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THE REFORMATION IN NORWAY: A HISTORICAL-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
H-200

Jack Preus
February, 1980

Adviser

David P. D

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INTRODUCTION

The branch of Lutheranism that has its roots in Norway has had a profound influence on American Lutheranism, as any survey of the history of the Lutheran church in America will reveal. That influence continues today to be a factor in Lutheran inter-church relationships. It is, therefore, incumbent upon both the student of history and upon all those who have dealings with Norwegian American Lutherans to know something about how that branch came into being.

The purpose of this study is to explore a few of the many questions that could be raised conderning the advent of the Reformation to Norway. When did the Lutheran Church of Norway begin? How did it come into being? Where did it begin? Where did it flourish first? How did Norway become a truly "Lutheran" country? Who were the heros or the antiheros of the Reformation in Norway? Where can one go to find out more about the Church of Norway? This study attempts to answer some of these questions.

As a historical-bibliographical study of the Reformation in Norway, this paper will have three main parts. First of all, there is a brief historical study of the Reformation in Norway. Then follows a very brief study of the historiography of Norway's Reformation. Then, finally, there is a biblio-

graphical listing of major or readily available sources on the subject. This last section is of primary importance in this study since, to my knowledge, no complete bibliography of the Norwegian Reformation exists at all. As a matter of fact, Norway is one of the few Western nations that lacks a historical bibliography of any type. So a study of this nature can be of great value.

This study doesn't pretend to be complete or exhaustive in any way. The history of the Reformation included here is only a brief outline. in the bibliography one may find many fine, much more complete histories than appears here. Nor is the historiography the final word. There are other (only a few) sources, again, included in the bibliography, that are more in-depth. Nor is the bibliography to be considered exhaustive. It wasn't my purpose to be so. It is, however, the only one I know of that has brought together so many resources of such varying types which can enable the student to piece together a relatively complete picture of the Reformation in Norway. My hope is that this study, while laying the foundation for possible future study, might prove helpful to interested students, as it has been to me.

THE HISTORY OF NORWAY'S REFORMATION

It would be impossible to understand the period of the Reformation in Norway without at least a brief introduction to the 150 years that preceded it. Because it was in that century and a half that all of Scandinavia became united into a union of three independent, equal kingdoms. And this made the history of the Reformation in Norway so intimately connected with the histories of the rest of Scandinavia that it would be impossible to separate them.

The Scandinavian Union, 1387-1536

In the waning years of the 14th century, the last of Norway's royal house died, leaving the country in the rule of foreign kings. If it had been impossible to maintain Norway's political status among nations when the monarchs were partly Norwegian in race and interests, it now became absolutely impossible. And by this time Norway had sunk to its lowest point in its political history. (See Larsen, p. 208) The events that brought about this situation are extremely complicated, involving the history of all the Scandinavian countries and, as such, are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a brief historical outline is indispensable.

In 1380 Haakon VI, of Norway, died at only forty years of age. He had been loved at home and abroad. During his reign Norway, though weakened by war and the plague, had maintained a fairly honorable place among the nations, largely through the efforts of this king. But times were serious and difficult and upon the death of this last really Norwegian ruler, the country slipped into an unfortunate union. (Larsen, p. 198)

Haakon's heir was his ten year old son Olaf (1380-1387). His accession to the throne brought about the dynastic union with Denmark which his mother, Margaret of Denmark, had planned. Thus began the long union which was to last until 1814. The young king was the last member of the Northern royalty in whose blood flowed the blood of all three of the Scandinavian countries. But he died suddenly in 1387. This was a tragedy for Margaret but even more so for Norway since he was the last of the old royal house. (Larsen, p. 199)

Margaret, however, continued her plans for a united Scandinavia. She adopted Erik of Pomerania, a five-year-old grandson of her sister. He was recognized as the rightful heir and was placed on the throne of Norway on September 14, 1389. By 1396 Margaret succeeded in having him also chosen as king of Sweden and Denmark. The three countries had the same king but different governments. To further achieve her goal of one united hereditary state,

Margaret called a large all-Scandinavian meeting in Kalmar in 1397. The "Kalmar Union" failed to obtain any documentary basis for one centralized government but it did achieve a larger degree of union than had been previously known and it brought peace between the countries. (Larsen, pp. 208-210)

The real result of this "union" was that Norway effectively lost its identity, a situation which plagued Norway until the twentieth-century. For nearly 450 years there was a foreign domination of Norway. So the events of the Reformation era in Norway were really the events of all of Scandinavia. It is only in this light that the Reformation can be understood.

The Reformation, 1536-1537

The situation in Denmark during the early years of the sixteenth-century was in a state of confusion. King Frederick I had been placed on the throne by the nobles because of his liberal concessions to them in the area of relations between the noble land-owners and their renters. This gave the nobility jurisdiction over the peasants, who were gradually reduced to serfdom. The Reformation was gradually gaining ground in Denmark and Frederick I was secretly encouraging it. Hans Tausen, a learned and eloquent preacher, who had studied at Rostock and Wittenberg became the leader of the movement in

Denmark. (Gjerset, pp. 126-127)

Against a powerful revival movement the Catholic clergy was powerless. Bishop Jørgen Friis sent an armed force against Tausen but the people drove them back. Monks were expelled and priests who would not accept the Lutheran teachings were discharged. King Frederick now openly sympathized with the reformers and made Tausen his chaplain. But the movement was especially encouraged by Frederick's son, Duke Christian. In 1530 the citizens of Copenhagen gave their Lutheran Confession to a diet assembled there. Before King Frederick I passed away in 1533, the Catholic Church in Denmark was crumbling into ruins before the assault of the Reformation. (Gjerset, pp. 125-127)

As was mentioned before, Frederick I had been placed on the throne because of his concessions to the nobility. This caused social discontent which, combined with religious upheaval, caused discord that, at any time, might burst forth into a general uprising. Under these circumstances the election of a new king caused great concern. The majority of the nobility supported Duke Christian, the oldest son of Frederick. But he was a Lutheran and was opposed by the Catholic party in Norway who preferred Frederick's younger son, Hans. The merchants and peasants, on the other hand, who were oppressed by the nobility, wanted to place the im-

prisoned Christian II on the throne. The struggle that ensued is known as the "Count's War." Duke Christian, later known as Christian III, took to the offensive and, aided by Gustav Vasa of Sweden, secured the crown of Denmark. (Gjerset, pp 127-134)

The situation in Denmark might have provided an opportunity for Norway to establish her independence but the people lacked organization and leaders. Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson tried in vain to organize an attempt at independence but factionalism prevented its success. Meanwhile, Christian III made known his intention to make Norway, at that time still a separate kindgom, into a province of Denmark. And, despite the charter which guaranteed Norway's co-equality with Denmark, he illegally usurped power. He simply inserted into the existing charter a paragraph making Norway a province of Denmark and subjecting it to her domination. He was never elected king of Norway in the regular way. No new charter was issued defining the relationship between the two kingdoms and he never came to Norway to receive its homage. He regarded the two kingdoms as so intimately and permanently united that the election to the throne of Denmark made him legitimate ruler of both realms. Thus Norway lost her autonomy. (Gjerset, pp. 131-134)

The overthrow of the Catholic church in Denmark was, naturally, followed by a like change
in Norway where its power was, if possible, even
more weak. Some of the bishoprics were vacant,
others became vacant through the flight or imprisonment of the bishops. The Lutheran Church
was established in Norway as a state church, by
royal fiat, at the head of which stood the Lutheran
king, Christian III.

The Reformation influence, however, had been known in Norway somewhat earlier. The first Lutheran preacher, the monk Antonius, who came to Norway in 1526, seems to have received permission from King Frederick I to preach in Bergen. Three years later two other Lutheran ministers arrived who were given support from Vincence Lunge and Lady Inger, their influential relatives. Bergen became the center of the Reformation in Norway in those early years but Lutheran preachers were active in other districts also. The Reformation could make progress because the Catholic Church in Norway had lost its spiritual vigor. The monasteries were rampant with vice and corruption. Moreover, the Latin rite consisted chiefly of empty ceremony and no longer appealed to the people in general. The fine scholar Geble Pederssøn became a convert. probably in 1536. He formed the Latin School in Bergen and became the first Protestant bishop of that diocese. (Gjerset, pp. 124-125)

The "Danish Church Ordinance" of 1537, which was written with the assistance of Luther's friend and fellow-reformer, John Bugenhagen, became the temporary constitution of the Lutheran Church in Norway. Though the king had promised to give the Norwegian church a separate ordinance in which more consideration would be given to its local conditions, it was never given. Nevertheless, this ordinance was accepted in the dioceses of Oslo and Hamar in 1539. (Gjerset, p. 134)

During the changes of the Reformation the priests were allowed to remain in their charges but the Catholic bishops were removed and superintendents were appointed to supervise the reformation of doctrines and practices in the church. But some time passed before superintendents were appointed for all the Norwegian dioceses. (Gjerset, p. 135)

The estates that had belonged to the Catholic bishops were confiscated. One-half of the income from the tithes was paid to the crown. The confiscation was complete by 1555. And by 1562 the last traces of Norwegian monks disappeared. In addition, the king of Denmark seized all the valueles belonging to the Norwegian churches and monasteries. (Gjerset, p. 135)

While the king devoted his attention chiefly to the pecuniary benefits which he might derive from the overthrow of the Catholic Church, the reform movement itself was making slow progress. The few Lutheran superintendents could not reach the masses of people who were as yet scarcely aware that the Reformation had occured. It was declared for them by royal edict. It was, in a sense, an affair of state to which the people, at most, yeilded a more or less willing assent. But it was a long time before the Reformation really took hold. Old habits died hard. Crucifixes and pictures of saints were still believed to possess healing qualities and received adoration that was akin to worship. Pilgrimages were made to them from far away. Even as late as 1835 pilgrimages were still made to a crucifix in Røldal. (Gjerset, p. 137)

The Consolidation of Lutheranism, 1538-1640

It was obvious from the start that if the Reformation was to have any impact, there must be an organizational structure. Bugenhagen had made a great name for himself by organizing the churches of Hamburg, Lubeck, Brunswick and Pomerania. And so he was chosen for the job in Denmark. The Elector of Saxony allowed Bugenhagen to accept the invitation of the Danish king, who recognized his talents. He arrived in Denmark in 1537 and stayed there until the spring of 1539. The result of his work was the "Danish Church Ordinance" which, if

not immediately beneficial, proved to be an important factor in the future development of the church. By royal edict the church ordinance also became the foundation for the church in Norway.

A study of some of the major aspects of the ordinance can be helpful in getting a glimpse of what the early Reformation Church in Norway was like.

It begins by explaining why it is of no avail to wait for a General Council to solve the conflicts in the Church, since one is always promised and never meets. It gives a list of errors and corruptions in the religion of the Middle Ages, declares that faith is the foundation of spiritual life and that the law of love is the only law of the Christian's life. It specifies the chief doctrines and the chief subjects on which the Christian preacher should dwell. It warns against dealing with mysterious questions which are beyond the comprehension of man. (Babington, pp. 140-141)

Private Masses were to be abolished. The public Mass on Sunday was retained and was celebrated in the usual vestments and with the customary vessels and lights. The communicants were to come to the altar, the men on the right and the women on the left. The minister may or may not elevate the elements, according as it seems fit to him.

If he chooses to elevate them, the cymbals were to be sounded at that moment. The distribution took place in silence. The preacher was to limit himself to no more than an hour of preaching and was not to indulge in his own fancies or to denounce the Romanists in an odious manner, abstaining from all invectives. (Babington, p. 141)

A special section of the ordinance was devoted to confession and absolution. The city
clergy were to be in the churches on Saturday
evening and the country clergy on Sundays, to hear
confessions. No enumeration of separate sins was
required, only a general confession or a confession
of special sins which troubled the people. No
one was admitted to communion without announcing
and giving account of his faith and life. (Babington, p. 141)

Rules concerning the ministry were of special importance in the church ordinance. The bishop was elected by the city clergy and approved by the neighboring bishop and the king. Because of abuses under the Catholic system, limitations were placed on the bishops. They were allowed no more than two maid-servants, a secretary, a groom, a coachman and a valet. Their duty was to study the Bible and teach it to others, to preach throughout the diocese, promote peace and obedience and purity of doctrine. They were to visit schools and churches

and appoint deacons to aid the poor. They were to be well paid but if they neglected their office or became corrupt, they were to be tried by the king. If they did not repent they were punished by deposition. (Babington, pp. 142-143)

In addition, there are detailed rules for the choosing of a pastor and regulations for his life. Excommunication is stressed as a last resort for the control of vice and lawlessness in the church. And education and the maintenance of schools was put on the highest of priorities. The Reformation gave the people the privileges and opportunities of such a kind that they could only very gradually learn to understand their value and importance. (Babington, pp. 143-145)

The Reformation came to Norway rather suddenly, by fiat, as it were, by a foreign king. But the best way to describe the real Reformation of the church together with its people is in terms of a lengthy process. It took a long time to acheive. It was more than one hundred years before Norway could be described as a truly Lutheran country. It was by about 1640 that the long process of cate-chetization was complete. And even after all the districts of Norway had been totally reformed in terms of leadership and official practice, many Catholic practices remained. As was mentioned before, pilgrimages, especially in the more isolated areas, remained in practice; until well into the

nineteenth-century. Nevertheless, by the middle of the seventeenth-century, Norway was, for all intents and purposes, a Lutheran country.

In this section I will comment briefly on the sources that are supplied in the bibliography. I will give an estimation of the value of the sources, separating them according to the types delineated in the bibliography itself. On occasion, when it is appropriate, I will mention works that are of special value. But the major part of this section is devoted to a study of the historiography of the Norwegian Reformation by Norwegian historians. For this part, I am indebted primarily to K. E. Christopherson and his article, "Hallelujahs, Damnations, or Norway's Reformation as Lengthy Process," which is also included in the bibliography.

I have included the encyclopedias and dictionaries in the bibliography because they are available to most students. However, they are of little value unless only the briefest outline of the historical events is desired. I would include in this same category the vast majority of general studies on the Christian Church. Though all of those listed in the bibliography do contain sections on Norway's Reformation (or Scandinavia's), they are brief and mainly concern themselves with historical sketches of events. None of them consider the Reformation in terms of its specifically Norwegian context. Very

few of them are able to look at Norway's Reformation on its own terms, to see its distinctiveness and its contributions. None of them follow the process of the Reformation to its completion.

When we take into consideration the works on the Reformation, however, the situation is a little different. In many of the works there is an attempt to portray the reformation in its larger context; that of an ongoing process which took a long time to complete. But, on the whole, these works also lack the ability to see Norway's Reformation as distinct (though not separate) from the events of the other Scandinavian countries, especially those of Denmark. Nevertheless, several of these works can be recommended as worthwhile and helpful resources. Notably among these are Babington's The Reformation and B. J. Kidd's Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation.

The sources on Danish and Swedish history were included to round out the picture, since it is impossible to understand the history of the Reformation in Norway without at least a cursory knowledge of the history of the other Scandinavian countries also. They are quite helpful in that they offer a broader view of the history of these events from a different vantage point than Norwegian. In the area of general Swedish history Michael Roberts' works are the best that are available in English.

Eric Yelverton's articles on the Swedish Reformation are also of great help.

Norway's Reformation Historiography

In this section I am largely endebted to K. E. Christopherson, professor of religion at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington. We, as far as I know, is the only one to attempt a historiographic study of Norway's Reformation. His article is of tremendous importance in this whole area of study.

Though Norway is one of the most Protestant nations (approximately 96 percent belong to the state Lutheran Church) it appears to have had neither cause nor opportunity to record the history of her Reformation. It wasn't until the nineteenth-century that Norway achieved her independence and the nationalistic fervor that followed is the most important key toward understanding the writing that Norwegian historians have done about their Reformation. The other key to understanding it lies in the peculiar Reformation events themselves. Norway had neither strong, identifiable antecedent movements nor any dramatic events surrounding the reformers themselves. All the decisive events, as described before, came from a foreign king. According to Christopherson, this political

background accounts for the remarkable fact that
Norway has not produced a single history of its
Reformation. This also accounts for the fact that
even the standard English accounts, drawn from the
few works, devote only a paragraph or so to the
Norwegian Reformation and perpetuate many of the
distortions that have characterized so much of
Norwegian historiography.

Kort Aslakson typifies early Norwegian historiography of the Reformation. A Norwegian professor at the University of Copenhagen, he published a history of Protestantism in 1622 in which he praises God for delivery from the papal darkness and mentions Norway only in passing. He ignored completely the intricate political situation of the times that played such an important part. Even as late as 1837, Jacob Dietrichson, of Oslo University, held the same view, which Christopherson has termed the "Hallelujah" approach.

But with the advent of Norway's independence, the trend changed. The "Damnation" approach began. In 1823 Stener Stenerson began a long tradition of historiography that maintained that Norway tried to oppose the coming of the Reformation because it was a form of political subjection from a foreign power. He ignores the fact that Norway had given virtually no resistance at all and, as a result of his newfound nationalism, maintained that the Norwegians

must have opposed a Reformation because it was imposed from Denmark.

Rudolf Keyser showed greater historical objectivity. He avoids attributing Christian III's edicts to purely political motivation. But he saw the Reformation in his land almost exclusively as a political fiat, part of Christian's move to consolidate his power. Keyser's great influence helped to imprint his political view on many generations that followed.

It was P. A. Munch, a student of Keyser, who made this political theory into a common doctrine, accepted by all levels of society. His eight-volume magnum opus, Det norske folkets historie, ended with the Kalmar Union of 1397 because he believed that the four centuries that followed were not Norwegian history. He then picked up the history again with Norway's independence in 1814. In another work, Norges, Sveriges, og Danmarks Historie til Skolebrug, he claims that the Reformation was imposed with great violence and that many of the reformed priests were killed by the laity, outraged by the changes of the Reformation. This is, according to Christopherson, a distortion. There is no evidence of a single incidence of a priest being killed for his Protestantism by the laity, who were not violent about the changes because they hardly noticed them. But this view, once widespread, can help explain the peculiar ambivalence among Norwegians concerning their Reformation. Those who are devoutly Protestant thank God for it but those who are patriotic (and most of them are intensely so) view it as part of the lowest shame in their history.

Later in the nineteenth-century Earnst Sars, with his Darwinian evolutionary determinism, sought a continuity through the Danish period of Norway's history. This continuity restored to the Norwegians their lost centuries and made Sars the nation's most influential historian. Yet he still couldn't quite make the break with the political theory. He considered the Reformation a factor in speeding up the intellectual and spiritual decline because of its association with the Danish subjection of Norway. In the long run, however, it was positive in that it saw gains for Norway's peasantry. in the end he sees no major role by the Reformation in the formation of modern Norway, rather emphasizing sociological and economic development. By doing so he set the pattern for most subsequent historiography. In Sars, though sociology had taken the place of politics, nationalistic preocupation remained the guiding force.

There is also a third approach to Norwegian historiography which appears about the turn of the century. That is to focus not on the preconditioning movements, not on the introductory events but on the

lengthy process of religious change in the lives and thought of the common people.

Yngvar Nielsen, a secular historian, attended more to the Reformation's implementation than any other previous historian. In this way he helped to transcend the old anti-Danish bias and its focus on 1536-7. He found the real key to the Reformation in the first Lutheran bishops, who set into operation the work of reform. Nielsen thus took a large step away from most earlier historians' undocumented generalizations against Denmark and pioneered the study of the Reformation as an ongoing process.

Anton Christian Bang, a church historian and bishop of the Church of Norway, wrote about the same time as Nielsen. Though he is the only Norwegian to attempt to write a history of the Norwegian Church during the Reformation era, his work still suffered from the same anti-Danish bias of the earlier writers. But the most outstanding feature of Bang's Reformation historiography is his realization that the church reformation was a process that continued long after the events of 1536-37. He is the first historian to let this principle fully govern his approach. Thus Bang gives by far the most complete treatment of remnants of Catholic practice and their gradual disappearance.

After Bang, several earlier twentieth-century

historians such as Andreas Brandrud and Halvdan Koht, wrote studies that touched on the Reformation in Norway. But these studies were of a narrow nature and they typified the shifts from political-national to economic-social issues that were only marginally connected to the Reformation.

There are two twentieth-century historians, however, who gave the Reformation serious attention. Both Andreas Seierstad and Carl Wisloff continued the trend set by Bang; that of considering the Reformation as a long process of implementation.

Seierstad suggested that every Reformation land had to go through three phases: 1) awakening movements, 2) shifts in government and law, and 3) church evangelization work. In Norway, the lack of drama in the first two underscores the need to study the third. This was about a hundred years in Norway, until 1630 or 1640.

To sum up, the reason for the scarcity of Nor-way's Reformation historiography is found in the source of her Reformation itself: the important, decisive initial events not only came by political fiat, but were also of foreign origin. The result of this has been a unique ambivalence on the part of both the people and the historians of Norway. As Lutherans, they prize their Reformation, but as Norwegians, they hold it in contempt. But, fortunately, Norwegians of the last 75 years have

realized that the most important part of Norway's Reformation is to be found in its final phase, the long process of implementation, its seepage into the local congregations and into the beliefs and lives of the people as a whole. This, according to Christopherson, is a new and unique Norwegian contribution to Reformation historiography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The purpose of the bibliography that follows is to gather, from a wide range of sources, as many resources on the Reformation in Norway as possible. I have included everything I have found that deals, either specifically or generally, with the subject of the the Norwegian Reformation. It is not complete, nor is it exhaustive. My purpose was to provide a sufficient number of resources that would allow the interested student to find something on the subject of the Reformation in Norway. Most of the general resources should be readily available to any body who has access to a reasonably well stocked library.

I have divided the sources according to types; encyclopedia articles, general studies on church history, general studies on the Reformation, studies on Scandinavia, studies on Denmark, studies on Sweden and studies on Norway. In the cases of the latter two categories, I have made further divisions as they naturally presented themselves.

Throughout, my intention was to be as accurate as possible. I have tried to furnish as much bibliographical data as was available to me. This fact accounts for the differences that can be found between the listings.

Where they were available, I have included the chapter

titles and page numbers in those books that only make reference to the Reformation in Norway. A number of sources listed here were found in bibliographies of other sources. In those cases I was limited by what was listed in those books. Consecuently, many of the listings lack the names of the publishing companies. I trust that this inconsistancy will cause no alarm since it was motivated by the desire to be as complete as possible.

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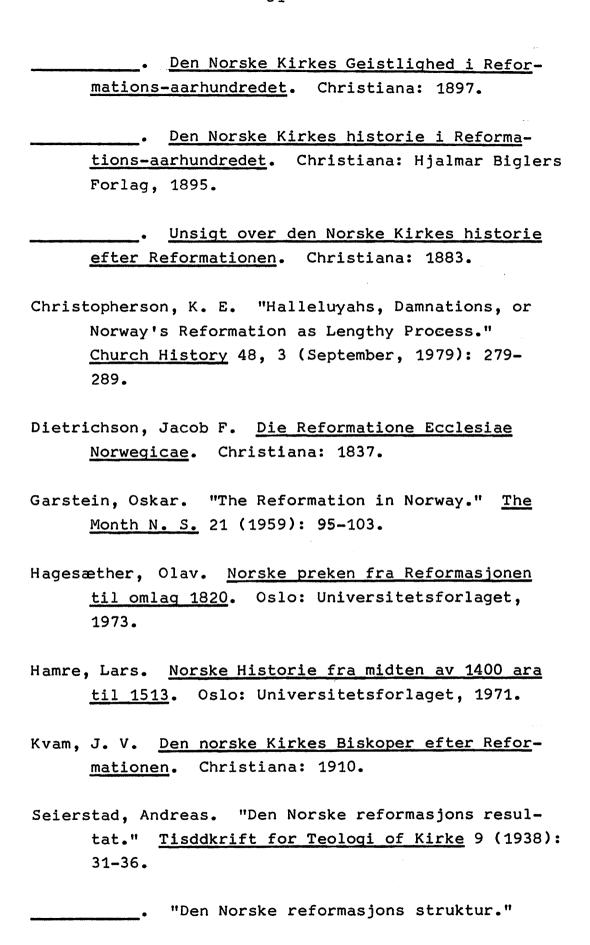
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