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What's Inside

Our issue leads with a guest editorial from Dr. Arjan de Visser, "Schillebeeckx and Schilder." He takes a look at some of their views, particularly on salvation, the church, and the world. One of our editors, Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer, has also written a timely article on questioning authority, particularly as it relates to current events.

We start a three-part series from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, "Should We Keep the Ten Commandments in our Sunday Liturgy?" Dr. Van Dam will be examining the reading the law as it has been set in our liturgical order of worship. In this part he goes back to Scripture to understand the place of the law in the life and worship of God's people.

Issue 16 includes a Treasures, New & Old meditation, the Clippings on Politics & Religion column, Mission News, a book review, and a Canticle.

Laura Veenendaal

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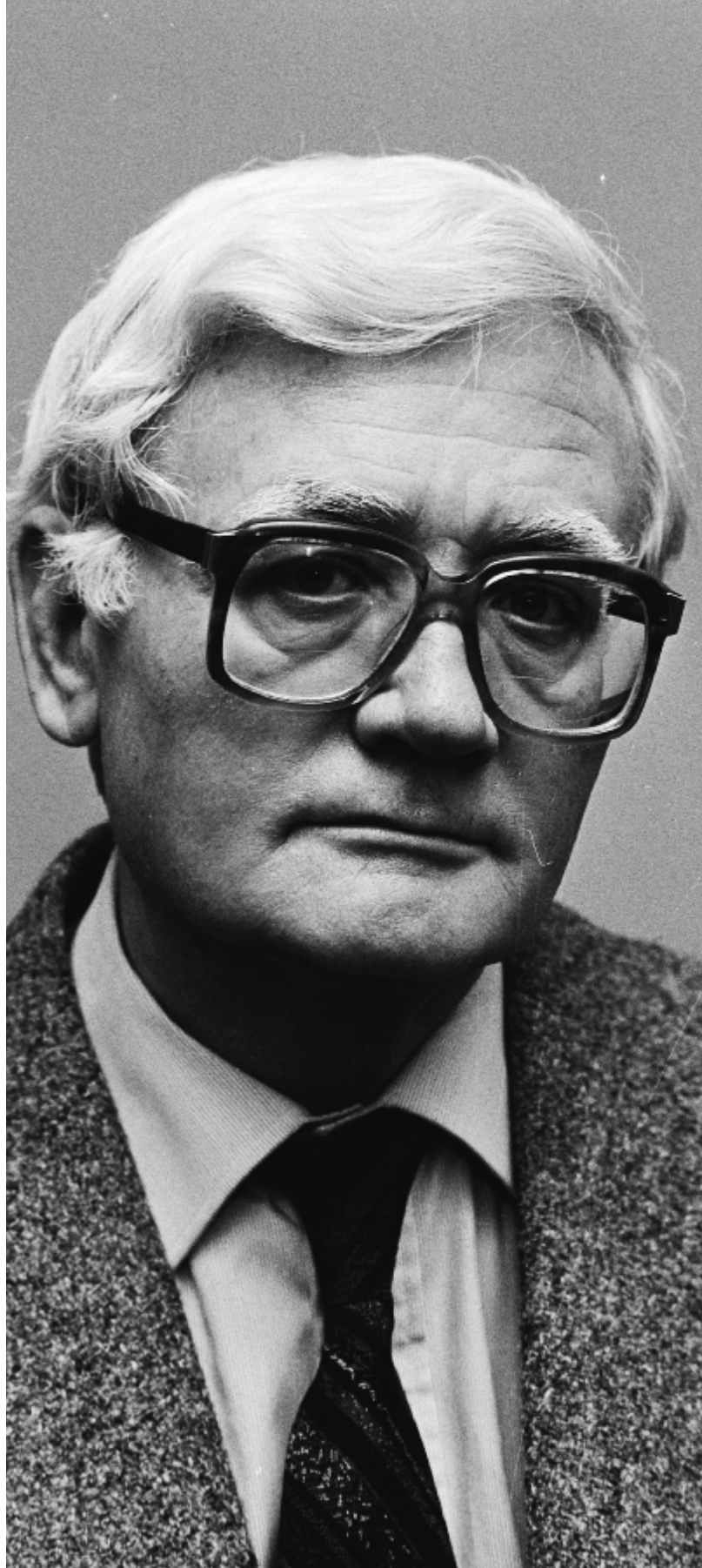


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Schillebeeckx and Schilder

Way back in 1986, when I was still a seminary student in Kampen, The Netherlands, I attended a symposium at the Free University in Amsterdam. The main speaker was Edward Schillebeeckx, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian at that time. Within his own church, Schillebeeckx was a controversial figure who was summoned to the headquarters in Rome several times during his lifetime to explain and defend his views. One of his main critics, by the way, was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future pope Benedict XVI.

The Free University, always eager to provide a platform to free thinking theologians, thought it was a great idea to get Schillebeeckx to give a series of lectures. I remember the Flemish theologian laying out his view of salvation as something that must happen in this world, not (as a well-known hymn says) in the sweet bye and bye. Christians should be earthly-minded, not heavenly-minded. At one point, Schillebeeckx's theological emphasis came together in a powerful and rather startling statement when he exclaimed: "*Extra mundum nulla salus*" (translation: outside the world there is no salvation)!



Edward Schillebeeckx

It was a clever play on words and a little bit naughty as well. Schillebeeckx used the well-known doctrinal adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation), changed one word (church – world), and so presented a radical rethinking of key theological concepts. Salvation, for example, would be no longer defined in terms of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God but rather in terms of wholeness of human beings, liberation from oppressive structures, emancipation, justice, etcetera.

Schillebeeckx also presented a different understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In his view, Jesus Christ did not really have to die for our salvation. The death of Jesus was rather inconsequential. The main role of Jesus was to show us *with his life* what God's intentions are with this world and with mankind. Understandably, the role of the church needed to be redefined as well. The message of Schillebeeckx was that the church should focus on doing good in the world rather than on saving souls. Salvation needs to be realized and encountered *in this world*, in human life and creation.

Listening to Schillebeeckx was a difficult experience. On the one hand, I respected him because of his concern regarding the suffering in the world and his desire that Christians should make a difference. On the other hand, I was appalled by his redefinition of key theological concepts, such as his view of salvation and his understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. I came away with the impression that the God of Schillebeeckx was a humanist.

Schilder

I was reminded of my Schillebeeckx experience recently, when I read the dissertation by Marinus de Jong on Klaas Schilder. This excellent dissertation was published last year and is available for downloading online. The title is: *The Church is the Means, the World is the End: The Development of Klaas Schilder's Thought on the Relationship between the Church and the World*.

As the subtitle indicates, De Jong describes the development of Schilder's views regarding the relationship between

the church and the world. He does so by placing the development of Schilder's thought in historical and biographical context, taking the reader through four phases in Schilder's life: his early years (1890-1925), his development as a leading theologian up to his appointment as a professor of dogmatics in Kampen (1925-1934), his involvement in the tensions within the Reformed Churches up to the Liberation (1934-1944), and the final years when Schilder was the leader of the Reformed Churches Liberated (1944-1952).

I found it fascinating to read about the development of Schilder's thought, and it helped me to understand my own *vrijgemaakte* background better. When I think back on the teaching I enjoyed during my years as a teenager in catechism class, the kind of preaching and teaching I heard in those years, the kind of views my parents and others instilled in me, De Jong's dissertation confirms that Schilder was a major influence. I'm thinking here of concepts such as the cultural mandate of Christians in the world, complemented with the awareness that there is an antithesis between the church and the world. Schilder was not as optimistic as Abraham Kuyper about the results of Christian activity in the world, but he did maintain that Christians ought to be active in various spheres of life, such as education, politics, etc. We were brought up with the idea that a small minority of faithful believers can have a significant impact

on the world. The church was supposed to be the hub of the various spheres of life Christians are involved in.

A central feature

I found De Jong's description of the various aspects of Schilder's thought insightful, but there is one important aspect in the dissertation that did not convince me. It is the very idea that is expressed in the title: "The church is the means, the world is the end." This statement is repeated at various points in the book and it is clearly something De Jong wants to get across as a major discovery of his research. On p. 276, he presents as his conclusion that in Schilder's thought "the church, as Christ's body, finds its fulfillment in restoring God's attention for his creation through the



Klaas Schilder

human cultural mandate. The church is the means, the world is the end." I found it interesting that in a footnote De Jong expresses his amazement that no other Schilder scholar (he mentions Batteau, Dee, and others) has noticed "this central feature" of Schilder's ecclesiology. I remain skeptical. If De Jong is the only one who has seen this supposedly "central feature" in Schilder's theology, it might be an indication it's not really there!


There is a difference between saying that the church is "the hub" of Christian activity in the world and saying that the church is "the means" and the world "the end." The first statement points to the all-important role the church has to play to motivate its members to Christian activity in the world. Without a doubt, Schilder would agree. The second statement, however, could be understood to mean that the church is merely an instrument and that the world is really the ultimate goal of the Lord's plan of salvation. Without a doubt, Schillebeeckx would agree, but as for Schilder, I don't think so. He would certainly agree that the church has cosmic relevance, but he would object to the idea that the church is merely an instrument.

The church was really important in Schilder's thinking. He emphasized that Christ bought the church with his precious blood and that the church is the beloved bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21). He worked hard to promote the idea that the church is a dynamic entity, always being opposed, but always being preserved by her Lord. He often quoted the words of the Catechism that the Son of God is gathering for himself, from the beginning of the world to its end, a church chosen to everlasting life (LD 21). He continually reminded everyone that the church is not just an assembly (*coetus*) but also a congregation (*congregatio*). With the latter, he understood the work of Christ himself in gathering his church in a dynamic process that will be brought to its fulfilment on the Last Day. With all this in mind, I cannot imagine Schilder agreeing with the title of De Jong's dissertation. I think Schilder would have said that the church is *both the means and the purpose* of God's plan of salvation.

Application

Despite the critical comments in the previous paragraphs, I really enjoyed reading De Jong's dissertation on Schilder, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to understand the theological roots of the Canadian Reformed Churches. I also recommend it because our churches are in a process of becoming more missional which necessarily involves a rethinking of the role of the church in the world. Let me mention two aspects to illustrate this.

First, in missional circles it is quite popular to say that "the church exists for the world." Along similar lines, it is popular to say that mission is the defining characteristic of God's people. With some regularity I see the statement of William Temple being quoted: "The church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members." While we can appreciate the missionary zeal underlying such comments, we cannot accept this as biblically balanced. Biblically speaking, the church exists for at least three purposes: for the glory of God, for the edification of its members, and for evangelizing the nations. In my estimation, the challenge for our churches is going to be how to become more missional *without losing the focus on the edification of the members*.

Second, in missional circles it is quite common to have high expectations regarding the impact Christians can have on the world. People speak about "transforming the society" or "redeeming the city." At the same time, the fact that there is enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) is easily forgotten. We can learn from Schilder that we should not be too optimistic about the prospects of changing the world. The Lord himself will do that on the Last Day. In the meantime, we may trust that the Lord will indeed bless Christian witness and obedience to the extent that there will be positive effects on the society in which we live. Our task is to be obedient to the mandate the Lord has given to us. The outcome is in the Lord's hands. 

The challenge for our churches is going to be how to become more missional without losing the focus on the edification of the members

A Funeral Procession Halted

"Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow..." (Luke 7:11-17)

One of the pictures etched in my mind from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is that of a procession of Italian army trucks carrying away the bodies of COVID-19 victims. There were too many bodies to handle and this emergency measure had to be taken. It was a grim procession, deathly surreal.

Luke 7:11-17 is an account of two processions – a funeral procession leaving the town of Nain to go to the cemetery, and the procession of Christ and the crowd with him approaching Nain. A dead man was at the head of the one procession, Christ was at the head of the other. The one procession represented death, the other life. This is a study in contrasts.

As he approached the town, Christ was confronted by the misery of death. A young man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. The woman – a widow – had already lost her husband. Now her son had died too. It was one sorrow after the other for this woman as she had to bury another loved one. This son was still a young man. Parents don't expect to bury their children regardless of age, but especially not when their children are still young. The death of a child is always heart-wrenching. And this was her only son. Sons were important in Israel because they

passed on the family name and because they were supposed to provide for their widowed mother; all of that was gone with the death of her only son. The future looked very bleak for this woman as she headed toward the cemetery. As was customary among the Jews in those days, the mourners would have been wailing loudly.


Normally people give funeral processions right of way. But not Christ. He was moved with compassion for the mother and said, "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13), and then deliberately touched the bier – let's say the coffin – thereby becoming unclean. Anyone in Israel who came into contact with death would be unclean (Num 19:11-22), because anything to do with death was a constant reminder that sin had come into the world. Death defiled because sin defiles.

The message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ came into the world to take our uncleanness, sin, and curse upon himself and to carry it all to the cross of Calvary. Touching the young man's coffin symbolized this. As Paul writes, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

Then Christ showed that he came into the world to break the power of death when he raised the young man to life. Sorrow

turned to joy for the mother and the crowd! This pointed ahead to the fact that, by his death and resurrection, Christ would triumph over death and the grave. Jesus Christ is the Saviour from death and the Lord of life!

For Christians, the curse of death has been removed because of Christ's death and resurrection. Death is entrance into eternal life. And the dead shall be raised incorruptible and live forever in body and soul – not to die again as the widow of Nain's son would die again.

We share in this good news by grace through faith. The people in Christ's day responded by saying that Christ was a great prophet (Luke 7:16). That's all. What is your response to Jesus Christ? Do you believe in him as Saviour from death and Lord of life? If so, then a funeral procession of any kind does not have to make you deathly scared because you have the deep and only comfort that you belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to your faithful Saviour Jesus Christ (HC, LD 1). 

For further study

1. This passage is the first of only three times that Christ raised someone from the dead. What are the other two instances? Look up Luke 8:40-56 and John 11:1-44.
2. How might trials and temptations strengthen us to rely more and more on God's faithfulness in Christ?



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ASK A QUESTION

Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for? Send us your
most thought provoking questions to explore
in our **You Asked** column.

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Questioning Authority

If there's one issue the coronavirus has brought to the fore in our country and in our churches, it's the role government plays in our lives. Never before in Canada have provincial governments used an emergency measures act to suspend, for months at a time, basic rights we all exercise regularly and have clearly enshrined in the Constitution of Canada. In short order, because of a government edict and with the rationale that we must take drastic action "to flatten the curve" of the anticipated rate of infection, most Canadians (and many Americans too) were denied the basic rights of freedom of movement and freedom of peaceful assembly.

Suddenly we were told to "stay home," to engage only in "essential travel," and not to visit the homes of family or friends.

Schools were closed and many seniors' homes were completely locked down. In some cases, provinces shut their borders to Canadians from other provinces. And perhaps most alarming of all, churches (and all houses of worship) were forbidden to gather in peaceful assembly for worship.² We also couldn't rejoice as a community in the marriages of our young people nor could we mourn as a community in the deaths of our elderly (or others). The sting of all this is still being felt. Whatever else we have learned in this unprecedented situation is that when push comes to shove, our rights can be taken away (at least temporarily), and the government has a great deal of influence in our everyday lives.

Permission to criticize?

As we were in the thick of this and trying to find our way as Christians and churches, I noticed no little brouhaha on social media over how we as Christians should react to the government decisions. There was (and is) an array of responses from chalking it up to part of a wider conspiracy to government overreach to shaming anyone who dared raise a question about let alone a criticism of the government. There were those who blamed the government for going way overboard and there were those who welcomed the government's actions and saw the restrictions on our freedoms as necessary for our safety.

In short, there were critics and there were cheerleaders. And as their opinions clashed in various forums, one issue seemed to be at the centre for Christians: may Christians criticize the government, or should they simply submit quietly? Is it biblical or godly to publicly raise questions about government rulings?

We could broaden this question and ask: may believers think critically about the actions and decisions of authority figures in general? Or must we blindly accept what parents, teachers, elders, police officers, judges, and policy makers decide to implement in their positions of authority? Must we obey without question? May we dissect and discuss government policy in public? We all know the biblical command to honour all in authority (fifth commandment) and to submit to governing authorities because "there is no authority except from God." We are even warned by Paul, "Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom 13:1-2).

Authority's limits

However, neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit can possibly mean unquestioning obedience in all matters. Governing authorities are indeed servants of God (Rom 13:4), but when such a servant defies its master, the servant not only *may* be resisted but *must* be resisted by those beneath him. The twelve apostles laid down this principle very clearly. After they were commanded by the Jewish council not to preach in the name of Jesus, they said plainly, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In this

they were following the godly example of Daniel, who refused to stop praying to the LORD contrary to the command of King Darius (Dan 6:1-10) or the two midwives who refused to kill the Israelite baby boys despite the edict of Pharaoh (Exod 1:15-20). Such disobedience to governing authorities is necessary in order to obey the highest authority in this world (God). This clearly implies that the commands and instructions of earthly authorities are to be analyzed and sifted by those receiving them. To be sure, submission and obedience is required in all things which do not violate God's commandments and yet the point remains: we are to think carefully about what government commands.

The apostle Paul himself, despite his strong words in Romans 13, does not hesitate to question the decisions and actions of governing authorities. He did so when a Roman centurion was making ready to flog him, raising the issue of whether it was just to flog a Roman citizen like Paul (Acts 22:25). He did something similar on an earlier occasion after he and Silas had been wrongly beaten by civil authorities in Philippi and were about to be quietly released from prison. Paul questioned their actions and essentially forced the magistrates to come

and apologize for their injustice (Acts 16:35-39). Note also that Paul felt free to defend himself in a Roman court of law against the unjust accusations of the Jewish authorities (Acts 23:1-11; 24:1-21; 26:1-32).

Submission vs. questioning

It seems that the rub is whether God's command to submit to authority rules out any questioning of that authority. To some the very idea of questioning and, from there, *criticizing* the actions or decisions of the government is forbidden for a child of God, or at the very least is conduct unbecoming and should be avoided. If our children question parental decisions, we consider that "back-talk" and clamp down on it. Teachers at school do the same thing. Some teachers and parents along with employers and elders do not like to be questioned at all and find it offensive and insubordinate. But is that necessarily the case? Are all questions rebellious in nature and to be rejected out of hand?

May Christians criticize the government, or should they simply submit quietly?

Clearly not. The above scriptural data proves otherwise. Certainly, there is an evil type of questioning, one which arises out of spirit of rebellion and which seeks to undermine the governing authorities. Scripture gives evidence of this too in the seditious questioning of Moses by Miriam and Aaron (Num 12) and by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16). Similarly, some unnamed Israelites called into question the effectiveness and thus the legitimacy of the newly anointed King Saul (1 Sam 10:27; 11:12). There is also a disdainful and scornful questioning of authority figures seen in how the wife of Job questions his loyalty to the LORD (Job 1:9) or in how the Pharisees constantly question the Lord Jesus seeking to trap him in his words (Matt 22:15-22). All such manner of questioning comes from the evil one and should be avoided by God's people.


Asking good questions

But let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater. It is also possible and even desirable to ask good questions of those in authority – honest questions seeking honest answers and looking to the greater good! The Lord himself encourages children to ask their parents questions so they might understand what the Lord has done for his people and walk in his ways (Exod 13:14-16; Deut 6:20-25). The Lord Jesus shows us by example when, as a twelve-year-old, he was eager to be in the temple asking questions of the teachers (Luke 2:46)! The wise servants of Naaman changed their master's prideful mind with a wise question and so saved his life (2 Kgs 5:11-14). The wise woman of Abel averted disaster for the city by asking a pertinent question of Joab the army commander (2 Sam 20:14). Similarly, the prophet Nathan worked with Bathsheba to raise with King David the important question of whether he intended to fulfill his promise to make Solomon king after him. Had they not questioned the king, Adonijah's plot would likely have succeeded, with Solomon murdered in the process (1 Kgs 1). In each case, there was full submission to and respect for the authority figure, but the Lord used their thoughtful analysis of the situation to raise vital questions and so bring blessing to his people.

In the same way, we should not be afraid of good questions, even hard and penetrating questions, asked in a spirit of sincere respect and submission and seeking the greater good. Parents, teachers, elders, and ministers should encourage and welcome

deeper questions of this nature – answering them will only help clarify the truth one way or the other. As authority figures, we should know why we do what we do, why we ask what we ask of our people, and be able to explain it to them for their understanding. And as we see the value of thinking analytically and asking discerning questions in those settings, we'll see the importance of doing so also with our governing authorities.

The truth is, premiers, prime ministers, and presidents can and do make mistakes just like the kings and rulers of old and like parents and church leaders still today. We should not feel intimidated by so-called "health experts" or "scientific data" for experts that speak what leaders like to hear are easily assembled in our day just as they were in ancient times (think of the wise men around Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar). And "scientific data" can be twisted and interpreted to mean lots of even conflicting things. Ordinary people of God often have a lot of common sense and biblically honed wisdom through years of experience, both of which are very valuable tools to sort out truth from error, a good path from a bad one.

Careful thinking on everyone's part and raising important questions for discussion even in the public square can help us avoid many pitfalls. It's debatable whether social media is the best place to actually discuss such matters (that's another article!), but since in Canada we have the right and the freedom to do so there is no biblical reason to shy away from public discourse on government activities. Because it is the duty of Christians to analyze decisions of governing authorities, we should seek and encourage courteous, public discussion on those decisions. We need to forego shaming each other for asking critical questions and instead engage each other in a gentle and brotherly spirit so that the clarity of what is true may come to the fore. Surely this will be to the glory of God and the benefit of all. 



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Should We Keep the Ten Commandments in Our Sunday Liturgy? (1 of 3)

There is an apparent trend in some churches to reduce the number of times that the Ten Commandments are read during the morning worship service. Sometimes alternate passages of Scripture are read and sometimes a prayer for forgiveness is all that is left of what once entailed the reading of the Decalogue, followed by a prayer. How do we evaluate this developing practice?

It may be good to take a look at the reading the law as it has been set in our liturgical order of worship. First, we need to go back to Scripture and try to understand the place of this law in the life and worship of God's people. In a second article we will consider how the Ten Commandments were used liturgically in

the history of the church. Finally, in a third article, we must ask whether the Decalogue should still have a fixed place in our regular Sunday worship. Is it necessary to maintain this custom?

At Mount Sinai

God's giving his people the Ten Commandments could not have been done in a more dramatic way. This was an unforgettable event in the history of redemption. God himself came down from heaven and personally addressed his people Israel from Mount Sinai so that the entire nation heard his very voice. They quaked with fear and begged Moses: "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us lest we die"

"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6)

(Exod 20:19). That event was forever etched into the collective memory of God's people, and rightly so. This event established and defined the relationship between God and his people.

To begin with, when God addressed his people from Mount Sinai, he spoke in love for them as their Savior. Before any command was issued, the LORD identified himself as Israel's Deliverer. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:1). Before God said "You shall not...", he first proclaimed the gospel of their deliverance, a gospel full of the great love God had for his people.

Furthermore, the announcement of the Ten Commandments was a critical part of God's making a covenant with his people. It was the basic document, the constitution of the covenant, so to speak. God himself had said: "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6). The Ten Commandments as a covenant document identified God's loving relationship with his people and the basic obligations which his people had to him.

It set forth the main norms which would later be detailed in laws and regulations for his people. But the Decalogue is the central document. Its enormous importance is evident from the fact that these are the only words of God's revelation that the LORD personally inscribed with his own finger in stone (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10). This was also the only written text placed inside the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:16; 40:20).

It is interesting to note that the Ten Commandments are never called such in Scripture. They are literally called the

"Ten Words" (Deut 4:13; 10:4) or "the words of the covenant" (Exod 34:28) or simply "the covenant" (Deut 4:13). This was *the* covenant document!

The Decalogue in the life of Israel

As the document lying at the heart of the covenant, it had a special and central place whenever the law was to be read in its entirety. Such a reading had to take place every seven years with the whole nation – young and old – in attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles during the year of release (Deut 31:10-13). This was of course not the only time the law was made known. Both parents and priests had the duty to regularly teach the law (e.g., Deut 6:7, 20; 33:10). But this prescribed septennial reading was to be a special time of covenant renewal and re-consecration to the Lord and his service.

We do not read too much in God's Word about the regular reading of Scripture in the context of worship. But what we are informed about underlines the importance of the reading of the Decalogue. Prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses reminded Israel that God had made a covenant with them and had spoken face to face at the mountain and out of the fire. He then again recited the Ten Words of the covenant (Deut 5). In this way the critical and foundational importance of the Decalogue was underlined. Indeed, earlier Moses had said that God had "declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Words" (Deut 4:13). The Ten Words are here identified as "his [i.e. God's] covenant" with his people. In the process of the renewal of the covenant prior to entering the Promised Land, the other laws and ordinances were also

Having been
graciously delivered,
as reflected
in the fulfillment
of the prologue
of the Ten Words,
God's people
are to respond
to God's salvation

recited and they constitute much of the book of Deuteronomy. But the Decalogue has a special place. It is the basic constitution so to speak of the covenant.

After Israel entered the Promised Land, Joshua led the nation in a ceremony of covenant renewal (Josh 24). Given the central significance of the Ten Words, one can assume that they were included in the broad references to God's will in the renewing of the covenant (Josh 24:25-26). Indeed, Targum Jonathan, an ancient Aramaic translation and interpretation of this part of Scripture, compares the stone which Joshua erected as a testimony at Shechem with "the two stone tablets of the covenant" on which were inscribed the Ten Words. Tragically, much of Israel's subsequent history was characterized by God's people abandoning the will of the LORD and going its own way. Consequently, the law was forgotten and became completely unknown. It was eventually rediscovered in the temple in the days of King Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8). This godly king initiated a ceremony of covenant renewal, during which he read in the hearing of all the people, both small and great, "all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD" and restored true worship (2 Kgs 23:1-27; 2 Chron 34).


Another reading of law that would have included the Ten Words took place after the return from the Babylonian exile. Then Ezra read "from early morning until midday" from "the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel" before all who could understand what they heard (Neh 8:1-8). This reading formed part of the renewal of the covenant with the LORD after the judgment of exile had passed. Indeed, the people were upset when they realized how grievously unfaithful they had been to the LORD on hearing his law (Neh 8:9).

Apart from the fact that Scripture identifies the Ten Words as "the covenant" (Deut 4:13) or "the words of the covenant" (Exod 34:28), the importance of the Decalogue is also evident from the way these laws are summarized, recalled, and underlined in all sorts of contexts throughout the Old Testament. Furthermore, its influence is evident in the fact that the book of Deuteronomy has been organized around the Decalogue, as is likely the case with the book of Proverbs as well.

When Israel lived in fellowship with God and heeded his good will, they understood the enormous significance of the

Decalogue. It was a gift of their Deliverer's grace, a mirror before which they could place themselves and see their sins and shortcomings and so know how to live in a way pleasing to the LORD. The psalmist had every reason to exclaim: "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day!" (Ps 119:97). Small wonder that the reading of Ten Words, which were at the very heart of God's covenant with his people, were later taken up in the daily liturgy of the second temple and subsequently in the daily liturgy of the Jewish synagogue.

The Decalogue with Christ's coming

The New Testament reflects the importance of the Ten Commandments in many ways. The covenant Lord of the prologue to the Ten Words who delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt has now set his people free from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death through the work of the Passover lamb, his Son (1 Cor 5:7; Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9). But his demand for holiness and obedience remains. The Lord Jesus affirmed the ongoing validity of the Ten Words and underlined their deeper meaning in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-6:4, 7:12) and the apostles reaffirmed their abiding authority (e.g., Rom 7:12; 13:9; Eph 5-6; Rev 12:17). Having been graciously delivered, as reflected in the fulfillment of the prologue of the Ten Words, God's people, also today, are to respond to God's salvation by obeying his will and so giving themselves in gratitude to God as a pleasing sacrifice (Rom 12:1; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 1:15-16). 

To be continued with the liturgical use of the Decalogue in the history of the church.



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The Church in North Korea

A recent article on Fox News explained the reality of Christianity in the most oppressive dictatorship in the world today, that is, in North Korea. The article opens, “Being a Christian in North Korea means using mysterious, spy-like tactics to read the Bible, facing threats of the death penalty, and circumventing propaganda about believers harvesting organs.”¹

In a country where the only deities that may be acknowledged are the members of the Kim family, particularly grandfather Kim Il-sung, father Kim Jong-il, and now Kim Jong-un, having a page or even sentence of the Bible amounts to treason. Yes, this communist country has the unique status of acknowledging *gods*, even if these gods happen to be the dynasty of dictators. In a sense, it is deeply religious.

How does this dynasty keep its people away from the Christian faith? First, by building up its own religion around the Kim family. This includes national hymns of praise to their leaders. Fox reported that, “Kindergarteners are taught to say a prayer before they eat: ‘Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung, for our food.’”

Second, by propaganda. Fox News included three photos that the Voice of the Martyrs obtained. Two of these were paintings found in a North Korean museum. The one depicts a Christian doctor and missionary torturing a Korean male toddler and the other depicts Western soldiers attacking a helpless Korean girl and smashing her skull. North Koreans are taught that Christians will catch them and harvest their organs.


In the third place, the Korean regime deters citizens from entertaining Christian teachings by an extremely heavy-handed response. Neighbours are urged to spy on each other. If one person is found to be a Christian, that person will probably be executed. But, in addition, three generations of that person’s family will be sent to labour camps. Very few people have escaped these camps, but those who have provide the most harrowing accounts of famine, physical torture, mental

abuse, and death (for a story of one escapee, read *Escape from Camp 14*, by Blaine Harden).

How then does the church even exist? Fox News reports that Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) has found some very creative ways to bring the gospel into North Korea. Where the gospel was once sent to fax machines in North Korean businesses and government offices, VOM now launches “Scripture balloons” when the wind is blowing in the right direction to float the balloons into North Korea. VOM is able to track these.

We also learn that VOM uses “radio broadcasts, with one person slowly reading Scriptures so that people in North Korea have enough time to write them down. It is sometimes the closest they ever get to owning a printed version. Bibles also are sent by sea, with the Scripture inside a plastic bottle along with a day’s supply of rice and enough air to keep it afloat.”

If one was to visit North Korea, one would be very hard pressed to find any Christians. No one would openly attest to their faith. But there is a church in North Korea. VOM’s Todd Nettleton told Fox News that the church, “doesn’t look anything like our churches, when we gather together with believers in the United States.” Rather, people read little portions of the Bible late at night, with blackout curtains, inside closets, and under blankets (perhaps all three at once). They agonize over when to tell their children about Jesus Christ, for one wrong statement by a child at school could mean prison for all the family.

Amazingly, by God’s grace, there are believers, even in this most unlikely place. Let us continue to pray for them to be comforted by our Lord Jesus, through the gospel. 



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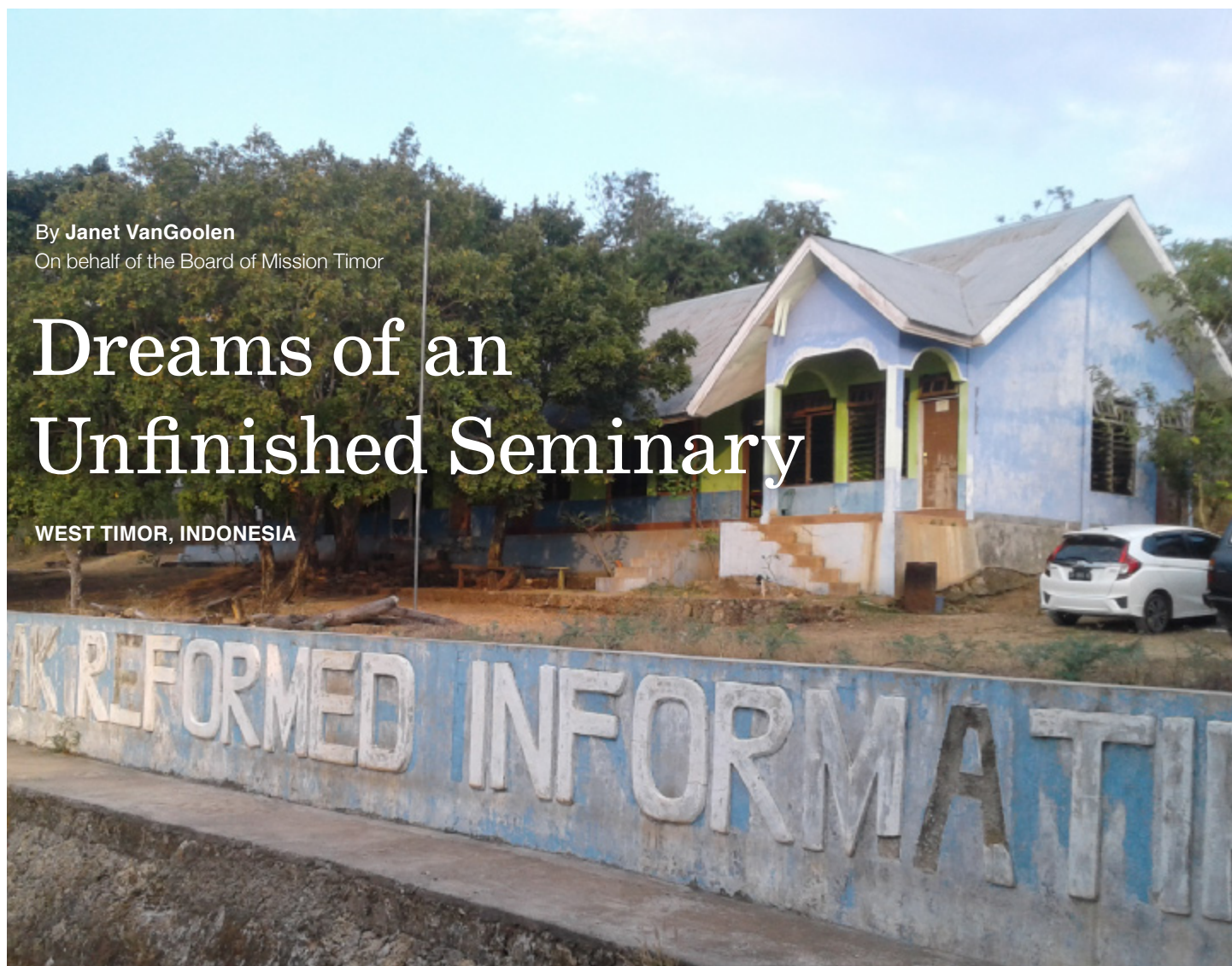
¹See <https://www.foxnews.com/world/north-korea-christianity-persecution-gospel>. Accessed May 15, 2020.
I have slightly shortened the wording of the quote, but not its sense.

By Janet VanGoolen

On behalf of the Board of Mission Timor

Dreams of an Unfinished Seminary

WEST TIMOR, INDONESIA



In June of 2019, I had the privilege of visiting the mission field in West Timor, Indonesia with another member of the Smithville Mission Board. Part of our visit included touring STAKRI (STAK Reformed Informatik), a theological seminary established in 2007, which trains ministers and evangelists for the churches as well as teachers for their local schools. This seminary is under the supervision of the Indonesian Reformed Churches, also known as GGRI-Timor. At present there are about eighty students enrolled, both in the ministry and teaching programs. Their current building consists of a few classrooms, an administration office and a library. The library consists of a small room with many books but not enough shelf space to house them all, and no space for student study.

Attached to the seminary is a small room – the control room of Radio Sahabat 102.7 FM, where “Paul” and a few STAKRI students spend time on air. The college has a private commercial radio license, renewable every five years. Broadcasting includes music, ads, sermonettes, and pre-recorded interviews during the day. A call-in time slot is also available where a pre-recorded five-minute theme is aired and callers call in and discuss the theme. A lively discussion often follows. We heard that they have a following of over 5,000 listeners. This is a wonderful tool for them to broadcast the Reformed message across the island of Timor.

The outside shell of a three-story unfinished building also sits on the property. Presently it has no windows or doors and



Top: unfinished building; above: students in classroom;
above right; Library

only a partially completed roof; it begs to be completed. The plan is to move the administration offices out of the existing building to the bottom floor, the library to the middle floor, and additional classrooms to the top floor. However, no funds have been available to complete the building.

We are hoping to fundraise a total of \$66,000, which includes \$60,000 to complete the building plus some classroom

improvements such as furniture (\$1,500), projector (\$2,500) for teachers to use, and a keyboard for musical accompaniment (\$2,000). The furniture has been repeatedly repaired in the past, but now new furniture is definitely necessary.

Part of the reason for finishing this building is to promote the name and reputation of STAKRI. The teachers and staff there are qualified (actually very qualified) and the teaching is very good. Many of the teachers are former STAKRI students themselves. A major hurdle that the local supporting churches face is growing STAKRI to a point where it can be self-sustaining and self-supporting. Much of the funds for the operating budget of STAKRI now come from the sending church of Smithville in Canada and the nearby supporting churches. The remainder of the funds comes from the students and families themselves. It is hoped that when the building is completed and has more classroom space available, more students will be able to attend STAKRI resulting in increased tuition income for the college. It is also our hope and prayer that the teaching and ministerial needs on Timor and surrounding islands can be met by STAKRI. As more students are hopefully attracted to attend, the better educated the area church members will become. With better paying jobs, more money will as a result be available to support the college. STAKRI is steadily growing and a finished building will definitely help them to attract more students and operate more efficiently – for the ultimate purpose of furthering the Lord's work in West Timor.

We feel that it is also important to finish the building as soon as possible, before the weather necessitates other repairs to the structure. It has been in its present state for several years now, and over time the existing framework has begun to show signs of deterioration.

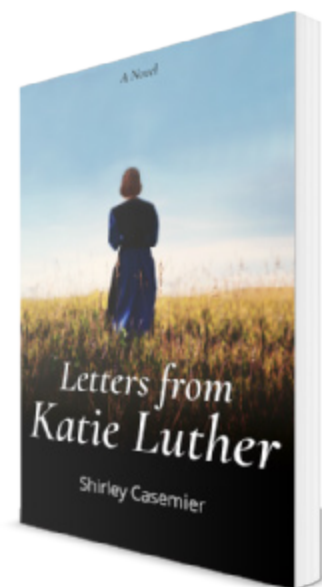
We pray as Mission Board that we can raise support for this project in West Timor, Indonesia. This is certainly a worthy project that needs to be completed soon. Growth of STAKRI depends on its completion, so that more students can attend and after graduation teach in their schools and minister in their churches.

Please remember us in your thoughts and prayers. Thank you on behalf of the Mission Board. 🇮🇩

If you are able or willing to support this cause, please send your donations to: **Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville** PO Box 268, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0. **Please make your cheques payable to:** *Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville* and note "STAKRI completion" in the memo line. If preferred you can also e-transfer your donations to smithvillecanrc.treasurer@gmail.com (with password answer "Timor").

Letters From Katie Luther

by Shirley Casemier



Letters From Katie Luther: *A Novel*
by Shirley Casemier Jenison
MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association
2020. \$14.95
208 pages; softcover

Chrysostom. Augustine. Martin Luther. John Calvin. John Knox. The list goes on. These are well-known names in the history of God's church. We learn about them in church history class. We read about them in Christian books and magazines. The King of kings, Jesus Christ, enabled these men to do remarkable things to protect his church and advance his kingdom.

But they were also normal people, weren't they? A man like Martin Luther may emerge from the pages of history almost larger than life, but did he ever get into an argument with his wife? Courageously he stood firm in his faith before princes and emperors, but did he ever doubt or even despair? The short answer is yes, of course, Luther was a normal child of God, full of weaknesses and at times full of frustrations as well. No one knew that better than his own dear wife, Katharina von Bora Luther, or Katie, as her husband called her.

In her novel, *Letters from Katie Luther*, Shirley Casemier gives us an intriguing literary glimpse into the Luther household. This easy-to-read book captures the readers' attention for several reasons. First, it is storytelling through letter writing. Although



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there are some sections of transitional narrative, the bulk of the book consists of a collection of fictional letters, crafted by Casemier, from Katie to her lifelong friend, Ave von Schoenfeld Axt. Anecdotes and emotions, crises and consolations all spill out of Katie's inkwell into her correspondence with her "Dear Ave." It makes for fascinating reading.

Second, snippets of church history are recounted through the eyes of a wife and mother. That gives a different perspective. During the Diet of Augsburg (1530), when Luther was away from home for months and staying in a castle of Coburg, Katie is left worrying about whether her husband will remember to take his medications and longing to go and comfort him when the news came that Luther's own father had died.

Third, although the author develops the personalities of Martin, Katie, and their children with some artistic "liberties" (p. 186), they all remain entirely believable. Martin Luther is an overworked preacher, pastor, and author, but he still knows how to have fun with kids, even when one of them hides the special hat of his academic regalia. Katie is the wife who loves her husband dearly but does not always agree with everything he does, especially in money matters.

This novel begins with Katie and a group of other nuns escaping from the Nimbschen convent in a fishmonger's wagon. They are brought to Martin Luther's large home, the Black Cloister. Shortly thereafter, Luther makes arrangements for all the nuns to return to their families or to live elsewhere. However, in the Lord's providence Katie eventually comes back, not as an escaped nun but as a newlywedded wife to the Reformer of Wittenberg himself!


The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write, "Those who marry will face many troubles in this life" (1 Cor 7:28), and that truth did not make a detour around the Black Cloister. Martin and Katie got upset with each other, even gave each other the

silent treatment at times, but they also realized they had to forgive each other and step forward again, hand-in-hand. The Lord blessed their marriage with children, three boys and three girls, to be precise. What joy! However, the Lord also took two of their daughters into glory, one at just eight months and the other at thirteen years old. What heartache! Added to all this, they lived through wars, plagues, persecution, and poverty. It was not an easy life. Far from it.

Yet, time and again, the Lord protected and provided. He comforted the Luther household and surprised them with his providence. Yes, through it all they could sing praise to his name on their music evenings, which did not happen enough, due to all the busyness of their lives, but were thoroughly enjoyed whenever they did. Katie Luther shares it all with her cherished friend and sister in the Lord, Ave. Through these letters we also learn that the Lord blessed Martin Luther with a devoted and capable wife, his "Little Rib," as he called her. (How's that for a term of endearment?)

Has your literary appetite been whetted? Casemier's novel is well-written and easy to read. Older children can read it themselves, and children in elementary school may well enjoy having their parents read this story to them, chapter by chapter.

At the same time, adults will profit from reading this book as well. Those who take a more purist approach to church history might wish that the writer had stayed somewhat closer to the actual historical facts and chronologies. However, in the "Author's Note" at the end, Casemier explains what she changed and why she altered it. The artistic license is used respectfully and effectively. Moreover, the front cover clearly states that it is "A Novel."

I recommend this book warmly. It is nice to meet the human side of the reformers, even if it is crafted by the imagination of a modern author. 

Jesus my Savior, Thank You for Your Mercy

Organ prelude



1. Je - sus, my Sav - iour, thank you for your mer - cy.
 2. Je - sus, Re - deem - er, thank you for our free - dom.
 3. Je - sus, my Shep - herd, thank you for your guid - ance.
 4. Je - sus, De - fend - er, thank you for your pow - er.
 5. Je - sus, our Sav - iour, teach us all to know you.

You came from heav - en to res - cue the guil - ty.
 You died on Cal - v'ry and so paid the ran - som.
 You are our lead - er and our firm re - li - ance.
 You have no ri - val. Be - fore you all cow - er.
 Let us be read - y to give what we owe you.

Your love is bound - less, full of grace and pit - y.
 You, per - fect of - f'ring, you the spot - less vic - tim!
 With rod and staff - we know you are be - side us.
 We fear no e - vil, for you are the vic - tor.
 Thanks, praise, and hon - our, we will al - ways show you.

Organ postlude

Thank you, Lord Je - sus.

Text: George van Popta, 2020

Tune: F. F. Flemming, 1811; arrangement: Gertim Alberda, 2020

11.11.11.5

FLEMMING

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