

Knit Together

in community and prayer

Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Advent / Christmas 2024

It has always been about love

Mandy Wheatley
Provincial Minister

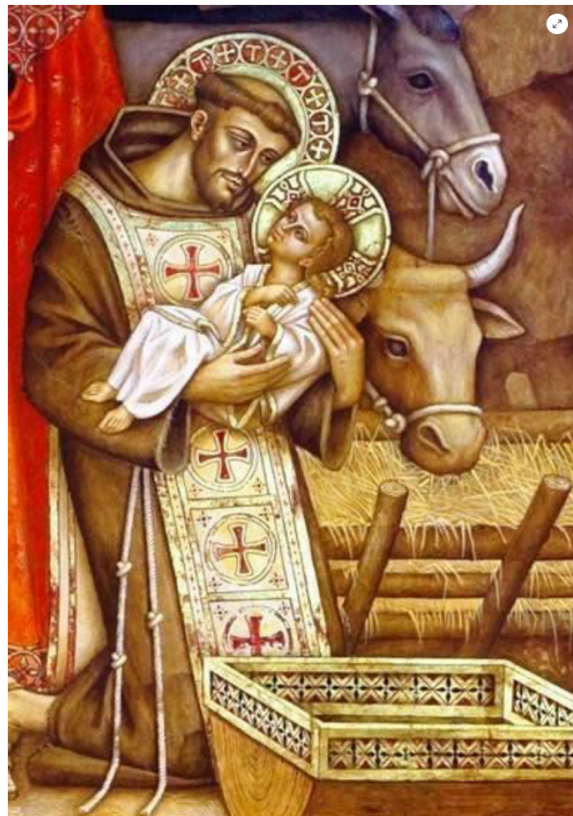
'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.' (John 1.14) Therefore; *'love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.'* (Deut. 6.5)

Francis and Clare were profoundly impressed by the simplicity and the poverty of God, who entered our world as a poor person to live as one of us.

We already know that Francis, an exuberant teacher, with his passionate, Italian nature, invented a dramatic way to preach about this love for the incarnation of God. In 1223 he created the first Christmas crib so that the people around the Italian village of Greccio could have a practical and personal experience of the incarnation of Jesus and what it meant for ordinary people. God came to be with us in the centre of everything, as a baby, as someone to love and naturally connect with.

Ted Witham expressed it this way; 'He (Francis) consciously saw the Bible as a script to be performed and not a complicated text to be understood. The Bible is a Word to be obeyed, not words to be analysed. Christmas celebrates the Word that God gives us in Jesus. Francis encourages us to perform the Word.'

Richard Rohr, (*Franciscan Mysticism: I AM That Which I Am Seeking* (Centre for Action and Contemplation: 2012) suggests:



Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God. Christianity is grounded in pure love and perfect freedom from the very beginning... this draws people toward lives of inner depth, prayer, reconciliation, healing, and even universal 'at-one-ment' instead of mere sacrificial atonement.

Nothing changed on Calvary, but everything was revealed as God's suffering love – so that we could change! (Please read that again.)

Francis invites us to become as he was, an incarnational believer, deeply aware that Jesus has entered our world to transform us through his saving presence among us, showing us that the earth and all creation are expressions of God's profound goodness.

Thomas of Celano tells us; 'His (Francis') highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy gospel in all things and through all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace his footsteps completely.' (*First Life* 30 in *Early Documents* 1:254).

May God continue to grace us all in the Third Order with the energy and wisdom to interpret the Word we hear and read about this Christmas; to preach everywhere, using words when necessary.

Peace and goodwill be with you,
in love,
Mandy Wheatley



Notices:

Welcome to new Novices in our province, including in NSW A, Ross Buckley.

Blessings to the newly professed:
Korea: Sunjin Ezekiel Park, Miran Regina Hyun, Lynn Kim
WA: Cheryl Absalom
NSW B/ACT: Karly Ferguson
May the love of Christ continue to grow in you.

A deeper sense of value and meaning

Monica Park tssf

I work at the Mission to Seafarers Busan, an organisation dedicated to serving seafarers.

I recently visited a ship and met a captain who shared the many hardships he and his crew had endured, including typhoons and unexpected accidents, before finally arriving at Busan Port.

No matter how large the vessel was, it felt small against massive typhoons, and unexpected accidents made life harder for the crew. Going through such a difficult journey, the captain felt that he needed God's help for the safety of the ship and crew. We prayed for the blessing of the ship, the crew's safety and a peaceful journey ahead. A priest sprinkled holy water throughout the vessel.

Thanks to the seafarers, we can use all the goods we rely on without difficulty. They sail the seas in constant motion, isolated from the land and confined to limited spaces on the ship. There, they face and overcome loneliness, isolation, and hardships that we can hardly imagine.

Previously, I thought that working for seafarers was simply my duty and the work God had given me, so I resolved to do it diligently. However, becoming a Third Order member has added a deeper sense of value and meaning to all my work. As a Christian, I have lived a fairly ordinary faith life, but encountering Saint Francis brought a small difference. I started following a Rule of Life, and this effort has brought a subtle change to my spiritual journey.

In the past, my sharing of what I had with others was limited, but becoming a tertiary has taught me that I should expand my commitment to a simplicity of life to the best of my ability. I have learned that practising simplicity and diligently doing my daily tasks are both ways to serve God and others. Preparing Christmas gifts for seafarers is always a joy, and I have come to realize that there is greater happiness in sharing with others.

While I am not able to fully emulate the life of Saint Francis, I believe that by practising my Rule of Life in my place and serving the seafarers, I can say that I am making an effort to resemble Saint Francis, even if just a little.

Often I stumble, but because of the support of the Third Order community, I find strength to rise again and continue on my faith journey. I pray that God's peace may always be with all the Third Order members who are reading this.



Monica Park and seafarers at the centre

In memory of Cleone Rolfe- Reardon

Keith Slater tssf

Cleone Scott Rolfe-Reardon was born in Ingham on Christmas Day 1937 to Grenfall and Isla Anderssen. She was the first of six children, and part of an extended family that was central to her throughout her life.



Cleone Rolfe-Reardon tssf

After some to-ing and fro-ing because of the war the family settled in Brisbane where Cleone went to Somerville House for her secondary schooling, and then on to Kelvin Grove Teachers' College.

She met her husband, Colin, in the 1950s and they were married in 1958. She moved to her husband's cattle property, 'Wheelholme' on the Buckland Tableland west of Springsure where they raised a family of six children: three sons and three daughters.

It was in May 1978 that I first met Cleone. Lorraine and I had just moved into Springsure that day. At dusk, Cleone appeared at the back door of the rectory with a large casserole she had cooked and driven into town (70+ km) to make us very welcome. That act tells of the generosity which she exhibited in so many ways throughout her life.

Cleone and Colin were very much involved in the local parish with generous support of time and talents. Sadly, Colin died at the end of 1983.

It was towards the end of the 1980s that Cleone became drawn to the Third Order and was noviced and then professed on 30th May 1991.

During the 1990s Cleone commenced theological studies which led to her being ordained as a deacon in 1995. She served as a permanent deacon in Springsure Parish.

Cleone continued this generous ministry when she moved to Brisbane and was licensed at St Clement's-on-the-Hill, Stafford, where she became part of a large clergy team.

In 2002 she married Kenneth Reardon. This marriage continued for 16 years in their retirement.

Cleone served as Regional Minister for the then Qld B Region. In time this Region was expanded to include NNSW. As Regional Minister she gave generously of her time and her gentle nature was greatly appreciated by the community.

Cleone was a talented person – a musician, singer, liturgical dancer – and had a great gift of being able to listen deeply and to respond compassionately.

As an Order our life was enhanced by the generosity of Cleone – a woman of graciousness, gifted with a gentle infectious joy.

Rest eternal grant to Cleone, O Lord: and let light perpetual shine upon her. Amen.

From England to Bendigo, Victoria

Hannah Gregory tssf

Hello from the other side of the world!

Greetings in Christ to my fellow Third Order brothers and sisters of the Offa Group, based in the South of the United Kingdom.

I made my profession on the 11th of March this year and within a few months have flown to Victoria, Australia, to take up my first posting. I am the Priest in Charge of the Anglican Parish of Bendigo North, Victoria. I have two Anglican churches and a fabulous congregation.

I enjoyed the loving support of my Franciscan community in the UK and have loved the warm welcome from the local group here. It was hard to leave my community but is great to get to know a new one. I love reading news from all over the province in this publication; it's so encouraging to hear the life and work of St Francis carrying on across the world. Many blessings on all you do.

Following Christ, taking the hard road seems to be a feature of my relationship with God. God always seems to ask me to do the hard things. This year God asked me to take up this post in Australia and after an eight month wait for visas, my family and I (my husband Paul and three young kids) arrived at the beginning of April. We love it here and it's so good to be in the place you are called to be. The kids have settled into school, and I have begun a vegetable garden at the back of the house. The church is growing in numbers.

I first heard about Franciscan Spirituality from a lecturer in my training college. We were encouraged to research one of the Spiritualities for the essay, and after reading many books I was smitten by the life of a man so passionate about serving Christ.

That was five years ago now, and I am still chasing the man, chasing the wild goose.



The Rev'd Hannah Gregory at her installation on 24th April

From Queensland B / Northern NSW



Mac Campbell

Jeni Nix writes: ‘Sadly we lost our beloved Mac Campbell on 14th June. On 26th June some of us gathered for his Celebration of Life with his family and friends. It was such a privilege to hear stories of his life, and that becoming a Franciscan was his proudest achievement.’



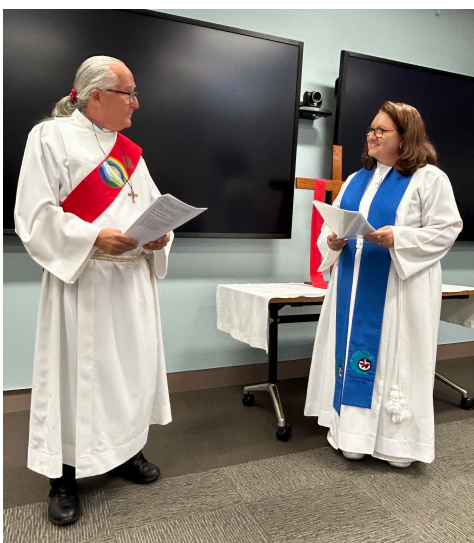
Left: Gathered to farewell Mac Campbell were Lex Nason, Keith Slater, Selina McMahon, Gemma Dashwood, Bill Guttormsen, Doc Dibbs. (Amanda McCarrick, Glenys McCarrick and Nicholas Whereat also present)

David Nix changes roles

Below left: The Rev'd Janet Staines (UCA) with The Rev'd David Nix as he was farewelled from his role as Chaplain at The Prince Charles Hospital (Brisbane)

Below right: NSW A turned out in force to celebrate David Nix's induction as Civil Chaplain, Westmead Hospital.

Paul Hawker's wife Moira, Jan McIntyre, Jill Gumbly, David and Jeni Nix, Jane and John Noller, Paul Hawker



Late to the party

**Andrew MacIntyre tssf,
Bunga, NSW**



Prof Andrew MacIntyre

I came late to faith, even later to the Third Order, and later still to Creation Care.

I started attending St David's Anglican Church in Canberra in my early fifties and remember being puzzled by a visitor who spoke of our Christian duty to take a stand on the environment and climate change. I thought the environment and climate change were indeed important issues, but quite separate from faith and our relationship with God. How little I understood.

With God's help we progress. I gradually grew in my faith and thanks to an introduction by John Gibson at St David's, I learned about TSSF and began a slow path of inquiring before finally being professed last year.

In ways large and small, the Third Order has been a wonderful help to my growth as a Christian and to my discovery of Creation Care. I now hold a sung version of St Francis' beautiful Canticum of the Creatures close to my heart. How could I believe that from all God had created, only one species really mattered? How could it be okay for the short-term interests of humankind – or worse still, just a small percentage of it – to be prioritized to the exclusion of all else?

But what to do about it all? I have been slowly feeling my way forward, looking for ways to contribute at the local level as well as seeking to reach more broadly. Since retiring from the world of paid employment and returning to Australia, I have been focusing on a parcel of land on the far south coast of NSW, my wife, Ella, and I have acquired. The striking landscape, the endless fascination of countless birds and animals and the quiet grandeur of the trees has captivated us. To be custodians of this area for even a short time is an almost unbelievable privilege.

Along with working to nurture and rehabilitate the land, I am seeking to research and hopefully write about the ways different species of flora and fauna (including the various waves of Homo sapiens) have interacted with the soil, with Brother Fire, Sister Water and other elements of creation. The evidence of ancient human settlement in the area abounds. As does, sadly, the determined efforts of much more recent generations of settlement – committed Christians in many cases – working as hard as they could to remove trees and various animals to make room for grass and cattle, and to ship wood for the construction needs of expanding urban settlements.

Using my own hands for practical purposes has great appeal, and yet, clearly, the scale of the current threats to creation is so vast and so imminent, that without much wider and concerted action the outlook seems bleak. I do not know what to do about this. But I do know I have

been encouraged by others who have written for this column. I have a vague sense Christians are doing much less than we could. (I know with certainty this is true of me.) For now, I am exploring collaborative action: I've joined the board of A Rocha Australia, a group with a focus on biodiversity seeking to mobilise and support other church-based activity, and following a suggestion from our own Jan Down, I'm also investigating the Anglican Communion Forest.

As I explore the world of Christian environmental advocacy, I'm struck by the difficulty we seem to have working beyond our denominational boundaries. Maybe the need to work together to save God's creation will encourage us to lift our sights.

Although very late, I am so glad I have discovered God's love and to have been able to join with others inspired by St Francis to take definite vows in a rule of life as part of the TSSF. Nurturing, protecting and celebrating God's creation will feature prominently in what I strive to do with the rest of my life.

Building on our wonderful newsletter, as part of being knit together, I would be very pleased both to welcome any other Franciscans interested in visiting this part of our Province and even just to hear from others interested in discussing these issues.



The land where Andrew and Ella are caring for God's creation

Provincial Conference 2025
One Province, Many Voices: Deep Listening
Thursday 21st – Sunday 24th August 2025
Sevenhills Jesuit Retreat Centre, Clare, South
Australia

Keynote speakers:
Bishop Chris McLeod – Listening to our First Peoples
Dr Cath Connolly – Listening to the music of our heart

To register, go to: tssf.org.au/conference-2025/

Could you write for this page on care for creation in crisis? I suggest about 350 words plus a photo if possible (at least 1MB please). Thank you!

Due-date for next issue: 11th March 2025 (earlier if possible)

Please send contributions to:
jeidown@protonmail.com

Christmas for Palestinian Christians

Stephen Howes tssf

Bethlehem Bible College, established in 1979, seeks to train and prepare Christian servant leaders for church and society within an Arab context. It ran extension classes in Gaza and Nazareth. Its choir with 40 members represents the seldom heard voice of Palestinian Christians.

The following hymn entitled *Bethlehem* has been sung in Arabic by the Bethlehem Bible College Choir:

Oh little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see you lie
mid broken dreams and silent screams
carried through the night.
Pain shatters your peaceful skies,
tears fill up your streams;
Love is lost when your heart no longer believes.

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still you are tonight.
Behind your walls you bury hope and lose sight of the Star
That lightens your darkened path, to show you the way
To the One who can set your spirit free.

Oh little town of Bethlehem, Chosen Village foreseen.
Oh little town of Bethlehem, City of the King.
We wait for you, we pray for you to let Him in again. *

The hymn, attributed to Liz Kopp, was on a CD of the Bethlehem College Choir which my son brought back from his visit to Bethlehem and Israel some years ago, when it was safe to travel around there.

I used to play the CD of the choir singing in Arabic to my SRE classes in the weeks before Christmas while they were doing a bookwork activity because it was a valuable way of demonstrating to the children that God has his church in the Middle East and there are many who pray in Arabic.

** Every effort has been made to trace copyright and we would appreciate being informed of details.*



Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem,
we pray for the children
of the Middle East,
who look up at night
to see the same stars
on which you gazed
with hope and wonder.
May all who share the same sky
learn to share the same land,
making peace
and seeking justice.*

Saint Francis and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

From Man of War to Patron of Peace

Louise Townend tssf

Part 2 (continued from *Knit Together* #3 2024)

What is meant by 'PTSD'?

'Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a set of reactions that can develop in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as... war or torture – that threatens their life or safety (or of others around them).' If the assault was intentional, or the person felt intensely helpless, or the assault continued for a long time, the trauma is usually worse. Rather than resolving in a few weeks, the memories can keep coming back and being relived, generating strong feelings of 'fear, sadness, guilt, anger, or grief', causing on-going suffering.(1)

Francis' biography viewed through this lens

There are three episodes of military conflict in Francis' lifetime in which he may have been involved, and you can see how his experiences fit the description of PTSD.

During his teenage years, the people of Assisi stormed the fortress that is built at the very top of the hill above the town – the Rocca Majora – in a bloody show of rejection of the Emperor's power. (Communities in Italy at the time sided with either the Pope or the Holy Roman Emperor – Assisi supported Papal power.) It is conjectured that Francis may have been part of the battle.

What is certain is that he took part in the Battle of Collestrada in 1202 against the neighbouring town of Perugia. It turned out to be a massacre with Perugia victorious, and many Assisi citizens-turned-soldiers slaughtered during and after the battle. It is believed that Francis' rich garments and arms were responsible for saving his life, as his captors thought he could be ransomed, so he was made a prisoner of war and cast into a dungeon where he remained for twelve months before his father was able to secure his release.

It is hard for us to imagine what either such a battle or such a dungeon would have been like. Francis would have witnessed men he'd known since childhood 'torn limb from limb'; the hills were said to be covered in blood. (2) It is reasonable also to suppose that he himself may have been responsible for maiming or killing.

After Francis was taken prisoner, he was cast into a dark, damp hole in the ground, chained up, with other prisoners, for twelve long months. Of course, Francis did not know it would be for twelve months – he didn't know if he would ever be released – such uncertainty (which asylum seekers today attest to) – does one's head in. From descriptions of illness and symptoms which Francis suffered from for the rest of his life, it



The Return of St Francis
by Norberto Proietti at the
Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi
Photo by Louise Townend

seems likely that he contracted malaria and tuberculosis during his imprisonment. (3) When released from prison, Francis was ill for a long time. (4)

We can imagine the emotions he may have felt – shame at being captured and having to be purchased from the enemy; guilt at having survived, and possibly for having inflicted suffering on others, even the taking of human life. Fear – day in, day out – and shame at feeling afraid. Pain! In chains. Hunger. Humiliation at his physical helplessness. Remorse. Despair. Alienation from God? I know I can feel abandoned by God after a night of insomnia – I cannot imagine suffering as Francis did and not feeling anger or doubt. (Who is God, that all this has happened?) The concept of ‘moral injury’ is helpful here, I think – when our worldview is upended, our dreams shattered, and what we thought was right or good or simply life-sustaining cannot be relied on, we are shattered. Our whole world has shifted. This is monumental.

Francis is reported as suffering from nightmares, sometimes waking the brothers in the middle of the night, shouting and – apparently - feeling rats crawling all over him. Journalist Katie Rutter, who interviewed Conrad Targonski – a Franciscan priest who was Chaplain to the US marines – comments, ‘Though it’s not a nightmare that would be expected from the patron saint of animals, it’s one that military veterans can deeply relate to. It is also one of many stories of St Francis that has helped Father Targonski through his own trauma.’ (5)

Francis had a lot of time for introspection, and what we call soul searching, both while in prison and after his release. And we need to remember that Francis was still a young man of about 20 at this time, still working out who he was and his place in the world. We know from Francis himself how important this was, and that he spent several years searching for his own path, and we recall his famous dying words: ‘I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do’.

Well, as many soldiers do after returning from one battlefield, Francis made another attempt at military service. He volunteered for a second tour of duty, as it were. Kitted out in gorgeous armour, he headed off to join the Crusades, but returned, having not reached the battle front.

You would be familiar with the account of his hearing the voice of Christ asking him if it is better to serve the servant or the master, to which he replied, ‘the master’. When Francis asked what he must do, God answered: ‘Go back home. It will be revealed to you what you must do.’ So Francis turned around and went back home. To me, this is the bravest thing he ever did – the shame must have been mortifying. He would have felt humiliated: perhaps this laid the groundwork for the humility that characterised his gospel-life? Maybe he had sunk so low in others’ estimation that he understood how unimportant esteem really was. Being brought so low seems to have been part of his cure and conversion.

A statue (*Il Ritorno di Francesco: The Return of Francis*) is situated outside Francis’ Basilica in Assisi, set in the wide lawns where the words ‘Pax et Bonum’ are carved. Francis is depicted in full medieval armour, sitting astride his armoured horse. His head hangs down in dejection as he returns home.

Father Targonski, whom I mentioned a bit earlier, spent 22 years as



chaplain to the US marines, doing two tours of Iraq and ministering to troops in the thick of battles which cost hundreds of US soldiers and thousands of civilians and insurgents their lives, offers us a number of insights. 'Even friars mentioned that I was different, and I think they were afraid of me, not because I was scary, but they didn't know how to talk to me,' he recalls. 'It's just something that I think many of us experience when we come back to our families. Wives are afraid. Children are afraid.' I (Louise) think that Francis' isolation may not just have been self-imposed – maybe his old friends and community avoided him. Faced with a 'world that does not understand their experience', returned 'service personnel' - 'warriors-turned-civilians' – often withdraw from relationships, with even worse depression and anxiety resulting. (6)

Targonski reflects that Francis' experiences as a war veteran were shared by the US soldiers coming back from war: 'He had the memories. He had the dreams. He had the flashbacks,' 'And you think about these veterans and all the work I do with my brothers and sisters who are coming back from war; all of us feel the same way.' Targonski ponders how many of the men who joined Francis were also combat veterans, like him seeking a life with purpose. He points out that the first man to join him was also a former soldier – Bernard of Quintavalle. There is a campaign to have Francis made patron saint of veterans. (7)

So, the value of examining the life of Francis through the lens of PTSD – honouring the traumatised aspects of Francis – can offer profound healing. A practical example of this is the life-changing pilgrimages to Assisi for US veterans, accompanied by psychologists and military chaplains, that are sponsored by Franciscans, where they find in Francis 'a brother who walks with them in their trauma' (Greg Friedman OFM). (8) Without using words, the question is posed: if a veteran can become the most loved of saints, maybe there's hope for me? We might call it grace.

Conclusion

The story doesn't finish there, because Francis somehow was able to turn his experiences, his heartfelt insights, outward (9). Saints don't just live for themselves. (Their miracles never involve self-healing.)

One day during his convalescence and his search for meaning, Francis was riding around the outskirts of Assisi when he spotted a leper, but instead of turning tail and fleeing from him as he would formerly have done, this time Francis has another of those God-moments, when he sees in the leper the suffering face of Christ, and embraces and kisses him. Targonski concludes, 'Francis was commissioned; he used his experience to heal. And I think that's why he continued with the lepers. He went outward.' (10)

Many of you would be familiar with the writings of Franciscan priest, Father Richard Rohr, and his Centre for Action and Contemplation, which remind us that the Franciscan way is one of applied compassion – love in action. Every grace we receive from God is to be shared – to flow through us – as instruments or conduits, connecting us with all of creation; compassion literally means to suffer together – 'Fratelli tutti' – and that's what Francis did; having fallen in love with Jesus, he didn't disappear up



a mountain for ever, to bask in awareness of his personal salvation, but he embraced the most marginalised and suffering of his contemporaries. He turned outwards, and I think his relationship with God deepened, step by step.

I believe that we are called to let go of our plans for ourselves, and to open up our hearts and minds to let in God's plan for our lives. This is what Francis did with fearsome courage, embracing what a few years earlier would have seemed to him an unbearably poor second-best. He turned outward, devoted himself to spreading the word of God through preaching, and to spreading the love of Christ through the practical service of lepers and the poor: THIS is surely the way to salvation! *Haec est porta vitae aeternae*.

If Francis had not experienced his war service and the suffering that resulted, he may not have become the saint we know. Perhaps for all of us, it is our wounds through which God accomplishes his work in us.



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