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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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August 27, 1993

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NEWS ADVISORY from Richmond, Va., (BP) bureau

MOSCOW (BP)--A bill restricting religious liberty and allowing the government to actively support the Russian Orthodox Church drew one step closer to becoming law Aug. 27 when Parliament passed it for the second time.

Lawmakers stuck with changes drawn up about a week earlier by the committee that first drafted the bill but they added a clause allowing government support for groups that promote traditional confessions in Russia. The committee was responding to President Boris Yeltsin's refusal to sign the bill after its first passage July 14.

It was uncertain Aug. 27 when the law will go into effect. There was a question as to whether Yeltsin would have the opportunity to reject it again or be forced to sign it this time. There was also a question of whether it would be delayed in the machinery of appeal as Yeltsin or dissenting Parliament members filed a case against it in constitutional court.

A further story will be posed by Baptist Press Monday, Aug. 30

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Letter urging pro-choice
call is called 'hoax'

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
8/27/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A faxed letter to Baptist state convention executives purportedly from the SBC Executive Committee Aug. 26 urging support for a nationwide survey on abortion was sent without approval or knowledge of the committee, according to Morris H. Chapman, president of the Executive Committee.

The letter, sent by Wave Industries of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, was designed to appear it had been sent from the fax machine in Chapman's office. Chapman was not aware of the letter until several state convention executives called his office to inquire about the request.

Labeled "urgent" at the top, the letter asked state executives to contact churches in their states to include a notice of a "national opinion poll" to be taken Sept. 5. The letter requested persons to call one of two "900" numbers to register a preference "for abortion on demand" or "against abortion on demand." The caller would be charged 90 cents.

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Calling the letter effort a "hoax," Chapman sent a faxed letter to the state executives Aug. 27 to advise them his office did not send the letter.

"While I am unalterably opposed to abortion on demand," Chapman said in his letter, "I unequivocally reject the attempt of any person to misuse and abuse the good reputation of this office for their own misguided scheme and personal gain of a 900 telephone number." Also, Chapman said he would talk to the SBC's legal counsel about any further action.

Contacted by Baptist Press, Bill Lewis, public relations director of Wave Industries, blamed the problem on a new employee in the company's telecommunications department. He said the employee made the faxed letter appear to come from the SBC Executive Committee president but he didn't know why. Lewis said the employee would be fired when company president Greg VonBevern returned to the office from a trip.

Lewis said the poll is, however, legitimate, and is an attempt to get a survey on the U.S. public's attitudes toward abortion on demand. He said the survey undoubtedly would be "pro-life" in results and that would help in elections in Canada for the pro-life movement. Lewis said public opinion polls, such as this one, cannot be done in Canada and the company decided to conduct the U.S. survey.

Wave Industries is a small, private research firm in Vancouver, Lewis said, which does many public interest surveys.

Lewis said an apology would be sent, via immediate fax, to all those who received the earlier fax.

The letter sent to the state executives the night of Aug. 26 did not have any identification as to the sender except the title "E.C. President" at the top and Chapman's private fax number. Apparently the employee used the top line of a fax sent to him by Chapman's office when Lewis requested a list of state executives. The Executive Committee routinely responds to requests for information about Southern Baptist entities, all of which are easily obtained in the SBC Annual.

Organizations who sponsor "900" numbers do stand to make profit from the use of those lines, telephone officials told Baptist Press. Baptist Press tried to call the two "900" numbers but they were not in use.

Michelle Arocha, a National Right to Life Committee spokesperson, said the organization had not involvement in the purported poll nor awareness of it.

"Most of the time they're pro-abortion scams," Arocha said, citing the committee's previous experience with such 1-900 polls. A pro-abortion group is seeking to generate calls, each of which makes a profit for the group, she said, and pro-lifers who call are "giving their money to a pro-abortion cause, unbeknownst to them."

Lewis' first attempt to get SBC support was routed to the SBC Christian Life Commission, in the same building in Nashville with the SBC Executive Committee. Richard Land, CLC president, said the request for support needed more information and a request for more information from Lewis did not get a response.

The CLC is assigned by the convention to address contemporary moral concerns, including abortion, and Louis Moore, director of media and products, said the CLC has no knowledge of the poll.

"We are very eager to see the source exposed," he said. "Whatever is done on ethical issues need to be done ethically. Political shenanigans such as this are disgraceful."

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Multi-faith D.C. relief team
helps flooded retirees, farmers By Diana Larmore

Baptist Press
8/27/93

BIG LAKE, Mo. (BP)--The once-pretty, retiree- and farming-oriented lakeside community of Big Lake, Mo., now the scene of Missouri River flooding followed by a tornado, was the destination of a 25-member interdenominational work crew sponsored by the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

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"We feel we were able to make a dent in the clean-up work that needed to be done at Big Lake," said Jim Stockbridge, a U.S. Department of Interior employee who led the team to the community north of Kansas City, Mo.

"But the most difficult work ahead falls squarely on the shoulders of the residents of Big Lake -- piecing their lives together again," said Stockbridge, a member of Hillandale Baptist Church in Adelphi, Md., and a veteran of relief efforts after Hurricanes Andrew and Hugo.

"We pray that our presence there will give them some of the encouragement they will need to get through the next year," he said.

Many Big Lake's residents are older people needing assistance in the physical work in cleaning up after the flood. Homes have had to be stripped to their foundations to rid them of contaminated matter. Along the edges of farm fields now just rotting rows of cornstalk stubble, fence rows have had to be cleared of large debris such as piers, barn doors, horse harnesses and whole trees deposited by strong currents at high water.

By the end of the D.C. relief team's cleanup Aug. 20, the residential roads of Big Lake were lined with huge piles of carpet, hardwood floor boards, siding, insulation, furniture and other personal goods waiting for special trash pick-up. Meanwhile, Big Lake's farm fields smoked with bonfires of chain sawed dead trees and contaminated waterborne debris.

Half of Big Lake's residents are retirees who had been attracted to the pretty lakeside community. Many lost the life savings they had invested in their homes.

The remainder of Big Lake's residents are farmers, most of whom had invested tens of thousands of dollars to seed and fertilize their holdings before the town was flooded.

The team spoke with a young farmer named Mark who has struggled to follow in his father's rural tradition while his three siblings have opted for city life. Mark said he farmed 1,700 acres this spring. How many were lost in the summer flood? "1600 acres," he said, his face totally expressionless after such a loss.

"Sure, there has been huge loss but in addition these farmers will have no income for over a year," said Jere Allen, head of the D.C. Baptist convention. Allen flew into the area early during the week and, despite a tight schedule, worked with the crew for most of its Monday through Friday assignments.

"We have identified 10 farm families who have been stripped of all their resources and who need help to get them through the next year," Allen said.

"Before we left, our group contributed \$2,000 to a local Lutheran church to distribute to these 10 needy families," Stockbridge added. "These funds will provide for a continuing ministry from all of us in the D.C. area even after we have completed our physical work there."

Most of the D.C.-area residents who joined the group learned of the mission effort through The Washington Post. They included Baptists, as well as Jews, Catholics, a Muslim and Christians from other denominations. There was a 19-year-old student who was raised in North Africa and Europe by his archeologist father and Swiss mother and a former child professional actor who is now a graduate student at Georgetown University in Washington. The group included mothers of all ages -- a 60-ish mother of five grown sons and two 40-year-olds whose husbands stayed at home to care for children. The group included dads as well, such as a 23-year-old Navy aircraft technician who cooed to his 2-year-old from every pay phone between the Potomac and the Missouri.

Some of the volunteers have experience in social outreach projects -- a young married couple affiliated with SOME (So others may eat) and a middle-aged man who is launching HOPE(E), an organization to provide entrepreneurial opportunities and economic empowerment for the homeless. One father couldn't bring his wife and teen-age son, but ended up sponsoring two teen-age boys, 15 and 16, whose parents couldn't join the group.

Participants brought skills with them -- a licensed engineer who assessed structural damage to Big Lake's buildings and assigned work crews and a dental assistant/office manager who handled the group's books. And they acquired skills there -- an insurance broker who now knows how to operate a chain saw.

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Larmore worships with a Plymouth Brethren assembly in Baltimore.

FMB missionaries named
to join Europe team

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
8/27/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Two Southern Baptist missionaries from Europe have been named to join the Foreign Mission Board's office for Europe.

The missionaries are Dan Panter of Pascagoula, Miss., a church starter in the former Soviet republic of Belarus, and Roger Briggs of Marceline, Mo., a church starter in Brussels, Belgium.

Briggs, 51, will be associate area director working out of the board's Richmond, Va., offices.

As associate to the area director for Europe, Panter, 46, will join Hal Lee, 61, of Pascagoula, Miss., a current associate to the area director, in Frankfurt, Germany, offices.

Area Director John Floyd, who also will live in Frankfurt, will move the area office from Paris, France, to Frankfurt because of the availability of flights to all parts of Europe from the busy German city.

Panter, Lee and a third associate to be named will work with missionaries in a set of countries in northern Europe, Western Europe and Eastern Europe (including the former Soviet Union), Floyd said. They will divide certain administrative and strategic duties of the area office, he added.

Briggs replaces Tom Warrington, whom Floyd asked to step down as his associate in June. Warrington has been offered another job at board offices in Richmond, but FMB officials would not publicly state the offered position.

Floyd said one of his considerations in making the new appointments was to find people who have worked and lived in the areas to which they would relate.

Working with Sam James, regional vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Floyd has been designing a program in which missionaries can capitalize on the exploding openness of former communist nations.

James and Floyd were elected to their posts after their predecessors resigned last year in conflict with board policies involving European Baptists. They have worked to stabilize the mission program and develop plans to better use missionary personnel, while rebuilding alliances between the board, missionaries and European Baptists.

Panter and his wife, the former Libby Wallace of Pearl, Miss., were missionaries in the West African nation of Togo for more than 13 years before transferring to Eastern Europe in 1991. Panter received the master of divinity and doctor of ministries degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was pastor of churches in Louisiana and Mississippi before becoming a missionary.

Appointed in 1984 with his wife, the former Jeannette Nash of Marceline, Mo., Briggs received the master of divinity degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. He was pastor of several churches in Missouri before becoming a missionary.

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**Baptists theologians ask BWA
to undergird their efforts**

By Wendy Ryan

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (BP)--"Come over and help us."

This request was heard often from Baptist theologians from Africa, India, Eastern Europe and Latin America who spoke of their needs for more teachers and resources; reduced costs for theological education; and accreditation for Baptist theological schools in their countries.

The 77 theologians from 21 countries met at the fourth Baptist International Conference of Theological Education (BICTE) in Johannesburg, South Africa. This was the fourth time the Baptist World Alliance had drawn Baptist theological educators together for an international conference. Previous meetings were held in Ridgecrest, N.C., in 1982, Los Angeles, 1985, and Zagreb, in former Yugoslavia, 1989.

The theological conference was organized by the BWA academic and theological education work group and led by Paul Fiddes of Regents Park College in Oxford, England, and Wiard Popkes of Hamburg Baptist Seminary in Germany. The July 31-Aug. 3 event also was co-hosted by the Baptist Union and Baptist Convention of Southern Africa.

"If we have to move from where we are to a better future, quality education is a must," said Wati Aier, principal of the Oriental Theological Seminary in Dimapur in India's Nagaland region.

Aier said his school wanted more qualified faculty to be able to grant a master of theology degree, move to a doctoral program and have their own accreditation. Without accreditation, other universities will now give credit to Baptist students, who "lose three to four years of work," Aier said. He also noted a trend in Nagaland from less to more qualified students coming to the seminary.

Sergei Sannikov, president of the seminary of the Odessa and European Asian Baptist Federation in Odessa, Ukraine, told the conference, "Only the Lord Jesus could have made what we have possible," after the struggle for theological education under communism and, now, the opening of several new theological schools in the former Soviet Union.

"I also could not imagine leading a seminary," said Sannikov, who said he became a Christian 17 years ago.

Started as a BWA initiative in January 1990, the Odessa seminary now has 37 students and 140 in Bible school, and Sannikov reported 20 students in the new Moscow Theological Seminary.

"The churches in Latin America are growing faster than we can handle," said Daniel Carro of the International Baptist Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Agreeing with his colleagues on the need for more and better trained theological teachers, Carro called on his first-world colleagues to "think of a Third World country for a sabbatical if you have something to give."

"It will change your life and change the lives of others," Carro said.

Carro encouraged his colleagues to look at alternative ways of doing theological education that do not financially overburden seminaries in less-affluent nations.

Ademola Ishola of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoso, said, "We have serious financial problems but things are improving as our people begin to understand the importance of theological education." The move from American missionaries to African teachers was one reason for the financial shortfall, he said.

Also addressing the need for accreditation, Ishola said, "On the one hand, accreditation is not important because we are producing leaders for our churches," said Ishola, "but on the other hand, it is important as our colleagues need to interact with other colleagues around the world."

Ishola reported the Baptist seminary in Liberia is still closed because of civil war.

Speaking of the need for Baptist seminaries in French-speaking countries of Africa where there are more than 1 million Baptists, Eleazar Ziherambere, general secretary of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship, pleaded for help.

"We Baptists in Africa feel we should be a significant part of the growth taking place in Africa," said Ziherambere, who warned that "many other ideologies coming in could damage our efforts in evangelism."

Cawley Bolt of the United Theological College of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica said Baptists in the Caribbean received training at the Barbados Bible College, run by Southern Baptists and the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, and from the United Theological College.

Explaining 11 denominations, including Baptists in Jamaica, cooperate in the United Theological College, Neville Callam, also from the college, said this was an example of how "patterns of cooperation can be developed as part of the stewardship of resources of our churches."

"We need to look to our own context to see what can be developed," Callam said. "Do we go it alone or do we work together in the wider marketplace, putting our Baptist distinctiveness along with others?"

In response to the needs mentioned, one suggestion was voiced to send theological students "not only to Europe and North America, where it is so expensive, but to Africa, India and Latin America where the church is growing."

As a group, conference participants responded with a resolution urging the BWA to extend the work of its theological assistance group (TAG) "into more regions of our international Baptist fellowship and to apply its resources to this end."

Since it was started in 1990, TAG largely has focused on theological needs in the former Soviet Union.

The resolution further asks for "development of a strategy that will be sensitive to the context in which theology is done; will investigate all existing opportunities for theological education in an area; and create groups for advice and assistance composed of theological educators, from the relevant regions and other countries, working in partnership together."

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South Africa: unique context
for Baptist theology dialogue

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
8/27/93

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (BP)--"Theology in context" was more than an academic discussion when Baptist theologians met in South Africa for the 4th Baptist International Conference of Theological Education.

The theologians met in a country fragmented by an apartheid system that, until very recently, had strong theological support, and they met a few days after the attack on a Cape Town church that left 11 people dead. During their four-day meeting, more than 90 people were killed in township fighting.

Most of the participants stayed in the homes of black and white South African Baptists as part of the "theology in context" emphasis.

"This is a country of oppression, suppression and segregation," said Vincent Mmcedisi Jones, acting general secretary of the black Baptist Convention of Southern Africa as he welcomed the 77 participants from 21 countries at the Sunday evening service launching the July 31-Aug. 3 conference.

"But we are a wonderful people with a sense of humor," Jones said. "We laugh and express the joy and consolation we find in the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"You've come at a time when we are going through mammoth changes, violence and bloodshed," said Terry Rae, general secretary of the predominantly white Baptist Union of Southern Africa. "To come at a time like this encourages us and blesses us."

A visit to Soweto, the largest black township, and respectful debate between representatives of the predominantly white Baptist union and the black Baptist convention during the meeting further deepened the "theology in context" theme.

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It was in 1987 the convention declared its independence from the union. "Our political history led to this split," said Philemon Moloi, president of the convention, "and while we are not fighting and respect each other's positions, work needs to be done in the grass roots."

Theological education is among the tensions between the union and convention.

"How can black South Africa best receive theological education and what form of education is best?" asked Des Hoffmeister, spokesperson for the convention.

Hoffmeister, pastor of the Ennerdale Baptist Church in Johannesburg, is one of the framers of the Barkly West Awareness Workshop convened in 1990 by black Baptists in South Africa to begin "the long road of self-discovery, awareness and empowerment."

Apart from the kind of theological education South Africa will need as it changes to black majority rule in 1994, there are, for the convention, some basic questions that first need to be answered.

While the convention is somewhat larger than the union, with approximately 35,000 members and 125 churches, it has no theological seminary or college, few resources and no real opportunity to train its pastors.

The union with approximately 34,000 members and 340 churches, 130 of which are black, has access to four theological schools.

The debate that followed an address by Louise Kretzchmar of the University of South Africa in Pretoria on the final evening of the meeting focused on concerns of the convention, which feels cheated out of one of the schools used to train their pastors. The union counters by saying much of its resources are used to educate blacks and coloreds.

"The remarkable feature of this 'doing theology in context' was the very obvious earnest efforts by both sides to work for solutions," said Tony Cupit, BWA director of evangelism and education. "The conference provided a good forum for reconciliation and continuing dialogue."

Both sides asked the BWA for help through its theological assistance group.

The conference then approved a resolution asking the BWA to facilitate the process of dialogue; the development of strategies; and the implementing of "a more contextual, effective and relevant theological education in South Africa."

"We need your input," said Dee Morcom, president-elect of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa. "Our sense of isolation is painful. I'm so thankful you are here at this time."

"We want a solution," said Kevin Roy of the Western province branch of the theological college. "You have been a catalyst," Hoffmeister said. "Your visit was significant and momentous and you have affirmed our humanity."

"If blacks and whites cannot work in unity, then we cannot expect society to take seriously our claims to the witness of Jesus Christ," Kretzchmar warned.

However, the conference itself was a testimony to the witness of Baptists in South Africa. It was jointly hosted by union and the convention and sponsored by the academic and theological education workgroup of the Baptist World Alliance.

Earlier that day, conference participants got another experience of "theology in context" when they visited Soweto, the largest black township in South Africa.

Known as the home of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, Soweto is also a place where Baptist ministers are bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ, education and hope to people there.

One visit was to Sanctuary Baptist Church, which has a nursery for approximately 70 children every day.

"We feed them, educate them and tell them about Jesus Christ," said Michael R Mathibedi, director of the nursery school program and outreach ministries of the church.

Such ministries reflected a major question in Africa for conference participants: What does it mean to do theology in context in Africa with all of its complexities?

"Which theology are we talking about in South Africa?" asked Douglas Waruta of the University of Nairobi in Kenya. "Is it that of the powerful and mighty or the kind influencing the women in the market trying to sell their vegetables?"

Women in the market "are not going to the theologians," Waruta said. "They are going to their preachers for answers to help them make it.

"We need a theology of protest rather than a theology of confirmation," Waruta stated. "There is no theology independent of its context."

According to Waruta, "The issues are pure and simple," since racism has over the years caused black churches to develop in a position of subservience and weakness.

Terrance McGee, former president of the union, pleaded "racism is never pure and for us the issues are certainly not simple."

In a major address on "Salvation From An African Perspective," Henry Mugabe of the Baptist Theological College of Zimbabwe said Africans generally accept Jesus Christ as the healer and Savior of their lives.

"We cannot resist Jesus, because he has bewitched us" is one popular African saying, according to Mugabe. He said Africans also refer to Jesus as "Our Healer" and this means "an all-inclusive healing." He sang a song from Malawi that spoke about "Jesus, Our Medicine Man."

Mugabe spoke about the liberating effects of the gospel of Jesus Christ in women and said some independent churches had taken a lead in the theology of the environment.

Speaking to the more difficult question of ancestor worship, Mugabe said, "Africans believe God will be merciful and act justly to those who did not hear about him."

Quoting from 1 Peter 3:19, Mugabe said many Africans believe "death is not a barrier to incorporation into Christ." He contended, "A lot of African spirituality is not inconsistent with Scripture.

"Many Africans like me find it hard to concentrate on the joys of heaven if the lives of our ancestors suffer elsewhere," Mugabe said.

Mugabe challenged his Western colleagues about the reasons for putting fresh flowers on and visiting the graves of loved ones long after their death, asking whether this was so different from African practices about which Western Christians have difficulty.

Mugabe also said African theological reflection must take into account the fact that "Africans are sinners, yes, but they've also been sinned against," referring the long history of colonization and continuing economic oppression Africans suffer.

In spite of the deadly conflicts that currently plague the continent, Mugabe said, "The best compliment you can give an African is to say, 'You are human.'"

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Nigeria changes leaders;
prayers for peace continue

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
8/27/93

IBADAN, Nigeria, (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria continued to pray for peace as the nation's military president transferred power to a civilian successor Aug. 26.

Gen. Ibrahim Babangida resigned as Nigeria's president and military commander Aug. 26 and named former corporate executive Ernest Shonekan as his replacement.

Babangida, who came to power in 1985 after a bloodless coup, earlier had promised to step down and hand over power to an elected government, according to news reports. The new interim government, which is mostly civilian, is expected to rule until Nigeria's elections next year.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Ibadan, Nigeria, reported the city was "very quiet" Aug. 27 following Babangida's transfer of power in a ceremony Aug. 26 in Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital.

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"With the missionaries, there have been no problems anywhere that we know of. For the most part people have stayed (home) during these past two days," said missionary Don Reece Aug. 26 as the nation awaited Babangida's announcement of his successor. "We have had no more than 5 percent of our Baptist headquarters (Nigerian) staff present."

Nigerian Baptists and the 65 Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria have met in homes and churches to pray for continued peace during the political crisis, Reece said. From Canton, N.C., Reece is executive secretary of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria, a West African nation of about 90 million people.

Nigeria's political crisis began in June when Babangida abruptly voided results of the June 12 presidential election that was to choose his civilian successor. Most observers believe business millionaire Moshood K.O. Abiola won the election, which Babangida claims was rigged.

Since then there have been several demonstrations and strikes in Lagos, resulting in the deaths of more than 100 people.

New strikes were launched Aug. 25, with varying degrees of success. In Lagos, the economic center of the country, some shops remained opened and traffic was light, but the streets were far from deserted. News reports indicated that gas, oil, airport and other workers planned to strike Aug. 28.

In the past few weeks, prices for food and fuel have steadily increased, Reece said. Most missionaries joined the Nigerian population in stocking up for the coming strike, which has depleted the shelves in many stores, he said.

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Mary E. Speidel contributed to this story

CORRECTION: In the 8-26-93 (BP) story "Prof says 'March on Washington' needs celebration, reflection," please correct the figure in the third paragraph to 200,000, not 200,00 as printed.

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