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## THE FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY METHODS OF THE LUBLIN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

**Abstract.** Fundamental theology has been practiced at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin for a hundred years. Our scholars conduct their research using methods developed and used by the most important academic theological centers. These primarily include a historical-synthetic method supplemented in ecclesiology with an analytical and empirical method. Over time, these methods were enriched with personalistic, historic-soteriological and semiotic contents. The elements of the semiotic-personalistic method present in Marian Rusecki's publications should be considered original and characteristic of the Lublin school. In his research on miracles and other ecclesiological issues, Rusecki applies the sign theory, giving it a very strong personalist inclination. However, this does not yet constitute a comprehensive and detailed research method, but only its initial outline.

**Keywords:** Marian Rusecki; theological and fundamental methods; the Lublin school; historical-synthetic method; analytical and empirical method; historic-soteriological method; personalistic method; semiotic-personalistic method.

Fundamental theology has been present at the Catholic University of Lublin since the beginning of this university's existence. This means one hundred years of fundamental theological research. Over the past century, fundamental theologians have used different research methods which were most often developed and applied in important theological theories. A brief presentation of the research of the scholars who first created the Section and later the Institute of Fundamental Theology will determine which theological and fundamental theories were present in the Lublin School's research work and answer the question whether this school developed its own research methods.

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## 1. THE BEGINNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY RESEARCH AT THE LUBLIN SCHOOL

The Chair of Fundamental Theology was established along with the initiation of the University in the autumn of 1918. At that time, the Department of the History of Religion was established, but it began to develop its academic research activity in 1958 as part of the Fundamental Theology Section created in 1920. This did not interfere in conducting didactic classes in fundamental theology and the history of religion from the onset of the Faculty of Theology. We can say that the Faculty of Theology from the very beginning practiced fundamental theology along with the history of religion (Łukaszyk 1968, 56).

The first head of the Department of Fundamental Theology was Fr. Piotr Kremer, a former professor at the Academy of Catholic Theology in St. Petersburg. He led the Department and the Fundamental Theology Section from 1918 to 1939 and was interested in dogmatic and comparative theology. The only written literary output he left behind were several apologetic articles published before taking over the Chair of Fundamental Theology in Lublin. It is difficult to determine which fundamental theology method his lectures were based on from these writings (Łukaszyk 1968, 12–13).

After the war, in 1946, the leadership of the Chair and Section of Fundamental Theology was given to Fr. Bolesław Radomski, who held this position until his tragic death in 1956. In his research, he dealt with making systematic research studies on the act of faith, developing an original research method called *vitalistic*. However, it was not widely recognized. He also devoted much attention to the new empirical science about religious religiosity. It was to give rise to the creation of an original method for apologetics. Based on the surviving manuscripts, we can establish that through fundamental theology, he sought to justify the divine origin of Revelation using external criteria: prophecy, miracles and internal criteria. A broader and more precise description of the scientific methods he used will be possible after a thorough examination and interpretation of his written works (Łukaszyk 1968, 16, Sokołowski 2012, 1100, Story 2002–2003, 328).

Fr. Edward Kopeć succeeded Fr. B. Radomski in the Department of Fundamental Theology. His work shows the transition in scientific research from “intellectual apologetics to fundamental theology understood in a personalistic way.” In his intellectual apologetic approach, he used a historical and synthetic method, but resigned from conducting polemics in defending the truths

of the Christian faith in favor of a positive lecture method justifying the supernatural character of Christianity. Over time, these lectures were constantly supplemented by elements of the personalistic method (Rusecki 1985, 23–36).

In 1958, Fr. Stanisław Nagy SCJ, was employed in the Fundamental Theology Section. His research mainly dealt with ecclesiology. These insights were accompanied by constant research on theological methodology. We can see his evolution from apologetic ecclesiology, cultivated using the historical-synthetic method, towards fundamental theological ecclesiology, in which he continued to use the historical-synthetic method, complementing it with the method of signs and the analytical and empirical methods. He enriched his inquiries with personalistic and historical contents (Nagy 1964, 331–350, Nagy 1980, 15–16, Seweryniak 1996, 11).

In 1963, the post of Assistant Professor in the Fundamental Theology Section was held by Fr. Czesław S. Bartnik. He was formally associated with the Section until 1969, that is, until undertaking the Chair of the History of Theology. From the very beginning of his academic work, Cz. Bartnik was known as a researcher with very wide interests, including apologetics and fundamental theology. He is above all a theologian, but in his inquiries he eagerly used philosophical contents. From the beginning, Bartnik was interested in theology and historical issues, but because he constantly needed to research methodology in theology, he quite early and was actually the first person in the field of Polish theology to began work on the salvation history method in theology. He not only gave it a mature style that could be used in conducting theological research. Cz. Bartnik expressed the view that in theology, including fundamental theology, various methods should be used, such as historical, empirical, psychological, eidetic, and above all personalistic, which he fully shaped for Polish theology. This approach to research methods was applied in his theological and fundamental ecclesiology (Bartnik 1982, 13; cf. Rusecki 1994, 280–289, 321–330; 2002, 144–145).

An important role in the organization and scientific development of the Lublin-based fundamental theology school was played by Fr. Marian Rusecki. Involved in the Section of Fundamental Theology since 1974 as an assistant, in 1985 he took over the Chair of Fundamental Christology. Since 1991, he headed the Fundamental Theology Section, contributing to its transformation in 1999 into the Institute of Fundamental Theology. His academic research achievements are very extensive. His contribution to the system and development of the methodology for fundamental theology is also

significant. Anyone doing research in this area cannot fail to refer to his work *On the Credibility of Christianity. From the Theory of Fundamental Theology* (Lublin 1994).

M. Rusecki did not end on presenting the state of research according to the methodology of fundamental theology, but he developed his own research method, which Cz. Bartnik calls the personalistic sign, recognizing it as “a milestone in the field of the theory and application [...] of methods in its scientific field” (Bartnik 2007, 70). This method is an original contribution of the Lublin School to fundamental theology research. M. Rusecki’s students creatively use it in their research, including J. Mastej, the present director the Institute of Fundamental Theology and the head of the Department of Christology and Fundamental Ecclesiology, as well as K. Kaucha and I.S. Ledwoń.

As mentioned above, in the Section which later became the Institute, research and didactics were conducted in the field of fundamental theology, but also in the history of religion. Next to the Department of Fundamental Theology, the Faculty of Theology was established together with the founding of the University’s Department of the History of Religion. At the same time, Boleslaw Radomski already began to deal with the theoretical and fundamental issues in his philosophical and religious research on religion. These were part of his investigations which he called religious studies.

However, on a wider scale, religious studies started developing only in 1958 thanks to employing Fr. Teofil Chodzidło, a student of Wilhelm Schmidt, and reactivating the Department of the History of Religion. They were continued by Fr. Henryk Zimoń SVD, and currently by Fr. Zdzisław Kupisiński SVD. All three are religious studies scholars and mainly use methods proper to religious studies in their own research. These methods are non-theological and are not taken into account in the methodology of fundamental theology (cf. Rusecki 1994, 257–330), hence they have not been included in this report.

The above overview of the scholars who decided about the organization of the academic research of the Section and later Institute of Fundamental Theology shows the multiplicity of methods that were used in their research. It first of all includes fundamental theology research and the commonly used synthetic historical method. All theologians reach for it to a greater or lesser degree in the Lublin school.

In addition to the historic-synthetic method, S. Nagy proposes introducing research on the Church using the ecclesiological method, which he calls

the analytic-empirical method, and he partially implements this postulate in his work on the Church (Nagy 1964, 348–349; Nagy 1980, 1516).

The Lublin school also postulates practicing fundamental theology using the historic-soteriological method. Some of its elements are contained in the works of Cz. Bartnik and M. Rusecki, however, there is no comprehensive study on this (Rusecki 1994, 321).

Cz. Bartnik along with M. Rusecki and his students in their works use the personalistic method started in the Lublin school by E. Kopeć. It is not a method developed from scratch by Lublin theologians. It was adopted by them from such scholars as: A. Brunner, R. Guardini and J. Mouroux (Rusecki 1994, 281).

On the other hand, one can agree with Cz. Bartnik's opinion that an original personalistic-sign method was created by the Lublin School, as Bartnik called it. It was developed in an innovative way by M. Rusecki (Bartnik 2007, 70). This method, therefore, was constructed at the Lublin school and its characteristics will become the subject of further reflection.

## 2. THE PERSONALISTIC-SIGN METHOD

The personalistic-sign method has not been comprehensively described so far in a detailed elaboration. The following outline is based on M. Rusecki's texts according to Cz. Bartnik's indications, in whose opinion Rusecki's works give a sufficient foundation for constructing the personalistic-sign method. According to Cz. Bartnik, its novelty lies in the use and merging of elements of fundamental theology in the research proceedings of various methods, and above all the historical, semiotic and personalistic methods (Bartnik 2007, 70–73).

The expression "personalistic-sign method" is not used by Rusecki, but was proposed by Bartnik. This seems fully justified, because the sign method, which Rusecki often referred to as semiotic, has an important place in his research. He also considers the personalistic method to be a tool necessary for fundamental theology's investigations. A necessary introduction to them is the historical method which Bartnik called the "pre-method." It allows us to establish facts that are later interpreted using the personalistic-sign method.

## 2.1. HISTORICAL RESEARCH A STARTING POINT OF THE PERSONALISTIC-SIGN METHOD

Applying the historical method in fundamental theological research first of all requires defining this method as a research tool. Today, as it turns out, this poses a lot of difficulties, because in the historical sciences, this method is not explicitly described. Nowadays, we are departing from the accepted nineteenth-century view of the positivist concept of history understood as pure factography. It is postulated to pay more attention to the fact that the object and subject of historical knowledge is the human person. This introduces an element of subjectivism to historical research.

### 2.1.1. SUBJECTIVITY IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH WORK

First of all, this deals with the assessment of historical sources that are no longer perceived as exact copies of reality, but its description made by a man working under certain conditions and always approaching the facts described with certain personal limitations. The subjective dimension is evident, for example, in making a choice on how to describe reality.

A historian is unable to describe all the details that make up an event, or fully reflect the entire wealth of external and internal traits when describing a person. The subjective nature of the sources is also manifested in directly or indirectly valuing the facts described. The axiological bias of a description may have a significant impact on the way historical information contained in the source texts is received.

The subjective aspect of historical research is perhaps even clearer in the actions of a historian who interprets sources. Cultural determinants influence a historian explaining the past, and his individual knowledge in the light of which he interprets historical facts has a significant impact on the results of his research investigations. Paying attention to the subjective elements in historical documents and their interpretation do not mean questioning the value of historical cognition, but only emphasize the need for taking into account the historical research process in someone's assessment.

### 2.1.2. THE CONTINUITY OF HUMAN HISTORY

In addition to the personal and hence subjective dimension of historical research, the need to examine the past from the perspective of the present and even the future is now being emphasized by history methodologists. The history of mankind should be seen as a series of closely related events, so that past events appear in this chain as largely the cause of what modern humanity is experiencing. A historian can find answers to present questions in past history. Perhaps, based on showing relationships between the past and present, we will be able to predict the future (Rusecki 1994, 290–302).

### 2.1.3. THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Keeping this historical method in mind, the fundamental theologian intends to study Christianity in three stages: first he gathers and organizes the sources, then he criticizes and interprets them, and in the final stage of research, he systematizes, clarifies and assesses the facts whose existence were determined based on sources. Fundamental theology research is about demonstrating the divine origin of Christianity.

According to the adopted historical method, the fundamental theologian begins with identifying and collecting sources. Determining the sources that form the basis of the theoretical and fundamental research does not pose great difficulty. Christianity sees its genesis in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and activities were described in the Gospels contained in the New Testament.

It is much more complicated to make a historical critique and interpretation of these sources. The fundamental theologian uses the achievement of Biblists in his own work. As a result of the analysis of the process of the formation of the Gospels, he comes to the conclusion about the specificity of these documents. Using the described historical method, he perceives that these Gospel texts created further subjective factors to a greater extent than other historical sources.

This does not mean, however, that these texts are not trustworthy from the historical point of view. It is important, however, to be guided by the ways of interpreting sources developed by historians keeping in mind the subjective elements which first accompanied the oral transmission of events and then their being written. As the historical method suggests, the presence

of subjective contents in source documents does not question their credibility, but only demands applying their proper interpretation.

Yet, when we take into consideration other postulates of the historical method, namely the need to take into account the continuity of human history when elaborating sources, the fundamental theologian will want to perceive the genesis of Christianity included in the Gospels from the perspective of Christianity today. Questions arise from it which ought to be given to the sources, while on the other hand, the events they describe have a different dimension when we can perceive their existence in the faith of the contemporary Church.

#### 2.1.4. JESUS OF NAZARETH IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The person of Jesus of Nazareth is the central event for both the Gospel and Christianity today. Strictly historical research will not give a definitive answer to the question about his identity. We might reach a hypothetical conclusion that emerges from them that this exceptional figure cannot be explained in purely human terms. The wider analysis of this proposal and its credibility goes beyond history as an academic discipline. Therefore, fundamental theology moves on to another stage of research, in which theological reflections appear (Rusecki 1994, 302-315).

#### 2.2. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SOURCE DATA

In order to construct the fundamental theology method of getting to know the events described in the Gospels, M. Rusecki reached for the one created by the contemporary epistemology of the sign theory (Rusecki 1980, 51–70). His starting point was the formulated by J. Kotarbińska's description of a sign as something "that has been created by someone in order to trigger a second specific reaction in someone else" (Kotarbińska 1957, 59–65, 75–143, Rusecki 2006, 262)



### 2.2.1. ELEMENTS OF A SIGN'S STRUCTURE

A sign understood in this way has a structure consisting of six basic elements. We can list three pairs of corresponding elements. These are the *message* (contents of the sign) and its *sender* (medium that transmits the contents); the sign's *creator* and its *recipient*; the *reference point* (moving the recipient's attention from the sign's sender to its contents) and a *code* (information allowing us to read the contents of the sign correctly, if it is not unambiguous) (Rusecki 2006, 260–266). Rusecki transfers these theoretical assumptions, derived from the theory of a sign, to the sphere of research on the unusual signs described in the Gospels.

#### 2.2.1.1. THE CARRIER AND COMMUNICATION

These signs must be clearly distinguished from ordinary signs people encounter daily, but in them we can perceive elements analogous to everyday signs. Thus, in the unusual Evangelical signs, we are able to distinguish the medium of the contents and the message. In the case of Evangelical signs, both elements come from God, giving these signs the character of miracles, meaning events whose final explanation can only be found in God. The message carrier, namely the empirical element of a sign according to the sign theory, is to draw the recipient's attention, yet it does not end here, but simply directs the recipient towards its contents.

The medium plays an instrumental function in the light of the contents. It should not obscure the contents, but be somewhat transparent in respect to it and expose it. A sign is essentially a message which a sender directs to a recipient. Taking into account the sign theory, a study of the unusual Evangelical events should focus attention not on the material element, but on the message which this element refers to. The medium plays a secondary role regarding the message and does not decide whether a miraculous sign will fulfill its final function.

#### 2.2.1.2. THE SIGN'S SENDER AND RECEIVER

The main function of a sign is to lead to contact between the sender and the recipient and provide the sign's recipient with the message intended by

the sender. At this stage of our analysis of a sign, there is a need to look at the next pair of its structural elements, the sender and the recipient of a sign. In the case of the signs in the Gospel, the sender of a sign is God. Through a miraculous sign, God seeks to make contact with man and present his saving plans, which are to lead man to unite with God. Such contents in a divine sign are easier for the recipient to read if the sign is directed directly to him, for example in the situation of experiencing extraordinary healing. The experience of miraculously returning to health becomes for the healed person an opportunity to experience the saving closeness of God and undergo not only bodily but also spiritual healing. It is different in the case of the extraordinary signs in the world surrounding man. Correctly comprehending these signs requires more than just one study undertaken in a broader semantic context. Here, another pair of structural elements of a sign are helpful, namely the act of referring a sign with its code.

#### 2.2.1.3. A SIGN'S REFERENCE AND CODE

The code to which the recipient of a miracle should refer to is divine revelation that took place in human history through God's deeds and words. God's deeds and words remain in a deeply intimate relationship: "the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (Dei Verbum 2). God's miraculous works are not events that could take place beyond divine revelation, for example, as arguments outside revelation authenticating its truthfulness. They are an element of revelation, its integral part. Through these extraordinary events, God reveals Himself, the faithfulness of his promises of salvation and his power, when he leads the Israelites out of Egypt "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Psalm 136: 12). God's works can be properly interpreted only in the context of the whole of God's plans appearing in salvation history for the world and man (Rusecki 2006, 266–272).

#### 2.2.2. CHRIST AS THE FUNDAMENTAL SIGN IN SALVATION HISTORY

Jesus Christ, His Person, teachings and deeds are the central points of salvation history. His deeds, but above all his Person, are wonderful signs

that need to be correctly understood. The semiotic method seems to be particularly accurate and useful in properly interpreting the unusual signs described by the Gospels, and ultimately for explaining the identity of Jesus who did not fit into purely human categories (Rusecki 1994, 196–197, Rusecki 2006, 272).

One of the basic tasks of fundamental theology is to answer the question: who is Jesus of Nazareth? This question concerns the Person of Jesus, and is asked by man in his inner being. Hence, the personalistic method is included along with the historical and semiotic methods for performing fundamental theology.

### 2.3. PERSONALISTIC COMPLETION OF SEMIOTIC RESEARCH

An analysis of the semiotic method showed that it is necessary to enrich it with personalistic thinking. This was especially evident in the points mentioning the sender and the recipient of a sign. It was evident that, for fully defining relations between them, it is necessary to refer to personalistic reflections.

#### 2.3.1. INTERPERSONAL COGNITION

The modern trend of thought called personalism is not described by all in the same way. The same is true with the personalistic method. When proposing to use this method in fundamental theology, M. Rusecki selected from among various approaches what they all had in common and what would be most useful for fundamental theology research. Proponents of the personalistic method no longer use purely conceptual speculations and deductive reasoning, but directly experience a given reality. This epistemological approach is especially useful in interpersonal cognition, which takes place in the religious cognition that is of interest to fundamental theology.

The subject of fundamental theology's research is grasped in terms of a personal being. Getting to know a person becomes possible thanks to the multiple signs by which a person reveals his or her identity. The first person spiritually experiences a second person through an intellectual vision. They intuitively not only notice the interior of the person they meet, but are able to capture the whole concrete personal being through cognition.

Such cognition converges objective and subjective elements. The objective contents come from the person-subject being met, yet they are subjectively constructed in the epistemic process by the cognizing object. The effects of the conducted research should have the characteristics of a science, that is, provide maximally objectified and inter-subjectively communicative data.

Hence, an intuitive view of the person we get to know would have to be repeated many times in order to enrich and verify the facts gathered in cognition. In addition, scientific validation of the results of intuitive cognition becomes possible when the subject of research is tested by many researchers. A comparison of the facts obtained in the research will then allow us to establish their convergence or differentiation. The similarity of the research results carried out by many researchers raises their scientific value. The greater the convergence of data provided by numerous research entities, the more reliable they become (Rusecki 1994, 280–285).

### 2.3.2. INTER-PERSONALISTIC COGNITION IN FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

M. Rusecki planned to apply the above described interpersonal cognition in fundamental theology research. With full conviction of the appropriateness of this operation, he took into account the subject of fundamental theology, which is not a material reality but the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

#### 2.3.2.1. INTERPERSONAL COGNITION IN JELUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS DISCIPLES

This concerns answering the question about who Jesus considered himself to be, and in the next stage, whether his self-declarations can be considered to be reliable. His words and deeds are examined as the signs through which he expressed himself, showing people his identity. People are the recipients of Jesus' self-revelation. A theologian sees their mutual contact as an interpersonal meeting in which the entire man is involved, including all his spiritual powers through which interpersonal experiences take place. Being with the disciples, Jesus affects their entire personality, entering into personal relationships with them and inviting them to filial closeness with God, who he, as the Son of God, makes present in this world.

In turn, the reactions of the disciples are not just a purely rational attempt to penetrate Jesus' teachings and intellectually discover the mystery of his person, but they are life-long responses to his call, which is expressed in leaving their previous lives and sacrificing everything for Jesus. It is not only a purely theoretical acceptance of Jesus' teachings, but internal and external consent to the lifestyle proposed by Jesus.

#### 2.3.2.2. THE PERSONALIST METHOD IN RESEARCH ON CHRISTIAN TESTIMONIES

Therefore, the fundamental theologian examines the personalistic method, not only the personal revelation of Jesus, but also the personally conditioned way of the disciples responding to Jesus' invitation to follow him. These studies play an important role in reading the witness accounts that the disciples left behind. Today, man needs these testimonies to get to know Jesus.

We need to apply the personalistic method for their correct interpretation. These testimonies arose in the group of disciples and the first Christian community they created.

Their correct interpretation today also cannot be done individually, but in the contemporary community of disciples, which is the Church understood as a community of people who are in personal relationships with Jesus and among themselves. Creating a personal relationship with Jesus is only possible today in relation to the personal meetings with him that were attended by the disciples during the life of Jesus, and which they later experienced in the first communities, where they lived the presence of Jesus at meetings that kept “the teachings of the Apostles in the community, in the breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:42) (Rusecki 1994, 285–286).

Perceiving the Church as a personal community experiencing the presence of Christ and remaining in personal relationships among each other is the postulate of the personalistic method. In a fundamental way, it wants to enrich the historical, empirical, psychological and other methods of studying the reality of the Church (Bartnik 1982, 13).

The above outline of the personalistic-sign method showed the direction in which research aimed at the full development of this method can go. According to Rusecki’s suggestion, the basic elements of the methods that make up the personalistic-sign method should be further refined and more adapted to fundamental theology’s research.

Regarding the historical method, Rusecki notes that it is not clearly understood in historical methodology. Theologians should constantly follow the research undertaken by historians on the method they use to get to know their latest achievements and how to use them in theology as best as possible. We should focus on those elements of the historical method that are appropriate for the researched subject in fundamental theology. Historical knowledge is a basic element of fundamental theology. It serves to establish facts that are the starting points for theological research. The correct implementation of historical knowledge raises the value of theological investigations (Rusecki 1994, 290–315; Rusecki 2007, 134–146).

The sign method leads to them. M. Rusecki devoted a lot of attention to this and used it in his research on miracles, yet he believed that it needed to be perfected if it were to be more widely used in fundamental theology. There is a common agreement among theologians that not only miracles, but the whole of revelation, including Jesus Christ as the center and summit of revelation, can be considered in terms of being a sign; the reality of the

Church also possesses a semiotic structure, which combines the divine and human dimensions. Both all of Divine Revelation and the Church can be the subjects of research perceived as a sign; however, prior agreements are needed that would make it possible to clearly specify how the concept of a sign can be applied to these complex realities (Rusecki 2007, 114).

According to Rusecki, the most advanced research is being done on the application of the personalistic method in fundamental theology, as well as specific attempts to use it in the analysis of Divine revelation and ecclesiology. Recognizing the advantages of this method, Rusecki also notices its constantly not fully specific method regarding fundamental theology (Rusecki 1994, 288). As mentioned above, Rusecki did not use the term “personalistic sign method” nor did he directly write about the intention to create a method in fundamental theology that would use the elements of the historical, semiotic and personalistic methods. However, he emphasizes many times that in fundamental theology, there is a need to use many research methods. Rusecki recognizes the need to apply the historical, semiotic, personalistic and other methods in a complementary way. Due to the complexity of the subject of research in fundamental theology, he emphasizes the insufficiency of research using only one or two methods. Such research procedures lead to one-sided research results and threaten to distort their subject matter (Rusecki 1994, 285–288, 329–330, 313–314). Implementing M. Rusecki’s methodological suggestions and verifying the possibility of creating a personalistic sign method based on his methodological investigations may be a task for subsequent generations of the Lublin School of Fundamental Theology.

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