
The Need for Religion in Human Life

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Abstract

People are often so religious that they cannot explain why they are doing what they are doing in the name of religion. Scholars have defined and dealt with the subject of religion which is based on each perspective. In spite of religion and religiosity, it seems that the situations of things are not better in our present world. If religion is recognition and the worship of the Supreme Being, does each religion have a separate Supreme Being? Or if the Supreme Being is all powerful, can the adherents defend or fight for him? The aim of this paper is make it known that having religion should make life better and peaceful rather than confusion. Religion requires commitment and devotion to the object of worship in the religion. If religion is the worship of God, the adherent of religion should respect each other's religion and the object of the religion which is God the Supreme Being, here we can apply the principle of live and let's live this will enhance peaceful coexistence among religion adherents in our society

INTRODUCTION

The question is a necessary one to ask, why do people need religion? There is need to understand religions of the world, why it is needed and why men behave the way they do when under the control of religion or religious activities. Man is originally born with the act of worship of God, there is an instinct in man with the tendency to surrender to a higher being and this controls his conscience and ability and invariably directs him to do or act religiously. There has been a lot of research on world

religion aimed at understanding the similarities and differences in religion, the truth in religions and their relevance to the human society. Religion is a universal phenomenon which is as old as the existence of humankind on earth. Religion is essential to human life as it has several functions to perform for individuals and societies.

The word 'religion' is derived from three Latin words, "*Ligare*", (meaning to bind). "*Relegere*" (meaning to unite, or to link) and "*Religio*" (meaning relationship). Religion has its etymology from the Latin *religio* and is thus of European origin, religion has assumed such meanings that are universal and comprehensible to inquiring mind. It emphasizes relationships between the human being and the divine, and between the human being and his or her environment. Oseovo Onibere points out that the continued use of the word 'religion' is "in order, more so as it refers to the outward form of faith, the practical expression being no hidden fact"⁴⁴⁶. From the root of the word 'religion', it can be referred to as a relationship or a link between two persons, namely the human person and the divine person who are bound by covenants. Omeregbe, said "The way God is conceived and portrayed in any religion is a reflection of the worldview and beliefs of the culture that gave birth to that religion"⁴⁴⁷

DEFINITION OF RELIGION

Scholars from various fields of study have their definitions and views of religion; hence, religion is one thing to a sociologist and another thing to a psychologist, an anthropologist, a philosopher and a theologian. In spite of the differences surrounding the root of the word, religion, authors are in agreement that religion connotes test the association and

⁴⁴⁶Onibere, Oseovo..*Rudimentary Study of Religion*.Olasode Press, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. 1981)67

⁴⁴⁷Omeregbe J. I. *A Philosophical look at Religion*. (Lagos: J.E.R.P. 1993), 28

relationship between the creature and its creator, the finite and the infinite, man and God⁴⁴⁸.

There is no universally accepted definition of religion, so this has created a serious problem with the definitions of religion. The fact is that Religion means different things to different people. The theologians, philosopher, and sociologist have different definition of religion. Karl Max said “religion is the opiate of the masses”⁴⁴⁹, Feuerbach defines “religion is man’s alienation; it is the means by which man strips himself of his own essence, his best qualities, and reduces himself to nothing”⁴⁵⁰. Salmon Reinach in his own views said, “Religion is an assembly of scruples impeding the free exercise of our faculties”⁴⁵¹. Schleiermacher in his own case said “religion is a feeling of absolute dependence on God.”⁴⁵² Campbell said “it is a state of mind comprising belief in the reality of a supernatural being”⁴⁵³ while Williams James said “the feeling, acts and the experience of individual men in their solitude”.⁴⁵⁴ Emile Durkheim viewed “religion is the creation of the society.”⁴⁵⁵ Bouquet defines religion as “a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the supernatural, the self – existent, the absolute or simply, God”⁴⁵⁶.

⁴⁴⁸ Idowu , E. B. *African Traditional Religion – A Definition*. London: SCM Press (1979)22-24

⁴⁴⁹ Oshitelu G.A. *A Background to Christian Philosophy*. (Ibadan: Oputoru Books. 2002), 64

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁴⁵² Omoregbe J. I. *A philosophical look at Religion* (Lagos,; J.E.R.P 1993). 13.

⁴⁵³ Iroegbu P.O. *Kpim of Theodicy, (Proving the existence of God via Hermeholiontica.* (Ibadan, Hope Publications. 2002) 7.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁵⁶ Maimela, S. S. *Modern trends in Theology*. (Cape Town: Skotaville Publishers. 1990)

From all the following definitions of religion, the following forms the element of religion.

The object of worship – God

The need for revelation - medium/religion

Apprehension of the revelation – man

The belief in an ultimate supreme being has always been a way of life for Africans and Most especially the Nigerian people in particular. Religion is agreed by almost all the scholars as a powerful force that has a strong influence on social behavior and human interaction, as well as forms a strong foundation for culture of the people, and this is in turn reflects in the various religious practices amongst the different ethnic groupings in the country.

There are three religions are major or dominant religion in Africa, the three major religions are Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional religion. Before the advent of Christianity and Islam, the traditional society had always been characterized by traditional religious beliefs and acts of worship. For instance every ethnic group in Nigeria at some point practices traditional religion handed down to them by their forefathers through oral tradition which are guided by the belief in spirits, witchcraft, and extra-terrestrial beings. Man was the judged either be it good or evil, has always been attributed to the doings and makings of the spirit world. The arrival of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria dates as far back as the 11th century and marked the beginning of a great change in the belief systems of the people. Christianity and Islam gained a widespread popularity and acceptance among the people partly because of the accompanying civilization and literacy, and partly because of the aggressive evangelism of their adherents.

The theological definition of religion include religion is the believing in God, religion is belief in spiritual beings, religion is

life of God in the soul of man, and religion is a mystery, at once awesome and attractive. The above are the theological definitions of religion because they centered on the ideas that religion has to do with God or supernatural spiritual powers. Taylor asserts that “religion being a belief in God and spiritual being involved a belief in a hierarchy of spirits from the lower to the most powerful beings”⁴⁵⁷. It is said to be the life of God in the soul of man; an idea which comes from Newton Clarke, who stressed the two realities of God and the soul as necessary for religion to exist.

Marx believed that religion arose out of oppressive conditions and supported the status quo by justifying inequality, consoling the downtrodden, and dulling the pains of daily life.

Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur* (trans.: principle), its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal source of consolation and justification . . . Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless condition. It is the opium of the people. (Marx 1843, 53–54)⁴⁵⁸

To serve these purposes, religion need not take any specific form, posit a god or supernatural beings, or embody particular practices. It need only justify existing conditions and soothe those

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid 36

⁴⁵⁸ Marx, Karl. 1843 (1970 trans). “From Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of the Law*: Introduction.” In *The Marx-Enges Reader*, 2nd Edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 53–65. New York: W.W. Norton.

who suffer. Marx's understanding of the functions of religion does not apply to all cases.⁴⁵⁹

Scholars have attempted to give meaningful definitions of religion. Emmanuel Bolaji Idowu, an eminent scholar of African Traditional Religion, noted the efforts of H. Fielding Hall and Professor Leuba. On this Idowu wrote that Hall listed twenty definitions of religion while J. B. Pratt recorded the effort of Professor Leuba thus:

Professor Leuba enumerates forty-eight definitions of religion from as many great men (and elsewhere adds two of his own, apparently to fill out the even half-hundred). But the striking thing about these definitions is that persuasive as many of them are, each learned doctor seems quite unpersuaded by any but his own. And when doctors disagree what are the rest of us going to do? ⁴⁶⁰

It is necessary to point out again that if we analyze all the definitions, there would still be some areas where those definitions show some deficiencies. One of the reasons is that more than ever before the dynamism of religion is growing in a sporadic manner, particularly in this age of modernity and globalization. Religion is developing many faces. There is a lot of intra- and inter-religious contact as so many cultures and societies continue to interact. New ideologies are developing.

⁴⁵⁹ Marx, Karl. 1843 (1970 trans). "From Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of the Law*: Introduction." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 53–65. New York: W.W. Norton.

⁴⁶⁰ E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, p. 69).

ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

There are different theories regarding the origin of the concept of religion. But it cannot be certainly said that when and how religious ideas emerged in man. It is also certainly cannot be said that what is the origin of the ideas of religion. All these are due to the fact that there is no broad consensus amongst the scholars regarding the origin of religion. But there are people who firmly believe that religious ideas are instinctive in man. No other animals except man bear this instinctive feature. Man can be distinguished from other animals from two angles: reason and religion. Man possesses reason while other animals do not and that is why men are called „rational animals“. Similarly, men are religious while other animals are not. Men bear both finite and infinite features. At the very inception of human race on earth, men were totally ignorant about the different events that occurred in nature around them. But they were curious to know the happenings and accordingly, they applied their own efforts. They had to face the different natural calamities like storms, floods, lightning; dangerous animals, famine etc. and they were unable to overcome these situations. As a result, they had to imagine an invisible power mightier than themselves upon whom they depended for assistance, strength, and relief. Thus fear and curiosity are the main factors responsible for the emergence of religious tendency in ancient people. They also believed that this unseen and invisible power would be helpful in their birth, sorrow, old age and finally in obtaining salvation. They sometimes conceived God as their object of love. There are different forms such as, father, friend, lover, beloved, master through which they tried to attain relation with God. Thus, in order to meet their ignorance and to get strength and courage to face natural calamities, men time and again depended on an imaginary existence, the result of which is named „God“ in religion.

PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The following are some of the perspectives that we have noted in the explanation and study of religion:

(a) Anthropological Perspectives focus on religion as the bedrock of the relationship of human beings to their cultural environments.

(b) Sociological Perspectives examine the impact of religion and social institutions. They focus on religious groups.

(c) Psychological Perspectives center on the role of emotions and feeling in the practice of religion.

(d) Historical Perspectives deal with the development of religions in time and space.

(e) Theological Perspectives focus on the different levels of relationship of God to human beings, which emphasize among others the attitudes, faith, and assumptions of human beings about God.

(f) Ethical Perspectives emphasize human beings' interpersonal relationships.

(g) Philosophical Perspectives focus on rational explanation of religious behaviors and ideas. It asks questions about the universe and the place of human beings in it. It seeks intellectual explanations to human religiousness and religiosity and thus allows no role for faith or revelation.

(h) Phenomenology Perspectives describe religious ideas as one observes them, and as they appear to the practitioners.

THE NEED FOR RELIGION

This argument is logical, and this writer is careful in expressing the advantages and disadvantages of religion. “Religion helps in creating an ethical framework and a regulator for values in day-to-day life. This approach helps in character building of a person. In other words”⁴⁶¹, it is an agency of socialization for it helps in building values like love, empathy, respect, and harmony.

Human beings *are* naturally religious when by that we mean that they possess, by virtue of their given ontological being, a complex set of innate features, capacities, powers, limitations, and tendencies that give them the capacity to think, perceive, feel, imagine, desire, and act religiously and that under the right conditions tend to predispose and direct them toward religion. That means that religious commitment is not fundamentally different from any human belief commitment. It involves the same innate human need to believe more than one can “prove.” Otherwise we would live in a cognitive desert, unable to furnish our minds with enough perceptions and ideas to begin thinking. Religious believing thus shares the larger epistemic situation of all human believing.

Religion has been the primary way that human cultures have answered these life questions. Still, religion is not the only way for human beings to answer them and live functional, happy lives. The human existential condition does not *require* that people be religious or feel the need to address and answer such questions many people appear happy to focus on the present, live as well as they can, and not be bothered by the Big Questions. At the same time, however, the capacity to respond to the human existential condition in terms that are not religious does not mean that this existential condition does not exist or that its tendency to lead to religion is not powerful. It

⁴⁶¹www.tutorialspoint.com/what-is-the-importance-of-relig.

does and is. Finally, the human need to make what Charles Taylor calls “strong evaluations” works as another tendency toward religion.

On the positive side, the human condition entails genuinely natural capacities for religion, which these four tendencies often direct toward the actualized practice of religion. No human person or culture has to respond to these conditions religiously. Any such tendency, weak or strong, is merely a tendency not a determination, necessity, or historical destiny. There are other, functional, nonreligious ways to deal with the human condition. Still, we can justifiably say that human beings are naturally religious—as a matter of real, natural potentiality, capacity, and tendency while at the same time acknowledging that very many human beings and even some cultures are not particularly religious at all. Religiosity is widespread, yet not universal, and though not inevitable, impossible to extinguish.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

Religious influence is here measured by the correlations between two measures of religiosity (Church attendance and importance of God). Two things stand out. The importance of God is generally better predictor of influence to moral statements than the Church attendance. Relations between religion and morality show also another interesting faces. Compared to previous data of general acceptance of different moral norms it is obvious that correlations are higher where and when some moral norms are not a part of social consensus in a particular country, or where particular religion pays much attention to it (abortion for example). General level of religiosity in each country should be also taken into account.

The importance of God is better predictor than the Church attendance. Personal and more thoughtful relations to God can better underpin some moral statements. Does it mean that the Church attendance is irrelevant for moral community? There

are at least two reasons which call for a negative response. First, the Church attendance and the importance of God are highly correlated. These two measures of religiosity are not identical, but are usually interconnected. Second, the Church attendance is a relevant measure of religiosity and can indicate different roles Churches play in a particular society. If Church gatherings are not so able to underpin moral community they are, particularly in some societies, still able to underpin social community what is, in one way or another, a significant factor in overall functioning of a society.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIETY

As religion so its institutions also play an important role in social life. None can deny the fact that the different kinds of social institutions such as, domestic, economic, and political influence on religious institutions. But it is also true that these institutions are sometimes influenced by religious institutions. An important aspect of religion is prayer, and different classes of people belonging to different castes of society assemble in religious institutions for prayer and worship. By these activities there form common feelings which thereby further generate a common sentiments and fellowship amongst the worshipers of a particular religion. Sometimes it is found that the members of a particular religion unite, and for the greater interest of society they perform different humanitarian activities. It is evident from the above that religious institutions perform not only their religious activities, but they also discharge different types of activities related to social welfare such as, charitable hospitals, schools, homes for the homeless. These institutions also run orphanages and collect money for the poor people.

It cannot be denied that religion has an external form of social control. The different activities of the people and their different spheres of social life are still influenced by religious rites and ceremonies. People generally express their religious feelings through rituals and ceremonies. It is also true that almost all the aspects have any precise organization. We find that there

are different important occasions in our social life such as, birth, marriage, harvesting, hunting, death etc. and in all these activities religious rites were performed in primitive societies. By doing these activities there is a common feeling and actions which are very much other than religious functions. Not only in primitive societies but also in modern societies religious activities occupy an important place. The different occasions of social life, such as birth, death, marriage etc. religious rites are performed. Similar activities are found in events related to economic life also. Moreover, it is found that, in almost all communities religious rites are common practices during various occasions in social life such as, inauguration of a new building, oath taking etc. From the above description of the role of religion in social life, it is evident that a regular order of procedure is developed by religion in society and thus it helps to control society. Religion helps to shape the character of an individual and thereby it molds social life. It brings forth the sense of social value in the mind of people. In obeying the social laws or respecting the elders and to show sympathy towards the feelings of others, or to discharge the social obligations faithfully, the role of religion is immense. In those cases it acts as a teacher. Not only this, a sense of fellow feeling amongst the people belonging to different communities is also taught by religion. Moreover, religion teaches that the man's love and services to God will be real only if he loves and serves humanity. In developing moral consciousness amongst people, religion acts as an inspiring factor. Religion enforces uniformity of behavior, and it strengthens social solidarity and thereby acts as an instrument in stabilizing social order. In the primitive age the influence of religion was very great in controlling society and this feature is not totally lost even today. Social life of primitive people was controlled by inspiring God-fear in their minds but in modern age people are inspired not by fear but by the hope for the attainment of virtuous and noble life. Thus by fostering patriotic sentiments in men, religion helps to maintain social integration.

In describing the role of religion, Radhakrishnan says that religion has innumerable effects. Religion not only guarantees values, but it also gives meaning to life. Moreover, the confidence to go on adventures is also inculcated in our mind by religion. Thus narrating the role of religion he says, "Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust and hatred, releases moral power and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world". People live in the third world countries such as, India, Africa, Brazil etc. derive their sense of life from religion and as such religion is very important to them. They get the answers to many questions that appear in their minds. The questions such as, who are we? What is the purpose of life? What is life and what is death? Is there anything after this life? - are very common for human beings and they are curious to have answers of these questions. But in the third world countries science is not so developed to answer these questions. Thus, it is religion from which they seek to get answers of these questions.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Not minding his disbelief in the existence of God and regard of religion as a source of untold misery to the human race, Russell⁴⁶² acknowledged that religion has made some contributions to civilization. For him, religion contributed two things to humanity: it helped in early days to fix the calendar, and it caused Egyptian priests to chronicle eclipses with such care that in time they became able to predict them. Apart from Russell's reluctant admission, religion has played both numerous and significant roles in civilizing humanity. Here the role of religion in the areas of education, culture, health-care and fundamental human rights is discussed.

⁴⁶² Russell, Bertrand *Why I am Not a Christian and other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, New York: Simon and Schuster (1966)24.

Education: In obedience to the injunction to teach others (to make disciples of all nations) by Jesus Christ, his disciples did not stop teaching that “Jesus is the Christ” at the apostolic era (Acts 5:42) rather they continued after the death of the apostles, initially in teachers’ homes. In 150 A.D. Justin Martyr established catechetical schools in Ephesus and Rome. After some time, these schools included reading, writing, and other subjects, in addition to religion. These schools ultimately included both boys and girls regardless of class or ethnicity, which was unheard of in the culture of that era. By the mid 1500s, Martin Luther and John Calvin had convinced civic authorities to implement tax- supported, universal, compulsory education. By the 1700’s education was expanded to include the deaf; by the 1800s the blind (Alvin 4-5).The scientific world owes a great deal to the Muslims. They invented Arabic numerals; algebra is practically their creation; they developed trigonometry, optics, and astronomy; they invented the pendulum; and in medicine they made very remarkable progress. It was the Arabs who introduced the empirical method in the study of nature and cultivated it widely when they were leaders of the civilized world.

Balogun said.

In Nigeria the pioneering and remarkable contributions of the Christian Missionaries and Muslims in the area of formal education cannot be ignored. Many of the primary and secondary educational institutions as well as their personnel, now administered by the Government of modern Nigeria, were the achievements of, and inherent from, the religious Agencies, who are still actively contributing to the growth and progress of the nation educationally ⁴⁶³.

⁴⁶³Balogun, S.S. "Islam in Nigeria: It's Historical Development". J.A. Atanda, Garuba Ashiwaju and Yahaya Abubakar, eds. *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-five Years*. IX, Religion 1989, 54-68.

Culture: Religion and culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is impossible for a society to have a culture without religion or religion without culture. Religion as expressed in institutional forms and structures, has contributed greatly to cultural and social development and improvement of humanity. It was Christianity as an institutional religion that laid the ethical and cultural foundations of the Western World and some other countries of the world through missionaries and colonial contacts and tutelage. The history of Christianity is indivisible from the history of western culture and of western society. For many centuries Christian beliefs, principles, and ideal shave tailored the thoughts and feelings of western man. The traditions and practices that have grown out of the Christian experience have left a permanent impress not only on development of purely religious interest. In Nigeria, Christianity fought against cannibalism, superstitious beliefs, the killing of twins, trial by ordeal and human sacrifice. It contributed so much to alleviate human misery in the country: Motherless babies' homes, mentally ill-destitute homes, physically challenged homes and leprosy centers were built to give hope to the hopeless. All the areas of the Hausaland where the Fulani(Islam) took hold, war ceased to be the normal state of affairs, the political leaders remained on seat and peace and order reigned. "The contributions of both Christianity and Islam, as the two major institutional religions in any society, to discipline and stability in family life and to public morality and order in general, cannot be ignored" ⁴⁶⁴.

Health-care: Following the biblical injunction by Jesus: "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45), Christians did not only oppose infanticide, abortion, and abandoned children, they cared for the sick. The condition or who they were whether Christians or pagans made no difference. They followed Christ's example of

⁴⁶⁴Okoronkwo, D.O. *History of Nigeria in a New Setting from the Earliest Time to 1961*. Aba: The International Press.(1962).170-172

healing the blind, lame, deaf, palsied, and lepers. In every healing, Christ was also concerned for the individual's spiritual well-being. This was in drastic contrast to the Greco-Roman world. Dionysius, a Christian bishop of the third century, described the existing behavior of the pagans toward their fellow sick human beings in an Alexandrian plague in about A.D. 250 as quoted in Alvin⁴⁶⁵: "the pagans thrust aside anyone who began to be sick, and kept aloof even from their dearest friends, and cast the sufferers out upon the public roads half dead, and left them unburied, and treated them with utter contempt when they died". Because of the severe persecution during early Christianity, for three centuries Christians could only care for the sick as they found them. It was not until A.D. 369 that the first hospital was built by the church. Evidence shows the hospital included rehabilitation units and workshops that allowed unskilled patients to learn a trade during healing. This shows an even higher level of humanitarian awareness.

Fundamental Human Rights: If we did a detailed work on the contributions of Christianity to fundamental human rights. He shows that Christianity by exerting its influence and moral standing against those inhuman practices perpetrated against human life by the ancient pagan world, it laid the foundation for the sanctity of human life. Christianity saw in all beings in possession of human life as worthy of its care and charity. Those born of adulterous union are not excluded. Thus right from its early days, Christianity had always sought to protect human life from inhuman treatment and from the dangers to which the sacredness of life is expected. The historical origin of fundamental equality of all men is traced to Christianity who asserted equality energetically and emphatically, but without violence. Before the eyes of Christianity, all the unnecessary and iniquitous distinctions and discriminations vanished and were firmly detested. The common fatherhood of God was

⁴⁶⁵ Alvin, Swchmidt, "How Christianity Changed the World." Web. Retrieved 28/4/2016

asserted and the consequence son ship of all men in God was professed with clarity.

CONCLUSION

The role of religion in society cannot be overlooked, it is clear that the negative aspect of religion is tremendous in our society. Not only this, but religion also restricts free thinking of human beings. It produces a sense of numbness in man and thereby makes him insensible to the actual happenings of the world. It teaches people to live in the world. At that time religion was necessary to control the barbarous and ignorant people. People were satisfied with the answers given by religious institutions. Even in mediaeval period people were convinced that the sun moves round the earth and challenged the great scientist Galileo, on a charge of heresy, who had to spend the rest of his life under house arrest. But now it is scientifically proved that the earth moves round the sun. Thus if institutional religion is eradicated from society, people will live peacefully and there will be less possibility of quarrels and bloodshed amongst the people. They will also be able to understand the happenings of natural phenomena scientifically.

Yet it cannot be over emphasized but the truth is people get mental peace from religion and religion explain the causes and remedies of individual suffering and as such it consoles people in their junctures. The important function that religion performs is that it inculcates social virtues in people like truth, honesty, love, discipline etc, while Religious education teaches people for promoting social welfare. Religious rites and festivals are means of recreations as well as it Religion creates values amongst people and as such it is the source of social cohesion.

Religion is an important instrument for the promotion of social solidarity. Religious institutions help in controlling the behavior of the individual religion works as an instrument of influencing political system and Religion works as an effective means in strengthening self-confidence of people.

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