

THE RELIGIOUS MENTALITY AND ITS GROWTH IN THE CITIES

by Father Francois Houtart

INTRODUCTION

The Sociology Department of the National University of Colombia is happy and proud to begin its series of monographs with this study ^{by} of Father Francois Houtart, the eminent Belgian priest ~~and~~ sociologist. During his stay in Bogota, Fr. Houtart kindly consented to speak on different problems of religious institutions seen from the sociological point of view. The result is an important essay on the impact of city living on the religious mentality, and ~~an~~ essay of great interest not only for priests, but for laymen and for all those who study man and his ways of ^{life.} living. Fr. Houtart has succeeded in treating the topic with scientific fittingness and a practical sensitivity.

This monograph is a tape-recording ^{ed} transcription of Fr. Houtart's speech, delivered at the National University on May 15, 1959, properly ^{duly} revised by Fr. Gustavo Perez Ramirez, director of the Center of Social Studies of the ^{Archdiocese of Bogota} (Curia Primada of Colombia). Fr. Perez, a distinguished Colombian sociologist and graduate of Louvain, introduced the author on the night of the lecture. The work has been complemented with a select bibliography on the sociology of religion.

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In this lecture I propose to shed some light on the religious and social problems of the city, especially the large city. First of all we must understand that the development of Sociology covers all areas of action, whether it be properly social or religious, since every act in today's world must be based on a sociological understanding. Our present-day society is very complex, or in a technical sense, very "socialized". That is why today we cannot act in any area of life without extending or systematizing our social understanding, that is, without Sociology. This is the reason why we can also apply the methods of sociological investigation to religion.

On this occasion we are going to apply some of those sociological methods to the religious problem which is found in urban living, and in the development of urban living itself. Certainly, in itself, this is an immense topic, and it could not be treated completely in the space of these few pages. So, we are going to limit ourselves concretely to certain aspects of this problem, and above all, to that which I know a little more about, namely, the problem of Catholicism in the large cities. Frequently we will make references to other religions, Christian or non-Christian, because they also have their problems within urban life. However, the central topic will be that of Catholicism, taking it as a sociological type, if you will, and studying it together with the problems dealing with urban development.

Along this line we will consider four points, namely:

1. The religious crisis in the urban environment.
2. The external sociological causes of this crisis. (External from the religious point of view; that is, they are not internal to the religious problem itself, or to religious organization itself.)
3. The internal sociological causes, that is, those which are proper to every organization of the Church in the city environment.

4. Finally, we will try to draw some conclusions.

THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN THE CITY ENVIRONMENT

In our times, the phenomenon of urbanism is one of the principal characteristics ^{in world development, growth.} ~~(of the development of the world)~~. This is shown by statistics such as the following: In the 150 years between 1800 and 1950, human population grew from ratio of 1 to 2.6. So too, during this time, the ratio of cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants passed from 1 to 23. The logical consequence of this data is that in the last 150 years, the growth of urban population has been about ten times more rapid than the growth of the world population. In 1800, there was a total of 21,000,000 people living in cities of 20,000 or more, and by 1950, this figure had risen to 502,000,000. During the last 30 years, the same phenomenon, although with a more accelerated progression, has occurred in cities of 100,000 or more inhabitants. Between 1900 and 1950 the ratio of the growth of these cities has risen from 1 to 25. Of course this is only a general figure, because now there are continents in which the urban growth is much more rapid; in Asia in the last 50 years, for example, the ratio of population in the cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants has risen from 1 to 44, and in Africa from 1 to 62. This confirms the thesis that rapid urban growth is one of the characteristics of world development. In Latin America in the year 1925 we had, more or less, a 33 per cent urban population. By 1945 that percentage had already risen to 39 per cent, and in 1955 it reached 44 per cent, so that in the course of 20 years, we have had in this continent an urban growth 10 per cent higher than the growth of the rural population. Also in Latin America there are presently about 20,000,000 people living in cities of a million or more population, which means that the same proportion exists as that in the United States. Once

again, the phenomenon of urbanism appears as a fundamental fact of modern world development.

Certainly one cannot speak of urbanization in general without making the normal distinctions between the various types of urbanization that exist. We cannot place cities such as New York or London, exactly in the same category with others such as Tokyo or Peking. Several degrees of urbanization exist, just as there are several qualitative and quantitative aspects, which make us conclude that the urbanization in a given part of the world is not exactly the same thing as in other parts, that the types of urbanization can have differences, and that in its dynamic process various degrees can be observed. But anyway, this process of urbanization is one of the really fundamental phenomena of the world today.

Now let us consider the religious consequences of this urbanization. Today throughout the world, we find a religious disinterest on the part of the urban masses, and what is said here in reference to the Catholic populace is equally applicable to the populace of other religions. Therefore, this is a universal phenomenon not only from the viewpoint of its geographic location, but also by the fact that it includes all religions. Considering the case of Catholicism, we see that in Europe, as a general rule, with the exception of one or two cities, there are no large urban areas where more than 30 per cent of the people practice their religion, or, more exactly put, where more than 30 per cent of the people go to Mass on Sundays. Generally the percentage is much smaller. In Paris, the percentage is about 15% on the average, although variations within different parts of the city can be observed, ranging from 2 to 25 or 30%. In Lyons 21% of the people practice their religion; in Cologne (Germany) 27%; in Brussels 27%; and so on in the other cities, enabling one to affirm generally that in all the cities of Western Europe the percentage of religious practice, as regards Sunday observance, varies for Catholicism from 10 to 30%, without

however, exceeding this last figure. Clearly one can see that in the case of Catholicism a religious crisis exists within the urban environment of Europe.

If we take now the case of Latin America, where studies of these phenomena were also made, we come to the same conclusions. We find in Lima that about 18% of the people practice their religion; in Rio de Janeiro 15%; in Buenos Aires between 9 and 10%; in Santiago between 11 and 12%. So we conclude that here also there is, within the process of urbanization, a grave religious crisis from the viewpoint of external practice.

The same thing is found in new Christian communities. In the Congo, for example, the social change of Africa is reflected in the fact that the entire population may leave its rural environment to establish itself in industrial cities, or in administrative or cultural centers. In this process a great clash quickly arises which simultaneously results in religious disinterest within the new environment.

And *if* all this is true for Catholicism, we can say roughly the same thing for traditional Protestantism, which ^{meets} ~~(finds)~~ similar problems. In Brussels, for example, Protestantism has at times greater and deeper problems than Catholicism, since Protestantism is such that in European cities only 4, 5, or 6% of the people try to follow a more or less regular religious practice. In the Hague, more than 50% of the people claim no religion. The same thing occurs among some traditional groups in the United States, especially in the large cities.

If we study other religions, we see that they also ^{face} ~~(have)~~ the same crisis in this process of urban growth. In a city such as Tunis, which now has a population of about a million, we see that in the last ten years there has been an enormous change, especially from the viewpoint of the actual externals of Moslem religious practice. The same thing is observed in the large cities of India and Japan and in other religions such as Buddhism and Shintoism. So, viewing these things on the surface,

one can say that the lack of religious practice in the urban environment is a general phenomenon. ~~an influence religion. Louis Vign, etc.~~
 an ~~an~~ ^{then,} ~~What~~ ^{reach?} ~~conclusions,~~ ~~can we~~ ~~(arrive at)?~~ We have seen that urban growth is one of the fundamental characteristics of the world today.
 We have also seen that a Very significant religious crisis exists within the urban environment. Here we must also note that there are still many other influences which ^{coalesce} ~~(come together)~~ to cause this religious crisis. Not only are there sociological factors; there are also ideological factors. All this, moreover, fosters a fault common among those ~~(who are)~~ responsible for religion. I am referring to ^{what is an all too facile} ~~an easy~~ temptation ^{to succumb to,} ~~the temptation~~ of condemning the city as ^{the} ~~a~~ source of all evils from a religious ^{point of view} ~~(viewpoint)~~. This is an erroneous conclusion ~~(that)~~ we find very often in Catholic circles.

Such are the facts, the descriptive portion, if you wish, of this study. But it is not enough just to make ~~the~~ ^{an} observation of the social facts: in addition, we must try to find the factors involved, and, hopefully, if we can, try to arrive at the causes. Also we must try to explain ^{at least} ~~at least~~ some of the causes within ^{their} ~~a~~ sociological framework.

THE EXTERNAL SOCIOLOGICAL CAUSES OF THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS

Urbanization is not just a quantitative change, it is not the mere fact that a village may develop gradually, changing itself after some years into a city, and then, into a large city. Urbanization is not only a quantitative change, not only the question of dimension, but it also signifies a total qualitative change. In urbanization we find ourselves facing a new society, a new group type, new institutions, new mentalities, new cultures. We must then, study urbanization not only as a quantitative change, but also as a qualitative change, of social organization and ~~of~~ the whole ^{social} system. At once we can observe

(p. 6)
4. Translator's note: by the term "role" I mean a given social position that ~~one~~^a person may have in society.

(p. 8)
2. Translator's note: by the phrase "role set" I mean the total complex of social relationships that a person has within one of his many social roles.

how in the analysis of this quantitative and qualitative change, we will find many causes which can influence religion. Louis Wirth, an American sociologist of the Chicago school, has written a classic article, "Urbanism as a Way of Life"; urbanization is exactly that; it is ^a completely ~~in a~~ way of ^{life} living, a way of viewing things, and also a way of understanding different mentalities. Mr. Wirth shows how in every human being social life is absorbed by this process of urbanization, and that by means of the gradual change we find ourselves confronted with a new society and new types of people. Let us see some characteristics of this social change. We will take only four of these characteristics of urban social life, to see how they influence life and one's attitude toward life, and how they can also help to bring about changes of attitude.

Williams

The first characteristic of urban social life is the specialization of social roles, and to explain this, let us make a simple comparison with a village. In a village we find everything joined together in the same geographic site: the home, the job, the school, places of recreation, etc., everything more or less identified within the same area, in a very well determined geographic unity within which the people live practically their whole lives. On the other hand, in the large city, we find, as a fundamental characteristic, ever greater specialization and diversification of all the roles of human life. Man no longer belongs in one place only, but he goes to work in a factory or an office, to fulfill his role as a worker, completely separated from the role of the home. When the housewife goes shopping, she has to go to the specialized down-town area where the big department stores are. The child who goes to school also has to go to another part of the city, because the specialized role of studying is located there. Moreover, many other specializations exist in the city, or rather, specialized roles such as ^(those found in health and recreation) (the health role and recreation role) This is a necessity caused by demographic growth, since quantity at once produces a qual-

itative consequence, as well as technical progress. Therefore, a great diversification of specialized roles exists in the city, in contrast to the village where all these roles are found together. *(because he has)* These specialized roles are ^{Fulfilled by} institutions. Within this new form we find domestic institutions, institutions of the working world (trade unions etc.), academic institutions, medical institutions, and in the general development, multiple social institutions. These institutions are creators of environment, because, for example, within the working institution, whether in an office or a factory, there are people coming from different parts of the city who, in order to work, have to be in touch with each other eight hours a day; and the fact that these people meet each other naturally brings about interhuman relationships, social relationships, and with these a whole environment is set up, a whole mentality, to the point where we can really say that a new world and a new organization of social life has been formed. In the same way, if we were to try it, we could set up the characteristics of rural life, totally different (as they are possible), but

because Now this change from the rural to the urban entails the following religious consequences: *into a reality of its own, since they all fulfill*

(1) In the urban environment man confronts new questions and new problems: social problems, problems within the institution where he works, problems in the social structure. Problems also arise in his religious life, since at times he has to make personal judgments using religious principles which are completely new to him, and for which he is frequently unprepared; in view of these facts a crisis arises. *a change of great proportions and we can correctly say that*

This has an important consequence in the organization of pastoral work, that is, in the work of Christianization. Let me explain this. In the village the parroquial territory ^{*if the parish was perfectly co-extensive with*} answered perfectly to the social identity of the people, since human life was contained in one geographic site, and the parish was at the center of it. But in the

city, the parish ^{is co-extensive with} only ~~corresponds to~~ one role, the role of the home, and now no longer has any influence over the other roles of society. Although the home is a preeminent role in man's society (because he has his family there, he will spend a great part of his time there), the parish in urban environment cannot continue as the sole religious organization responding to all the new problems present in man's life. It is necessary to make extraordinary efforts in the home environment to stop the suburb from being completely destroyed, from the religious viewpoint, by the other role sets². This is the first religious difficulty in the passage from a rural society to an urban society. ^{easy}

(2) The second consequence depends on the first. The interhuman relations of the city become more and more functional, while the relationships existing among the residents of a city are less and less of the primary type, that is, less of a direct or intimate sort. They are relationships which progressively and hurriedly approach the role sets. Students, for example, relate to one another not because they all live in the same district (this would be almost impossible), but because they all happen to be studying at the same university, thus making the university into a reality of its own, since they all fulfill the role of students. Therefore, the relationships which are established depend on the fact that all the people fulfill the same role, without having anything to do with possibly living in the same district. And this extends to the parents, brothers, and sisters.

In this way we find in the city a ^{Type} ~~species~~ of interhuman social relationships which is more functional than that of ^{the neighborhood} ~~(a given vicinity)~~. This is a change of great proportions and we can correctly say that the level of urbanization is measured by the level of functional relationships; and likewise, when the relationships are only those of ^{the neighborhood} ~~a given (vicinity)~~, we can maintain that we do not have an urbanized district in Wirth's sense of a "way of life". This has religious consequences, because a man who moves from the country, accustomed to his

rural surroundings, with very close relationships of the first type, with his whole religious life depending on those other relationships, loses those relationships when he arrives in the city. Thus, he feels alone, because of the loss of the environment which he had before, and he finds himself faced with new types of relationships which do not furnish him with the same surroundings, but bring about in him a crisis.

(3) An important characteristic of urban life occurs as the third consequence: socialization. I use this word in the technical sense, that is, that in the process of urbanization, society grows in importance and exerts more influence on the individual. This is very easy to understand. Here in Bogota, when there were only four inhabitants per square kilometer, it was not necessary to put up traffic lights to regulate the flow of traffic. But now we have 5,000, 10,000, or 20,000 inhabitants per square kilometer. If we do not organize traffic, that is, if we do not socialize it, it would be impossible to live. This is true in all aspects of urban social life. It is a logical consequence and not the result of any ideology. It is a sociological fact.

This socialization of urban life can have two aspects. Regarding the first we may say that the city dweller comes to form social groups which are stratified and diversified. In urban life there is constructed a type of society with social stratifications, or we may say, with social classes. The individual who arrives in the city is immediately relegated to one of these strata. But social classes have a particular culture, that is, they exercise a great influence over the mentality of the people. When a man enters the working class, his whole mentality is changed little by little so as to acquire the new mentality of the group. In this way, in Europe for example, we have seen, (for various reasons which I do not have the time to explain) that the working class has such a behavior pattern from the religious point of view, that practically speaking, for workers in large industry, to be a worker and

to practice religion are two opposing things. I recall an interview ~~with~~ a worker during a sociological inquiry in Belgium, in which he was asked for facts about religious attitudes, his as well as his parents'. This worker explained that his father had not had a religious funeral, adding thereupon, "You understand, he was a miner." As can be seen, in the mind of this class of people, to be a miner and to go to Church are two things which do not fit together. And so for various reasons, sometimes sociological and sometimes religious, there is created a special mentality with such group laws, which although they may be unwritten, are very profound within that social group. It is not normal that the individual worker within the social group should have a different behavior pattern from the religious point of view. Thus we see that when a farm worker in Europe enters the industrial working class, he adopts the entire behavior patterns of that group in politics, culture, religion, etc. Likewise such an entrance into this process of socialization presents problems from the religious point of view.

The second aspect of this socialization is the fact that in social institutions all the roles that we have already studied ^{weigh more} ~~depend every~~ ^{more heavily} ~~time, more~~ on the organization of ~~the~~ man's life, this being normal, as I have already said. This burdensome ^{part} ~~role~~ which institutions play in the life of man also creates problems from the religious point of view, not only because such institutions may have an anti-religious attitude, but also because social life may be organized in another way, and therefore ~~the~~ man in this new environment, in these new organizations, may be more directed in his cultural life, including his religious life.

(4) Finally, as a fourth consequence, we observe a geographic mobility. This mobility is necessary for the life of a large city. It is normal. When a young couple settles down and takes a four or five room house, this house is sufficient for the time being. But when that

couple has one, two, three, or more children, they have to move to a larger house. Another factor is the continual process of house building. In one city in the north of Belgium we studied the number of changes brought about by the construction of new homes. There were a hundred houses built, which when finished, were occupied by a hundred families; the fact that these hundred families moved in produces another hundred moves in chain-like fashion, since families came to occupy the homes left vacant by the others. So it is that in every city, in the very life of the city, there exists a great mobility.

And there is the problem: Religious life, especially Catholic religious life, was until now conceived of and organized for a fixed geographic area, to the point where the mobility of people has been considered as an evil, social as well as religious. This characteristic at once, causes difficulties from the religious standpoint for the people who suffer this mobility. As a result of all this, we can say that the man in the city finds himself forced into new adaptations of his religious life. He must adapt his life to new situations, or else very often suffer the consequences of other problems such as his social relationships, his education, and his psychological problems. It is also natural that the larger the city, and the worse the conditions of its social organization, so much stronger will be psychological conflict in the social and religious fields.

INTERNAL SOCIOLOGICAL CAUSES OF THE RELIGIOUS CRISIS

In the previous section we have considered the external sociological causes of the urban religious crisis. Now we are going to see the internal sociological causes, that is, internal to the religious organization itself. The first refers to the structure of the Church.

In the cities, in the urban and industrial centers, the Church has continued her same ancient structures within these new environments

and social institutions. It is clear that from the functional point of view new forms of organized religious action are needed, that is, specialized forms which will be fully accommodated to urban societies. In Europe, within Catholicism, we have not seen the birth of this new religious environment, and we have continued with a purely parochial apostolate. In Buenos Aires, there is one with 80,000 and in Santiago, another. The second cause, depending on the first, is that the parish, as an institution within the city, is already completely outdated. We have studied the parish as an institution in European cities with the following results: In Brussels, in the year 1803, there was an average of 6,000 persons per parish (here we use the word "parish" in the communal sense, ^{in a group sense} ~~usual sense of a group of people~~). Now a group of 6,000 persons is already too large, especially in the city. The growth of parishes in Brussels was rapid. The number rose to an average of 8,000 then to 9,000, 10,000, 14,000, and 15,000 persons per parish. ^{growth} One can observe that in the development of the past century, the parish as a sociological entity ceased to exist, since we cannot conceive of a social group (in the sociological sense) comprising 15,000 people. It should be remembered that this figure is an average, since there were parishes of 5,000 and 6,000 persons which have more than 30,000 and 40,000 today. If we compare these averages of Brussels with those of other European cities, we find ^{this figure} ~~them~~ acceptable since in the year 1900 there was in Paris an average of 36,000 people per parish; in Vienna, 29,000; in Budapest, 28,000. In such circumstances we must say once more that in Europe the sociological concept of the parish has been destroyed by these dimensions. ^{happens that a large number} In Latin America we find similar cases. In São Paulo we had in 1934 an average of 22,000 people per parish, and now we have 28,000 per parish. In Buenos Aires in 1910 we had an average of 26,000 and this figure has climbed to 51,000. In Montevideo in 1909 we had an average of 25,000 and now we have 44,000. At the present time in the

Mexico City the parishes have an average of 35,000 persons and in Havana, 60,000. As we see in ^{Latin} America, the parochial institution is found to be destroyed completely as a social concept. There are some cases above the average, which therefore are much more serious. In Paris a while ago, one of the parishes had 65,000 people and another had 125,000. In Buenos Aires there is one with 80,000 and in Santiago, another with 125,000. We can say basing ourselves on these statistics, that the process of urbanization has caused the parochial structure great difficulties.

But, as in everything, there are exceptions, and this time the exception is the United States. In a city like Chicago which in 1850 had 29,000 inhabitants and which in 1950 rose to 5 million, there has never been in Catholic parishes on the average more than 5,000 people. This is an extraordinary and unique fact which is due to the immigration of ethnic groups who settled down in well determined districts, and who arrived from Europe with their own priests. Also it is due in large part to the fact that in the rural areas of the US, there are not many Catholics, and consequently the forces of the apostolate can be concentrated in the cities. This group organization within the cities has allowed the parish to develop on a much larger scale than in the cities of Europe or of Latin America.

Immediately one notices favorable results. The Catholic people in North American cities are to a much lesser degree victims of the problems of religious adaptation, owing to the system of parochial structures and the presence of priests. The presence of priests is very important. For example, in Europe especially it happens that a large number of priests have remained in the towns and in the rural regions, thus producing a lack of priests needed to work in the cities. Thus from the religious standpoint, we can speak of an "underdevelopment" in European and Latin American cities.

A primary fact which we must note is that the structures of the

Church were knocked down by urbanization. But this not only happened with religious structures. Other institutions as well such as the school and health institutions suffered the same consequences. All of them have had the same difficulties in the rapid process of urbanization.

A second point concerns the internal organization of religious action in the cities. Even nowadays we continue with a parochial organization in the city, and therefore we work within a communitarian fiction, since in fact this parochial community has ceased to exist. From the religious viewpoint we have naively conceived of a sort of rural community within the city. This naturally, is a fundamental error, since if a parochial-type community could exist in the city, it would have to be another kind of community different from the rural community. We see in the sociological analysis of city parishes that in fact the small group of people who keep a communitarian "parish consciousness" varies between 3% and 5% of the total number of parishioners. We have continued with this fiction, working with this small group of people, but not having any influence on the great majority of people. It comes to a complete stop within the new social reality in which we must change this situation; but the change has to come about little by little since it is most difficult to know how the change must be made. In the first place we must understand exactly what a city is and what urban life is, even though we have to continue for now working with a system of parochial organization based on the self-sufficiency of each parish. The parish in itself, as a group surrounded by boundaries, is like a fortress which is very hard to enter, but also very hard to get out of. So marvelous is the system that ^{behind} ~~(next to)~~ each fortress you find another. Thus there exists an urban system of religious organization based on self-sufficient units, whereas the reality of city life has different needs, since ^{here} ~~in this case~~ the social unit is the city with all its roles organically forming one sole social entity. We must, then, as priests, little by little change our cast of

mind when it comes to religious action, taking as our first gauge the complete reality, the social unit; and then, we must try to organize the religious life of this social unit in different areas organically bound together, and not in small geographical entities which live inside themselves and which have no relationships with one another.

Another false concept with which we have been working is that of the "elite". In the town, in a rural society, ^{we have an elite} (due to the fact of vertical influence, ^{accounted for precisely because of the structure of vertical influence,} we do have an elite which extends for example, from the doctor or the pastor ^{down} to the workers in the fields. In the city on the other hand, the social stratification does not allow for an elite, functioning along vertical lines. Rather their influence is produced horizontally, that is, the elite have an influence only on each independent social group. In this case, from the viewpoint of religious action, it would be a serious error to continue to believe that the urban elite still possesses a vertical influence. Naturally, the works that have been developed on these bases have had influence only within a respective social group, and therefore leave much to be desired when it comes to a complete job within the new social reality in which we live.

CONCLUSIONS

From the sociological point of view (I do not speak here from the ideological, personal or psychological point of view), the religious crisis of the cities depends on three factors: First, it depends on the change to a new kind of social living. We find ourselves facing ^{confronted with} (up to) a new religious synthesis, and we must think over many new aspects in order to adapt this synthesis to the social situations of urban life. Naturally this process or a readaptation of all forms of religious life will be slow, since first we must have an idea of the reality and then we have to accomplish the full task of adaptation both of the

institutions and of mentalities.

Secondly, the crisis depends on the fact that the social conditions of urbanization are, in most cases, very bad. Sub-human conditions are found above all in the large cities, and most especially in those countries where the process of urbanization has been rapid. These sub-human conditions of urbanization (which are only conditions of urbanization and not equivalent with urbanization as such) also play a leading role in the religious crisis of **which** we are speaking.

Thirdly, the crisis depends on our ability to adapt organizations of religious action. We cannot say that cities necessarily cause religious crises. But we can say for one thing that subhuman living conditions deprive man of his possibilities for spiritual development, and for another thing, that we have still not found a way of religious life applicable to the growth of cities and which is solid enough to have our confidence.

We can conclude with this short resume: On the one hand urbanization as such causes social change which demands a new synthesis of religious life; on the other hand, most of the time the very conditions of urbanization bring about such a change that spiritual life becomes impossible for those who suffer the change; and finally, we must continue in our search for new ways of action, new forms of social life, and a new religious mentality that will be truly "of the city".

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