, who declared that membership in the Mystical Body is not lost by mortal sin except mortal sin against faith; by *Monsignor Shea* who appealed to the Encyclical MYSTICI CORPORIS as proof that mortal sin does not destroy membership, and by *Father Edward F. Hanahoe, S.A.*, who appealed to the Parable of the Marriage Feast, pointing out that the man who did not have on the wedding garment was nevertheless present at the feast.

Father Joseph Fichtner, O.S.C., remarked that he could see clearly enough that the Church derives her power to sanctify from the Holy Eucharist, but that he could not see *Father Hill's* position that the Eucharist is the source from which she derives her power to teach.

Father Hill replied that the Church derives all her power and authority to teach from Christ and that Christ is in the Church in the Holy Eucharist. *Father Fichtner* thereupon inquired if Christ exercises His intellectual and volitional powers in the Eucharist. *Father Hill* answered that Christ is in the Church in the Holy Eucharist and it seems reasonable to say that through the instrumentality of His real presence He continues to exercise His office of teaching. He added that the Holy Eucharist makes the Magisterium which He founded to carry on His work of teaching better equipped for the fulfillment of its task.

Father Pancratius of Teutopolis, Ill., quoted a statement made by *Father Hill* in his paper: "In producing the Eucharist the Church produces herself," and inquired in what way that statement is true. *Father Hill* replied that without the Eucharist the Church would be different from what she actually is. *Father Pancratius* rejoined that it would be better to say that "In producing the Eucharist the Church produces one of her activities."

Monsignor Shea also objected to the above statement on the score that the Mystical Body existed before the Eucharist. Remarking that it would make for clarity and accuracy in our thinking about the Mystical Body if we adhered closely to the analogy of the physical body, he added that the Mystical Body, as a physical body, had its birth, growth and normal development until it reached its maturity. On these premises he concluded that it would be more accurate to say that when the Church

produces the Eucharist, she produces her perfection, her consummation, her culmination.

Father Hill replied that this objection is valid only if one thinks of the growth and development of the Mystical Body as a quantitative or a mathematical thing. He added that it would be equally true to say that the Mystical Body existed before the Passion. But it existed only inchoatively. It was only after the Passion that the Church became vivified and actualized and began to live her full life.

Monsignor Shea replied that in his opinion we would be well advised to abandon the statement that "The Church in producing the Eucharist produces herself." He added that it would be better to say that "The Church, in producing the Eucharist, realizes herself." *Father Richard Doherty* however defended the statement. He said that he recalled having encountered it in serious authors and that consequently authority could be cited in support of it. To this *Monsignor Shea* replied that we must distinguish clearly between the use of the term "Mystical Body" before the Encyclical on that subject was issued and since. Before, many concepts and ideas were advanced on that subject which could not be tolerated since. The Encyclical has compelled writers on the subject to be much more guarded and careful in what they say. To this *Father Doherty* agreed.

Father Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., of Weston College also objected to the statement that the Church in producing the Eucharist produces the Mystical Body. He declared that by Baptism the Church produces the Mystical Body in as much as by this sacrament she perpetually renews her membership. By the Eucharist, he said, the Church brings herself to her culmination.

To this *Father Hill* replied that without the Eucharist the Church would be different; it would not be the same Church. There is, he said, a species of incorporation into the Church by Baptism but the incorporation effected by Baptism is itself ordered toward the Holy Eucharist. *Father Sullivan* answered that he could see readily enough how the Eucharist disposes the faithful to accept the teaching and governing authority of the Church, but that he could not see any cogent reason for saying that the Church derives this authority from the Holy Eucharist.

Father Francis Costa, S.S.S., of Cleveland, first spoke of the three Aspects of the Holy Eucharist as Sacrifice, Sacrament and Real Presence and then asked *Father Hill* if he meant to connect the three powers of the Church, viz., teaching, governing and sanctifying respectively with these three aspects of the Holy Eucharist.

Father Hill answered that in his paper he had first considered the Church's "life-in-general," which is essentially redemptive and sacrificial. This he had connected with the Eucharist as sacrifice. Then, he added,

the more particularized activity of the Church as teaching, governing and sanctifying he had connected with the Eucharist as sacrament. To this Father Costa replied that he could see clearly enough how the sanctifying power of the Church derives from the Holy Eucharist but that he could not see how the teaching and governing powers are derived from that source.

Father Hill answered that in sanctifying the members of the Magisterium the Holy Eucharist renders them better equipped to fulfill their office of teaching and governing; in sanctifying the faithful it makes them more ready to fulfill their obligation to believe and to obey.

Father Edward Hanahoe then asked if it is possible to consider the first two powers of the Church, viz., teaching and governing, as related to the Holy Eucharist as to a final cause, but the sanctifying power as related to it as its efficient cause?

Father Romeo Trahan, S.S.E., of St. Edmund's Seminary, Vermont, also objected to *Father Hill's* position that the Holy Eucharist is the source from which the Church derives her teaching and governing authority. Christ is indeed, he said, the source from which the Church derives these powers. Now He can give them as He is present in the Holy Eucharist, but He can also give them apart from the Eucharist and there does not seem to be any compelling reason for saying that He imparts them as He is present in the Holy Eucharist.

Father Hill replied that Christ could have established His Church in some different manner, but that as a matter of fact He did establish it as it is, and as it is He is present in it in the Holy Eucharist.

Monsignor Shea alluded to the fact that *Father Hill* had said in the course of his paper that the Holy Eucharist is the source of all graces. He then asked him if he held the theory, propounded by some modern theologians, that the Holy Eucharist is the source of absolutely all the graces, even actual graces, that are given in the present dispensation.

Father Hill denied any intention of maintaining that Christ is the author of all graces under the precise formality of His presence in the Eucharist. Rather, it is only true that this sacrament contains Christ who is, *de facto*, the source of all graces, including those that derive from the other sacraments.

By way of conclusion, *Father Hill* then touched upon the analogy suggested by St. Thomas wherein the Eucharist occupies among the sacraments a position analogous to that which is proper to charity in the hierarchy of the supernatural virtues. Thus are the other sacraments relative to the Eucharist somewhat as charity is the form of the other virtues.

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