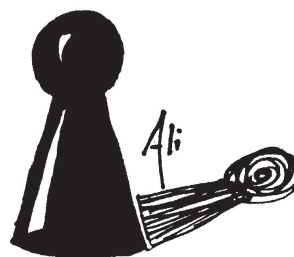


RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Awakenings

∴ THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES ∴ JULY 2019 ∴



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Challenging Exclusion



It's not enough to simply offer a gospel that only offers divine forgiveness of sins. A gospel that is faithful to the Jesus story must include *people* forgiving people. It must include a redistribution of power and resources so that everyone has what they need not simply to survive but also to thrive. It must include reparations alongside reconciliation. It must include access and inclusion where the vulnerable have been excluded. A gospel that is faithful to the Jesus story must include material, holistic liberation.

by Herb Montgomery

"Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on." (Mark 2:4)

In the worldview of the gospel authors and their intended audience, healing was normal. Whereas most healing stories in that era tended to bolster the way society was organized, the healing stories in the gospels challenged, subverted, and even threatened the status quo.

One such resistance/healing story is found very early in the gospel of Mark:

"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you

thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mark 2:1-12)

Message of Inclusion

The first thing we bump into in this story is a lack of room. The crowd could have made room for the paralyzed man to get through. They could have practiced a preferential option for the one with the disability. Yet they didn't. They were each focused on making sure there was a place for themselves, even if it came at the expense of someone else.

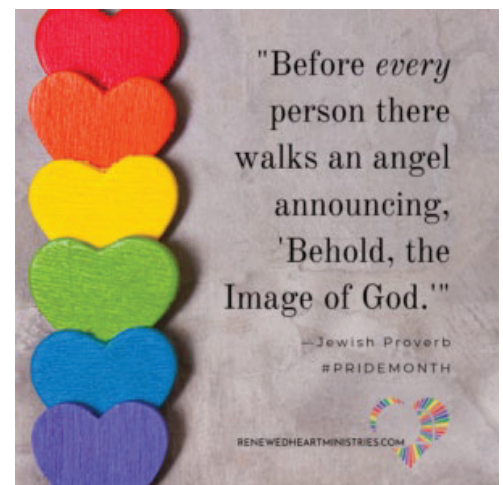
I used to fly a lot. Those two options—a preferential option for others or making a place for oneself—always played out during the boarding practice. Before airlines started overselling flights, there was enough room for everyone. The plane was going to leave at the same time for everyone and seats were even already assigned. Yet you could see passengers who only thought of themselves from a concourse away.

Saving ourselves at others' expense has a long evolutionary history for humans. Yet I contend that our salvation as a race lies not in what works for some at the expense of others but in what makes our world safe, just, and compassionate for all. We will survive together or we will perish together. What once worked for

the survival of some, will not ensure the survival of us all in the context of global climate break down.

I also want to address the gospel author's use of a person with a disability. In the culture of the gospel writers, there were religious teachings that explained disabilities as the result of sin, either one's own or one's parents (see John 9:1-2). This teaching added a basis for further exclusion in a world that already left those with disabilities on the margins. But in Mark's story, Jesus rejects that teaching and declares that this paralytic has been forgiven. Jesus does not offer the man a plan or program: do this and your sins *will be* forgiven. Jesus declares that this man already *was* forgiven.

His teaching challenged those who believed that those with disabilities were being punished for some sin. It challenged them to view this man as their equal regardless of his ability. Jesus here juxtaposes disability and the culture's definition of right standing, and calls people to rethink.



Similarly, one could challenge non-affirming Christians' definition of what's normative in relation to the LGBTQ community. Last week, Renewed Heart Ministries posted a meme for Pride Month juxtaposing LGBTQ identity and LGBTQ people's being in the image of God. This deeply challenges Christian cisheterosexism.

Again, though, Jesus does not offer the man a plan or program to follow. Jesus declared that this man already was forgiven, and so challenges many Christian stories that teach a God who must be moved by some action on our part first.

Holistic Liberation

Just like in any work of affirmation or liberation, there will always be push back by those who feel threatened by such inclusivity and equity. The objection in Mark's story is "only God can forgive sins." Jesus doesn't respond by stating that he is divine. The gospel writers instead identify Jesus with "a human being" or the "son of man." This language is from the Maccabean era Jewish resistance literature.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man." (Daniel 7.13, NIV, emphasis added.)

"As I continued to watch this night vision of mine, I suddenly saw one like a *human being*..." (Daniel 7.13, CEB, emphasis added.)

The "human being" in Daniel 7 was a symbol of liberation from oppressive empires and putting the world to right.

Forgiveness in Mark's story is also a human act. It's not something left only to a god or cosmic being that leaves us off the hook. Forgiveness as something we should practice as *humans* was part of Jesus's message. Yet I don't believe Jesus taught reconciliation without reparation and liberation. Jesus message of forgiveness was primarily aimed at wealthy, elite creditors and called them to "forgive" the debts of their poor debtors. Jesus' message of forgiveness included a deep economic implication. It was a call for debt forgiveness, the Jewish Jubilee. (See *A Prayer for Debts Cancelled* at <https://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/10-12-2018>)

Jesus' gospel included material liberation. And not only was the man

with the disability told he had already been forgiven, but the story also includes him being liberated from his inability to walk. Honestly, I don't like this story as I read it from our vantage point today. It can be too easily coopted to make people with disabilities feel less than those without. I'm thankful that the story author challenged the crowd's bias against this man *before* he removes the group's actual *reason* for marginalizing him. Otherwise the marginalized would be simply kept marginalized.

If the gospel writer had written the story differently, the solution to marginalized women would be to make women men.

The solution to marginalized Black, brown and other people of color would be to make them White.

The solution to marginalized LGBTQ people would be make them straight and/or cisgender. (Conversion therapy is harmful and is outlawed in 18 states, Maine and Colorado being the latest to ban such practices.)

Rather than using various disabilities as metaphors for social evils (as the gospels do), we can do better and name specific social evils instead.

Being gay is not a social evil.
Being a woman is not a social evil.
Being non-white is not a social evil.
Being a migrant is not a social evil.
Being disabled is not a social evil.
How the social system treats these folks is a social evil.
Poverty is a social evil.
Keeping people uneducated is a social evil.
Keeping people indebted is a social evil.
Keeping people without adequate access to health care is a social evil.

And that is what I believe Mark's story is trying to teach. In holistic liberation, everyone receives what they need.

When we apply this to people with disabilities, we arrive at the lesson of removing the barriers that keep people with disabilities excluded. We are to remove the barriers that keep people with disabilities from accessing what they need to thrive.

Actual social evils are what we as followers of Jesus must work against today. This story doesn't stop at forgiveness. We can't afford to either. It's not enough to simply offer a gospel that only offers divine forgiveness of sins. A gospel that is faithful to the Jesus

story must include *people* forgiving people. It must include a redistribution of power and resources so that everyone has what they need not simply to survive but also to thrive. It must include reparations alongside reconciliation. It must include access and inclusion where the vulnerable have been excluded. A gospel that is faithful to the Jesus story must include material, holistic liberation.

This story calls us to work toward an inclusive, just, safe society for everyone.

"Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on." (Mark 2:4)

HeartGroup Application

1. What are some of the ways you either experience or witness others experiencing discrimination and exclusion, either in your faith community or our larger society today?
2. Make a list of practices your HeartGroup can engage that express inclusion, justice, and create a safe space for those mentioned in number 1.
3. Pick something from the list and put it into action this week.

Thanks for checking in with us. I'm so glad you're here.

Wherever you are today, keep living in love. Choose compassion, justice and action. Till the only world that remains is a world where love and justice reigns.

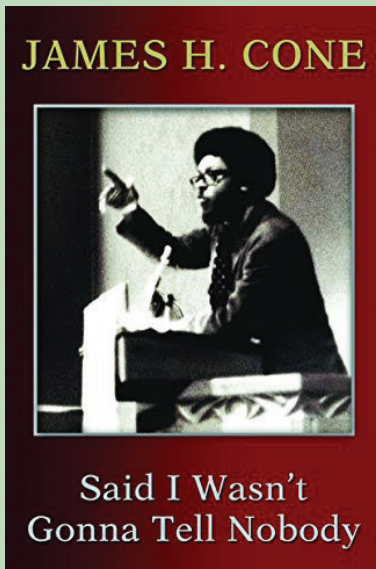
Want to start a HeartGroup in your area? Go to renewedheartministries.com and click "Contact Us." Just write "HeartGroup" in the "details" box and we'll get you started! ■



Book of the Month for July 2019

Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian

by James H. Cone



I have so much respect and gratitude for the late Dr. James H. Cone. His work has deeply impacted my own journey and understanding.

He is widely regarded as the “father of Black Theology”—his own synthesis of Gospel message embodied by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the black pride of Malcolm X. Next year marks the 50th anniversary of his first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*.

This book tells his story. This new work is truly the capstone to that career, showing how he was compelled by events to articulate this theology, how it led to his career at Union and his succession of books—along the way learning from his critics, his students, and the ongoing challenge of his principal models—King, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin.

This month’s book comes with our highest recommendation here at RHM.

[You don’t have to order this book through amazon.com, but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.]

Photo by Carolyn V on Unsplash



The “Jesus For Everyone” podcast

New episodes every Friday!

A weekly podcast where we discuss where faith in Jesus and social justice work for the vulnerable today intersect and what a first-century, Jewish, Galilean prophet of the poor might offer us today in our work of survival, resistance, liberation, restoration, and transformation.

renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts

Quotable Quotes

“Anyone who claims to be fighting against the problem of oppression and does not analyze the exploitive role of capitalism is either naive or an agent of the enemies of freedom.”

— James H. Cone;
A Black Theology of Liberation

RHM's New "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

A couple months ago now I was approached by a friend of mine who works with Patheos with about blogging on their blog site. For those who aren't familiar with Patheos, it is an interdenominational, non-partisan blog site which hosts both religious and nonreligious perspectives. After much consideration and a lot of talking to people I respect, we here at Renewed Heart Ministries felt this would be a great opportunity to grow RHM's work and expand the availability of our resources to a larger group of people.

We are excited to announce RHM's new blog on Patheos' site:

Social Jesus at
patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/

We will still be posting essays and articles each Friday at renewedheartministries.com and publishing our weekly *Jesus for Everyone* podcast. (You can latest episode, Episode 289, on iTunes or on our website at renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts). If you are signed up for our daily inspirational quotations email, you'll keep getting those in your inbox, as well. In addition to these, we will now be posting three articles each week on our new Social Jesus blog site, too.

We thought our supporters would like to see a sampling of some of the Social Jesus blog posts we've made so far this month.

The response to these blog posts has been tremendous!

We hope you find this sampling encouraging to your heart as we, together, seek to follow the teachings of Jesus more deeply in working toward a compassionate, just and safe world for all.

And, to each of you who support our work, thank you for helping us continue to grow. Your generous support over the years has enabled us to step into each of these new opportunities as they arise. We are excited about what lies ahead for RHM.



Photo by Gift Habeshaw on Unsplash

To support our ongoing work click **DONATE** at renewedheartministries.com to make a contribution online, or your can mail your support to:

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Whether you give \$5 or \$5,000, any amount helps us sustain our ongoing ministry in the heart and lives of our readers and listeners.

The following are just a few of our *Social Jesus* blog posts for the month of June.

Mimicking the Compassionate Action of a Mother-Father God

JUNE 5, 2019



In Luke's gospel we read of Jesus teaching his audience, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36 cf. Matthew 5:48) We can split this saying into two parts. The first portion is obvious: the call to adopt "mercy" and apply it to the way we relate to each other. The second portion of the saying involves Jesus naming God as our "Father." Let's begin with this second part first.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/compassionate-action-mother-father-god

Don't Judge Me

JUNE 6, 2019



In the gospels we read the instruction, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:37) And, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/dont-judge/

The Misinformed Leading the Misinformed

JUNE 12, 2019



In Matthew's gospel, we read of Jesus saying, "Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Matthew 15:14, cf.

continued on page 6

Social Jesus continued from page 5

Luke 6:39) The earliest record of a saying like the one we're considering today is more than 200 years older than the time of Jesus: "Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither, like blind led by the blind." (Katha Upanishad; *The Upanishads* written between 800 BCE-200 BCE.)

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/misinformed-leading-misinformed/

Like Teacher, Like Student

JUNE 17, 2019



There is an age-old adage, "Like teacher, like student." In the gospel of Matthew we read: "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Matthew 10:24-25, cf. Luke 6:40) We take on the characteristics of our teachers.

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/like-teacher-like-student/

The Plank In Our Own Eye and Social Privilege

JUNE 19, 2019



In Matthew's gospel, Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's or sister's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's or sister's eye." (Matthew 7:3-5, cf. Luke 6:41-42)

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/the-beam-of-privilege/

The Gospels' Fruit Test

JUNE 24, 2019



When we speak of the fruit test in the gospels, three passages come to mind: Luke 6.43-45: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

Read more at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2019/06/gospels-fruit-test/

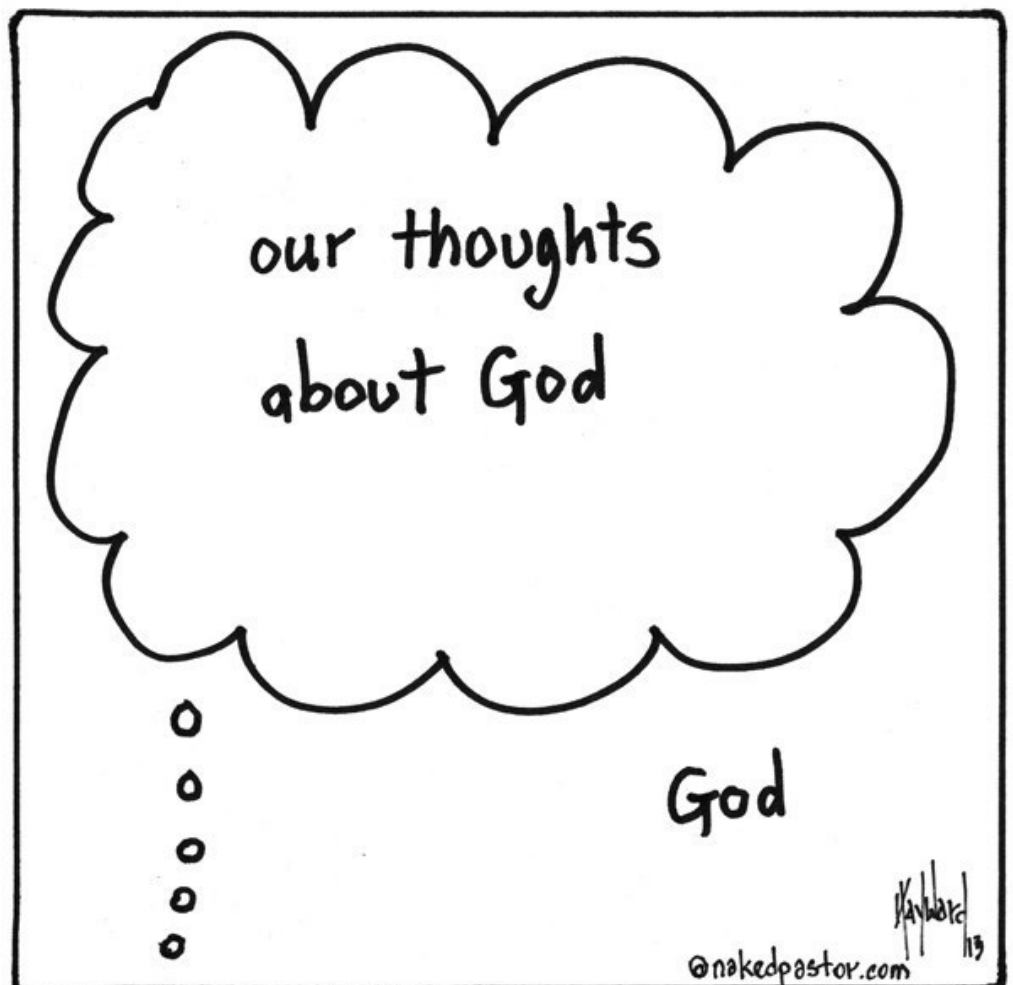
Schedule

JULY 12, 2019

Wild Goose Festival

Hot Springs, NC

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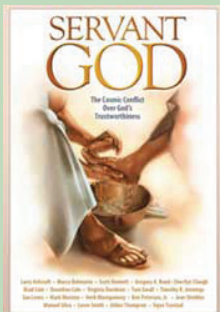
Quotable Quotes

"When the practice of nonviolence [as Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount] becomes universal, God will reign on earth as God does in heaven."

— Gandhi;
Essential Writings

Audiobooks free on RHM's Website!

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renewedheartministries.
com/Audio-Books**



Servant God: The Cosmic Conflict Over God's Trustworthiness

Written by 16 Contributors
including Herb Montgomery



Finding the Father
by Herb Montgomery

The RHM team, in any given month, consists of a small team of 10–12 people working either full-time, part-time, or as volunteers dedicating hundreds of hours to make what we do possible. If you find blessing, encouragement, and renewal here, please consider becoming one of our Monthly Partners with a reoccurring donation or by making a one-time gift.

**2019 Full Year Budget Goal:
\$185,000.00**

**January-May Budget Goal:
\$77,085.00**

**January-May
Contributions Received:
\$39,990.11**

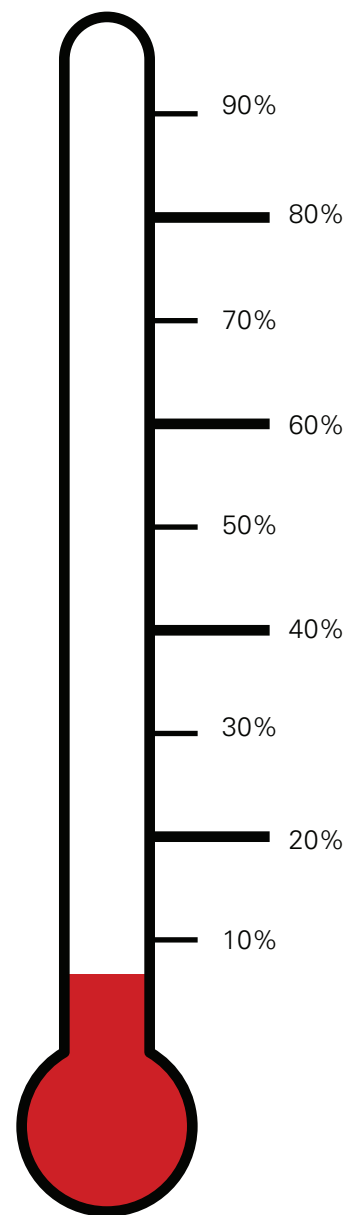
**May Contributions Goal:
\$15,417.00**

**May Contributions Received:
\$7,089.15**

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Whether you give \$5 or \$5000, every amount helps us continue our work.



Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors by going to **RenewedHeartMinistries.com** and clicking the **donate** tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
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Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily give away to other not-for-profits who are making both personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of people who are less privileged.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.

RENEWED
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Featured Presentation

James M. Robinson wrote in his book *The Gospel of Jesus*, "The human dilemma is, in large part, that we are each other's fate. We become the tool of evil that ruins another person as we look out for ourselves, having long abandoned any youthful idealism we might once have cherished. But if we

desist from pushing the other down to keep ourselves up, then the vicious cycle would be broken." Jesus showed us the way to do this. This month it is our hope that your heart will be encouraged as you listen to this month's featured presentation.

Enough Bread For Today by Herb Montgomery.



"What has the gospel to do
with the oppressed of the land
and their struggle for
liberation? Any theologian
who fails to place that
question at the center of his
or her work has ignored the
essence of the gospel."

James H. Cone
God of the Oppressed

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