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Editorial Note: Bishop Richard Williamson was one of the four priests consecrated bishops by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in Econe, Switzerland, on June 30, 1988.

In Defense Of Sedevacantism: An Open Letter To Bishop Richard Williamson

from John Kenneth Weiskittel

December 1, 1990

Your Excellency:

May the grace of Our Lord be with you! Earlier this year you twice used your "friends and benefactors" letter to comment on the topic of sedevacantism, including a four-page letter in July. I'd like to answer your objections to that stand and I hope you see that I do so in public simply because, as you noted in defending your decision to write on the subject, "the problem set by the recent Popes is already very much there in many Catholics' minds..." Indeed it is, being nothing less than a daily cross for all who seek to hold fast to Roman Catholic Tradition.

Before approaching the subject, let me set forth the limits within which I frame this letter. As a layman, though reasonably well versed in the Faith, I do not pretend to teach the clergy. The issue at hand isn't about the dogmas of the Church but about specific perceptions concerning recent claimants to the Chair of Peter. You should know, beforehand, that I have the encouragement and support of several priests in the writing of this letter. While the greater part of my study is a direct response to your July letter, which contains your more complete writings on the topic, in general it also takes to task the avowed position of Archbishop Marcel Lefebrve and your other brethren in the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX). As you have focused on "Pope" John Paul II, so too will I direct my attention to his twelve-year reign as leader of the Conciliar Church.

Apologia Pro John Paul II

Some time ago, your fellow countryman, Michael Davies, wrote a defense of the SSPX founder, titling the book

Apologia Pro Marcel Lefebvre. Curiously, in reading what you term "the true solution" to the "mystery" of why John Paul II and his Conciliar predecessors have been "doing so much damage to the Church," I find myself likening it to an Apologia Pro John Paul II, insomuch as you take such great pains to absolve him of personal culpability and to throw your support his way. In your letter you make this clear, writing that you consider the issue "(not) out of disloyalty to the Holy Father but, on the contrary, out of loyalty, namely, in the hope of helping Catholic minds to ride out in peace the present storm and to stay by the Pope's side without falling into his errors..."

Now such sentiments are laudable *only* if they are a faithful reflection of the situation; otherwise, they are dangerous because they propose a false resolution. In doing so, they resemble the phenomenon that psychologists call *denial*, in which a person experiencing a trauma forms a mental block that rejects the harsh reality and, in its place, fabricates a less threatening delusion. When I read how you bend over backwards to give John Paul II every benefit of the doubt, I cannot help but think that what I'm witnessing is a prime example of denial in action. You amply demonstrate this on every page of your letter.

You concern yourself with what you call the "main argument" of the sedevacantists, which you render: "The recent Popes say and do heretical things (such as would have earned instant excommunication had any Catholic bishop said or done them 50 years ago.) Now heretics are outside the Church. Therefore these Popes are not even members of the Church, let alone true Popes." It is of interest that nowhere do you disagree with the first part of this formula, that is, that "recent Popes say and do heretical things."

How, then, do you fail to draw the same conclusion as sedevacantists? You do so by appealing to the difference between the *material* and the *formal* heretic. While the former may say and do things against the teaching of the Church without realizing it, the latter does so pertinaciously, that is, "fully aware that he is denying revealed Catholic dogma."

For the better part of four pages you build a case for John Paul II being merely a material heretic. He may be doing wrong, you say, but he isn't really conscious of what he's doing. You rightly maintain that Modernism, condemned by Pope Saint Pius X as the "synthesis of all heresies," never actually left the Church but merely went underground until it was safe to come out of hiding. But then you state that, while Pope Pius X had tried vainly to eradicate the Modernist weed, "it so grew back that now his successors are destroying the Church while convinced they are saving it!" In other words, John Paul II has accepted Modernist errors unconsciously.

And so you go on to state that John Paul II is "one of a long line of Catholics seeking to come to an understanding or compromise with that world which, insofar as it is 'seated in wickedness' (I John 5:19), is always opposed to the Church." Since John Paul II was born in Poland, "a country and culture steeped in the benefits of Mother Church," he would, you say, by necessity "believe profoundly in the goodness of what she does." If we accept this, however, he must also "believe profoundly in the goodness" of the *Church's condemnation* of Modernism.

Further muddling things, you argue: "Hence, what one believes most profoundly of all is a mixture of the world and the Church; a combination of everything admirable in the modern world with everything admirable in Mother Church, for one is profoundly convinced that, since both are so admirable, they cannot be irreconcilable; on the contrary, all that is needed is a new synthesis of the two, a synthesis that everyone is waiting for." A Modernist might seek such but a Catholic knowledgeable in Church history is aware that the two worlds — spiritual and secular — have never had more than temporary alliances. And, again, if John Paul II was such a loyal son of the Church, he would have studied the writings of the Popes to see how the Church views questions of the Church in society, instead of seeking the sort of "synthesis" condemned by these same pontiffs. Compounding this is the fact that, by the time he was born (1920), Poland had already moved from its historic status of a staunchly Catholic nation to one more in line with the Freemasonic models in Western Europe and the United States, so there wasn't a great deal for him to find admirable in its secular side. There is still less for him to find admirable in the openly anti-Christian Nazi (1939) and Communist (1945) regimes that followed. No, there was no reason for John Paul II to find the world attractive and ready to be blended with the Church. To suggest as much totally ignores the fact that his theological studies had to be made in a makeshift "underground" seminary at the palace of Cardinal Adam Sapieha, Archbishop of Cracow. Far from being a mitigating factor as regards his career, the acceptance of such a stance by him, in spite of the evils he saw all around him, actually should make us wary of him.

Modernism, Vatican II And "Peer Pressure"

During the Reagan Presidency, one reporter observed a curious tendency by his fellow journalists: no matter what sort of scandals were taking place by Reagan appointees, the popularity of the president was such that he remained unsullied by the dirty dealings. Hence, the reporter coined the term teflon presidency. When reading certain conservative Conciliar analyses of the current Church crisis, such as appear with regularity in *The Wanderer*, I am struck by a somewhat similar editorial policy. Any number of bishops, priests, religious and laity are raked through the coals in *The* Wanderer for espousing views at odds with Catholic teaching but John Paul II, despite promoting the same sort of ideas, is held as somehow sacrosanct. Indeed, the same news sources commit what amounts to an informational blackout when his uncatholic words and deeds are involved. Your teflon-coated Pope seems able to drag Catholic teaching through the mud with him and all the while, you assure us, he keeps his papal vestments snow-white.

Returning to your attack on sedevacantism, you note that this Modernist drive for a "synthesis" with the Liberal modern world is a striving for "independence from God" and as futile as to "mix oil and water." You attempt to explain John Paul II's own pursuit of this mirage, from his seminary days on, by conjecturing that, "as long as men will let themselves be mothered by the Church and seduced by the world, such efforts will continue." Since part of the basis of this desired synthesis is "independence from God," it would appear that your case for simple "material heresy" on the part of John Paul II is further weakened.

At this juncture, I reach a central point of your argument and quote at length from your letter:

... When a Protestant refuses certain Catholic truths, he admits it, he is even proud of it, he puts himself outside the Catholic Church and, if he attacks the Catholic Faith, he can only attack it from outside. On the contrary your Liberal Catholic with a modern philosophy, or a Modernist, logically does not admit that there are Catholic Truths out there that he is refusing, so he does not admit that he is outside the Church; rather he is convinced that he is an improved (updated) Catholic and that he has a mission, from inside the Church which he has not left, to "improve" the rest of the Church.

Implicit in this passage is the suggestion that somehow the Liberal Catholic (a contradiction in terms) or Modernist is merely a confused do-gooder who doesn't really know the harm he's causing, and that this is different from the deliberation of the Protestant in his attacks. Hold on a minute, Bishop! Let us not forget that it was Martin Luther's original intention to spur the Church into confronting the abuses that were damaging it. It was only after the Vatican ordered him to renounce the errors that had crept into his writings, and he refused, that Pope Leo X excommunicated him. Ignatius von Dollinger, a Liberal Catholic, challenged the infallibility of the Popes as defined by Vatican I. When he ignored commands to abjure his heresy, he was excommunicated in 1871 by the Archbishop of Munich and became a leader of the "Old Catholic" sect, whose teachings of a vernacular Mass, married clergy, optional confession and national Churches anticipated the "updated and improved" doctrines of Vatican II! Finally, the situation was similar when Alfred Loisy was instructed by Pope Saint Pius X to conform his writings to Church dogma; Loisy held fast to his "improved" doctrines and was excommunicated in 1907. The point is that Liberal Catholics and Modernists, no less than Protestants, have had their errors thoroughly condemned by the Holy See (especially by Popes Pius IX, Leo XIII and Pius X) and the faithful are expressly warned not to tread these forbidden paths. All of the papal pronouncements condemning these heresies are — and have been — readily available to Catholics (and, obviously, to seminarians), so it is difficult to see how you can suggest ignorance as an excuse for anyone.

But this is precisely what you propose. How is this? Well, you rightly declare that, after Pope Pius X condemned Modernism, its proponents "went underground to wait for better times." Unfortunately for the Church they did not have to wait very long, for Pius' successors did not continue

vigilantly to root up this theological weed from seminary gardens. I think we're agreed on this point, though I'd take exception with your characterization of the Vatican II culprits as being "neo-Modernists." This suggests that the movement died and its ideas were later revived while, in truth, it continued in a semidormant state with leaders who learned from Loisy's tactical mistakes and proceeded to spread the same heresy with greater subtlety. The errors, then, that raised their ugly heads at the Council, and were successfully promulgated there, did not somehow suddenly infect minds like some mass hallucination; no indeed, they had been injected virus-like into seminaries years — or, in some cases, decades — before. Despite this, there were voices like Archbishop Lefebvre's who roundly condemned the "innovations" in no uncertain terms.

Yet, because so many present at Vatican II endorsed these false teachings or, at least, did not speak out boldly against them, you are ready to suggest that this somehow removes the obligation of these prelates to stand firm for the Faith. (Saint Athanasius and his Catholic brethren were in a distinct and terribly persecuted minority against the Arians — but *they* held fast. The number of those who espouse error is never a justification for embracing it.) Of this sordid Conciliar scene you write as follows regarding the typical "neo-modernist" (including, presumably, the then Bishop Karol Wojtyla): "The collective folly of the Church now bolstered him in his errors." Sorry, Bishop Williamson, but this just won't wash. However "bolstered" he may have felt in his errors, the fact remains that no shepherd of souls may use such an excuse as a *carte blanche* dispensing him of his responsibility over his flock or to excuse culpability in his failure to guard his lambs. Not Bishop Karol Wojtyla — not anyone!

John Paul II's "Liberal Dream"

You continue your defense of John Paul II as a badly mixed-up fellow in your appraisal of his years in Rome. The mere fact that, at the time of his 1978 election, he found "neo-modernism firmly established in the upper ranks of the Church" does not exempt him from even more firmly adhering to the true Faith. But this is precisely what you maintain when you write: "And so what can he know 'Catholicism' to be but this 'improved' version which he himself strove with conviction to promote at Vatican II..." This apology might make sense if we were talking about someone who had grown up in such a spiritual environment and who knew no better. But John Paul II was raised in a time

and place where the roots of traditional Catholicism were quite deep. By the time we reach the Council years, he is already a middle-aged bishop and one who is well-known for cutting deals with the godless Communists who enslaved his nation. He continued this policy at Vatican II, shamelessly advocating that the Church pursue a "conspiracy of silence" about Communism. Here, too, we see a conscious direction on his part.

When you speak of his coming to accept this "improved version" of the Faith as a consequence of seeing so many who had already succumbed to it, you seem to forget that earlier you had mentioned that, "as a seminarian in his early twenties, he was attempting to put together a philosophy which would blend Catholic with modern thinking, Thomism with existentialism and personalism." In other words, far from being an "innocent" who simply followed the prevailing Conciliar errors, he was actually a ringleader who was victimizing others with his aberrations. Far from being a follower, he was a trendsetter.

But now we reach your conclusion, which is supposed to be the *coup de grace* to sedevacantism. Lest I be accused of quoting out of context, I again cite a lengthy passage:

In which case how can he know ... that his ecumenism is flouting Catholic dogma? ... But just as a man who unawares tells an untruth is not properly a liar, so a man who unawares flouts Catholic dogma is not properly (formally) a heretic. So John Paul II may well be destroying the Church with his ecumenism but, until he wakes out of his Liberal dream and becomes aware of the fact, he is not by formal heresy out of the Church (and one may well think that if he did he would change course). Hence, the main sedevacantist argument falls to the ground.

Does it *really* fall to the ground, Bishop? For you to suggest so leads me to wonder whether it is *you* who are doing the dreaming.

John Paul II has had twelve years to "wake out of his Liberal dream" and, far from doing so, he has year by year demonstrated ever more clearly that he is wide awake in his destructive imposture. Only days after his "election" to the throne of Saint Peter, he declared that "the Council must be understood in the light of all Holy Tradition and on the basis of the constant Magisterium of the Church." But how is this mixing of oil and water (that is, understanding the Council in light of Tradition) to be effected? Well, the only course for

Catholics is to renounce it as opposed to Catholic teaching in such areas as religious liberty but, of course, John Paul II means a false harmonization of the two.

Let's review a few of the teachings that this "Pope" is spinning out of his "Liberal dream." Space limits prevent any detailed examination of his record (and most readers are already familiar with it) but keep in mind that these and other declarations of John Paul II represent the kind of thinking that is supposed to be Catholic (and his actions the model of behavior) for those in the Conciliar Church:

- * To Cardinals in 1979, he proclaimed that "Jesus Christ united Himself forever with each (person)..." Even those in Hell? or is universal salvation being taught here?
- * To visiting leaders of the Jewish community at Mainz, Germany, in 1980, he professed that "Jews and Christians, all of them sons of Abraham, are called to be a blessing on the world..." And, in 1986, he visited the synagogue in Rome where he sat in a chair identical to that in which sat the Chief Rabbi; the two spoke for the same length of time; equality of sects was stressed. According to John Paul II's "new" tradition, there is no need for conversion of Jews they are already our brothers and have no need of the Messiah. This stance confuses *spiritual* with merely *biological* "sons of Abraham." Christ said to the Jews who opposed Him: "I know that you are the children of Abraham; but you seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you."
- * His 1983 participation in the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth at which he proclaimed this gem of "wisdom": "One must be enlightened by the convincing manner of the proud religious spirit of Luther, animated by a burning passion for the question of eternal salvation." This is but one of many "papal" pronouncements that veil the errors of Protestants and Orthodox and that suggest that the Catholic Church is equally guilty of bringing about the divisions of Christendom.
- * In 1985, he told Islamic representatives that Christians and Moslems both "strive to put into practice ... the will of God, following the teaching of our respective holy books." Conciliar "Catholics" may thus conclude that the Koran is also sacred scripture even though it declares that all who say "Allah is the Messiah, Son of Mary" are infidels and urges that Moslems kill them (Christians) so as to make a big

slaughter." Islam, according to the "new" tradition, is not a false religion, only a different way to do "the will of God."

- * In India, in 1986, John Paul II permitted the mark of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, to be placed on his forehead. How appropriate!
- * Later, in 1986, the notorious Assisi "love-in" occurred, when leaders of world religions converged there for a spiritual peace summit. The Dalai Lama, worshiped by his followers as God Incarnate, sat beside the supposed Vicar of the true God Incarnate and then, with the approval of John Paul II, joined other Tibetan Buddhists in profaning the centuries-old Church of Saint Peter with their heathen rites. But then, all religions lead to the same place in Conciliar theology.

Somehow, in all this giddy false ecumenism, the *true Catholic Tradition* has been swept under the carpet. But the Holy Ghost, speaking through Saint Paul, is not mocked and John Paul II will have much to answer for because of his conveniently ignoring the admonition: "Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what participation hath justice with injustice? Or what fellowship hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath the faithful with the unbeliever? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?..." (II Corinthians 6:14-15)

But rubbing elbows with idolators has not been John Paul II's only pastime. Besides his tireless promotion of the One World Religion (we mustn't forget his joint declaration with the Orthodox Patriarch Dimitrios I condemning "proselytism" — who needs converts when all faiths are equal?), he is also at home with the forces of the One World Government lobby. We see him continually hobnobbing with Trilateralists and United Nations officials. He bestows his "apostolic blessing" on the likes of Yassar Arafat, Mikhail Gorbachev and Nelson Mandela.

Yes, "Pope" John Paul II is just bubbling with goodwill for everyone. Well, *not quite* everyone. In fact, he got downright surly with one group of folks. You see, Bishop, a couple of years ago there was this fellow who crossed him, a hardheaded sort of chap who had an "old" view of tradition, didn't want to be involved with the hand-clapping fun of the Novus Ordo "Mass" and even complained about that harmless gathering of "believers" over in Assisi. All of this bothered "His Holiness" but he tried his best to "reconcile" the poor, backward soul. Then this individual, an arch-

bishop, goes and consecrates four bishops! Claimed he was "preserving Catholic tradition." John Paul II warned him not to do this (the last thing we need are more bishops spouting this outdated nonsense about the Catholic Church being the "one, true Faith" and other anti-ecumenical dogmatism). Now the "Pope" is a very ecumenical person, you know, but his ecumenism only goes so far, so he did the only thing he knew to preserve the "unity" of his Church — he booted this archbishop out, "excommunicated" him in a loving, nonjudgmental, Conciliar sort of way. What this "shortsighted" individual failed to grasp, you see, was that in the New Church there are well-defined limits and that he had passed one. Not to worry though. It's only a dream, after all, and the "Holy Father" ought to be waking up any time soon now. (He certainly takes long naps though, doesn't he?)

Heresy Most Foul

Is it not absurd then, Bishop, to hold out hope that, given enough time, we can expect John Paul II to come around, renounce his heresy and strive mightily to defend the Faith that for a lifetime he has worked to tear down — if only we pray enough about it, collect enough petitions or enter into enough protocols with him? (I'm not suggesting here that we ought not to pray for him — we should, not as the Pope, of course, but as an incredibly destructive enemy of the Faith we all hold dear.) If his not-so-glorious "reign" has shown us anything at all, it is that he has systematically jettisoned among other things - the Church's teaching about non-Catholics and our correct relationship with them. Wrapping himself in the robes of Peter, he has perhaps done more than any man in history to deny the divine commission of the Church he claims to represent and to espouse the pernicious lie of indifferentism. Even were he to profess the rest of the Faith intact, I maintain, denial of this fundamental dogma is such as would place him outside the Church. Your appeal to the "peer pressure" defense does not remove the basic duty of all Catholics to defend their religion. Our martyred brethren in pagan Rome faced far greater pressure to conform that any of us is likely to see, yet their faith endured to the last and was sealed by the supreme sacrifice. They saw, as we also are duty-bound to see, that, when matters of Faith are concerned, no compromise is possible.

In the case charging the defendant, John Paul II, with formal heresy, I, in the role of counsel for the plaintiff, intend to show that the defendant, in full possession of his faculties and with malice aforethought, is guilty of the crime with which he is charged. Over and above the exhibits already submitted as evidence, I would like to call the following "witnesses" (I have taken the liberty of expanding on the usual definition here):

Jesus Christ: Our Savior instructed his chosen Apostles and their successors thus: "Go ye into the whole wide world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16) Ignoring this commission, the defendant has, in many and sundry ways, encouraged nonbelievers to remain in their darkness. Christ's words are so essential to the Faith that it is impossible to claim that the defendant was unaware of them.

The Holy Ghost: The Guardian of the orthodoxy of every Pope and the Inspirer of Sacred Scripture rejects the defendant as a heretic who claims that the religious texts of false religions are also "holy books."

The Church Triumphant: The Blessed Mother of Our Lord, the apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and all the angels and saints protest that the defendant has reduced all their heroic acts of virtue to trivialities by his claims that false religions enjoy equal favor with God.

The Church Suffering: The faithful departed in Purgatory cry out in anguish against the defendant — under his continuing leadership, the Conciliar Church pretends that no such place exists and, hence, those detained there are deprived of much in the way of spiritual benefits.

The Church Militant: This includes every Catholic who, at any point in the defendant's life, warned him about his erroneous thinking; the prelates who spoke out against Vatican II's innovations and against the "new Mass"; and, at present, that small but visible remnant of traditional Roman Catholics resisting the defendant's brutal attacks on the Magisterium of the Church.

Sacred Scripture: As a priest, the defendant was repeatedly warned about his duty to preserve sound doctrine. On the feast of every Doctor of the Church he read the following passage from an Epistle of the Apostle Paul: "Preach the word: be instant in season and out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to

their own desires they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and will indeed turn their hearing from the truth, but will be turned into fables. Be thou vigilant. (II Timothy 4:2-4; emphasis added)

The Chair of Peter: All Popes who proclaimed the true Faith before John Paul II stand as an army of witnesses against him, as do the legitimate ecumenical councils over which they presided. Foremost among these is Saint Peter, above whose very bones the defendant conducts the sacrilegious "new Mass."

The Oath Against Modernism: In November, 1946, the defendant was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in Poland. In being raised to this august order he was obliged to swear that he would champion the doctrines of the Catholic Faith and would strive to combat the errors of her sworn enemy, Modernism. Unlike the sect of Masonry, the Church does not impose oaths upon anyone unless it is clear that the individual has a firm understanding about their object.

John Paul II: Ironically, some of the most damaging of all testimony comes from the defendant's own career. Here is a man with considerable intellectual gifts. Fluent in several tongues, he has been a poet, priest, actor, playwright, philosopher, professor, bishop and theologian. At Vatican II he was regarded as an expert; later, he was called upon to conduct Paul VI's retreats. All of this weighs heavily against the defendant's claim of material heresy, a condition that presupposes *ignorance* on the defendant's part. Had he been an uneducated peasant who, from ignorance or inattentiveness, utters an error without realizing it and who would denounce it when corrected, such a defense could be made. The defendant's very stature increases his culpability, suggesting that it is far more likely that he saw his errors and persisted in them anyway!

Bishop Richard Williamson: Although a witness for the defense, his testimony included the statement that the defendant's words and deeds are "such as would have earned instant excommunication had any Catholic bishop said or done them 50 years ago." That which is evil does not become good with the passage of time (regardless of Modernist claims to the contrary) and, if those being now considered were so heinous as to deserve instant excommunication as recently as half a century ago, then it is clear then the Church did not

regard them as mere fringe issues that could easily be overlooked in a relatively brief passage of time.

The case for formal heresy, then, is far from a weak one. It is not a charge with which any of us should feel comfortable but it is the only one that is *logical* and conforms to the facts before us. And, unlike the arguments set forth on the other side, it is one that can be made without resorting to *tortuous* mental gymnastics. Only with a guilty verdict can relief be meted out to the plaintiff and justice to the defendant. The *record* of John Paul II convicts him.

The SSPX Contradicts Itself

Having laid out the claims of the sedevacantists' "main argument," I will only touch over a second, though no less important one. And this is the obvious point that, as the Conciliar Church is a faith different from the Catholic one, its leader can no more be Pope than could the head of the Mormons. In 1976, Archbishop Lefebvre condemned the Conciliar Church as "at once schismatic and heretical," warning that "(t) o whatever extent Pope, bishops, priests or faithful adhere to this new Church they separate themselves from the Catholic Church." These sentiments are in keeping

with those expressed here at *The Athanasian*.

The SSPX's position is self-contradictory, as is evidenced by the following statement made by its superior, Father Franz Schmidberger, to the Conciliar magazine 30 Days (June, 1989): "Rome, with (Cardinal Paul Augustin) Mayer's Ecclesia Dei, has done everything she can to divide us, to draw away our faithful and priests..." But how can he complain of an effort to lure them away if those guilty of this are members of the same church to which he belongs? There is, then, no consistency to the SSPX position.

In Conclusion

Bishop Williamson, it is time that the SSPX takes off its blinders, sees the bitter truth for what it is and follows that truth to its logical conclusion. This is no time for vacillation. The Church Militant is in the fight of its life against a great apostasy and the last thing we need is to lose nerve and back down from the enemy. God will provide us with all that is necessary for victory but we must accept the challenge.

Sincerely in Christ,

John Kenneth Weiskittel

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