

AMADIOHA AS A PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION: TOWARDS THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Prof. KANU, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA

Rector

Villanova Polytechnic, Imesi Ile

Osun State, Nigeria

ikee_mario@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper is a comparative study of Amadioha known as the son of Chineke, and sometimes referred to as the husband of Ala in Igbo traditional religion, with the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity of the Christian religion. The comparative method of investigation is, therefore, employed to investigate the possibility of relationships between Amadioha in Igbo Religion and Jesus Christ. It strongly asserts that certain similarities exist between Amadioha worshipped among the Igbo before the advent of Christianity, and Jesus Christ of the Christian religion. While it does not in any way attempt at equating Amadioha with Jesus Christ, this paper believes that Amadioha, rather being thrown to the background as a pagan deity can be understood as an imperfect expression of Christ given to the Igbo in preparation for the revelation of Christ. Christ would have been more comprehensible to the Igbo if the missionaries to move from the understanding of Amadioha to the understanding of Jesus Christ, rather than presenting the gospel message as an entirely new message to the Igbo. Catechesis always make more impact if it begins from what the people know to what they do not know.

Keywords: Amadioha, Typology, Jesus Christ, Culture, Gospel, Igbo, Management

Introduction: The Looming Concern

In his address to the British Parliament on 2nd February 1835, an address which was an expression of his views on the 1813 Act of the British parliament (which sought to set aside money for the promotion of scientific study and native literature among the British colonies), Lord Thomas Babington Macauley, a British Historian and Whig politician said:

I have travelled along the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar who is a thief, such wealth I have not seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we will ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient educational system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture, and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation (2.2.1835).

From the foregoing, it is, therefore, not surprising that the colonial disposition towards the African culture and religion was that of condemnation. They identified everything "good to be white" and everything "bad to be black" (Nkrumah, 1981). As seen in the words of Lord Thomas Babington Macauley, the basic purpose of their

condemnation of the African culture and religion was to create a moral ground for the destruction of the traditional society in its various forms and modes. Thus, the African cultural and religious worlds were reconstructed according to the colonial vision and design (Ekwuru, 1999), thereby forcing it to derail from its unique tract of cultural civilization. It was, therefore, not surprising that Achebe (1958) in his celebrated classic and epoch-making piece, *Things Fall Apart*, laments the consequences of the encounter between the European and African cultures. He particularly looks at the Igbo society, specifically at the period when the white man broke into it as a missionary, trader and administrator:

Does the white man understand our custom about land?, asked Okonkwo, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" responded Obierika, and then he continued, "But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (pp. 124-125).

The earliest Christian Missionaries who worked hand-in-hand with the colonial masters in the Igbo traditional society, tried to baptize the Igbo-African people and missed-out baptizing the Igbo-African culture. Jordan (1949) and Okonkwo (2002) observe that they referred to the Igboland that they had come to evangelize as the citadel of Paganism and the domain of the Lord of Hell. Isichei (1970) noted that the missionary Priest Rev. Fr. Lutz advised his colleagues during these early missionary ventures to note that this portion of 'Dark Continent (Africa)' was cursed and engulfed by the power of the devil. According to Okonkwo (1998ab&c), such missionary postures created more damaging effect on the Igbo which has until the present age, made the massage of the Gospel to a large extent in Igbo land an 'Engli-Igbo-Church'. Uzukwu (1988) described the this missionary frame of mind as oppressive and dominant, and also confirms the missionary frame of mind that portrayed the Igbo religious language, culture and worldview as inferior and as such was due for replacement.

This paper is anchored on the believe that the time has come for African scholars to rewrite their story told by their western visitors, who appropriated to themselves a superiority of knowledge they lacked the capacity to possess in the first place- not knowing the language and the culture of the people they came to evangelize. This paper attempts at studying the relationship between Amadioha and Jesus Christ, a comparative study that is more sympathetic, non-dominant and non-derogatory to the African culture and religion, so as to enhance a better understanding of the gospel by beginning from what the African people already know as part of their religion and culture.

From the Known to the Unknown

In the study of Christology emerged the idea of Christology from below. It begins from what the people know to what they do not know; it can be referred to as an

ascending theory. Bosch (1973) and Kanu (2016) aver that the breakthrough in Christological studies, came with the advent of Third World Theologies in their various forms, constructed from a plethora of socio-political contexts relevant to the people. The essential contextual approach to Third World Christologies distinguishes African Christology from Western Christology, which was basically an elitist enterprise, with philosophy as its main source and the interlocutors, the educated non-believer. The Christology of the West was, therefore, distinguished as a descending Christology or a Christology from above. It emphasized the divinity of Christ, and said very little about the historical or ontological context of such a study. This notwithstanding, African Christology begins from below, from the underside of history, its main source apart from Scripture and Tradition, the social sciences and its main interlocutors, the poor and the culturally marginalized. The primary concern of ascending Christology is “how will Christ and his message be presented to individual cultures, in such a way that particular peoples would understand and appreciate Jesus within categories that they have?” Thus, Schreier (1985) maintains that theology is meant for a community and not to remain the property of a theologian class. The contemporary signs of the times is a *locus theologicus* in Christology. It is within this context that we can speak of Jesus as the new Amadioha, just as we speak of Jesus as the ne Moses. That does not in any way mean that Jesus is the same as Moses, and this helped the Jewish people who were acquainted with Moses to understand Jesus much better. The old having passed away, the coming of Jesus puts human history on a new level of existence.

Jesus came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, His attitude towards the Jewish cult was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in His challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion (Kanu 2019).

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, “To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (9:20 & 22). In this context, St Paul was talking about mission, in a way that brings the Christian experience into the cultural experience of the local people (Kanu 2019). When Jesus began from below, from what the people know to the new message he was bringing them, he was establishing a method of evangelization and research that

must begin from the underground to the surface. This leads us to the understanding of culture as containing the seed of the Word of God.

Culture as *Logos Spermatikos*

During the 2nd century, Christianity had moved beyond the walls of Jerusalem to the Greek and Roman territories, with the challenge of Christianity coming face to face with other religious and cultural traditions outside of Judaism. This required a more dynamic method of evangelisation that does not in any way compromise the gospel message. Rather than a radical rejection of the Greek culture in which they found themselves, they indulged in a great appreciation and partial acceptance of the Greek culture as a starting point for their sowing of the seed of the gospel message among the Greeks. Although they were primarily Christian theologians, they employed Greek culture and philosophy for the service of the gospel message for they found philosophical themes and concepts useful for developing and clarifying the Christian message. At the time that these Christian thinkers brought the message to the Greeks, Neo-Platonism, a revival of Platonic philosophy, was at its peak. These Christian thinkers found Neo-Platonism a useful tool for the explanation of Christian doctrines. Prominent among these Christian writers were: Justine Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Augustine, among others. According to Omoregbe (1997):

These men Christianized Neoplatonism by giving Christian interpretation to certain theme and concepts in Neoplatonic philosophy, such as Logos, the divine mind, creation, the soul, the problem of evil, the problem of the universal and the particular, the problem of man's freedom and God's foreknowledge, etc. (p. 93)

These men were, therefore, the first, outside of the Apostles to raise the problem of the relationship between the doctrinal tradition of the church and other cultures outside of Jerusalem. However, more interesting is the position taken by Justine Martyr on this matter, when he tried to engraft Stoic concept of the logos into Christian revelation. Justine in his analysis of Natural law linked it to his concept of man. He saw man as composed of three distinct parts: body (σῶμα, *soma*), soul (ψυχή, *psyche*), and spirit (πνεῦμα, *pneuma*). He used the term ζωτικὸν πνεῦμα (*zotikon pneuma*), in Latin (*spiritus vitalis*) to describe the spiritual dimension of the human person. The ζωτικὸν πνεῦμα, he understands as the divine principle in man, the distinguishing feature of his nature, his unique dignity and as a participation in the very life of the Logos, and so he calls it the "seed of the word" or "reason in man", in Greek, the σπερματικός λόγος (*spermaticos logos*) and in Latin, the *ratio seminalis*.

Through the σπερματικός λόγος, the divine principle in man, man was able to govern himself and pursued virtue even before the coming of Christianity. This divine principle, he argues, has an intimate connection with the Divine Logos, the Word of God. "In every man," St. Justin Martyr believed, "there is a divine particle, his reason, which at least before Christ's coming was man's best guide in life." (*Ap. II* 10.8). This thus created a burden in man to live in accordance with reason and not against or without reason. By thus doing, the human person participated in divine reason, which formed his fundamental law. Through this reason, men without express faith in

Christ, already experienced Christ the Logos at work in them (Lex Christianorum 2010). He writes:

We have been taught that Christ is the First-born of God, and we have declared . . . that he is the Word of whom every race of men were partaken, and those who lived reasonable are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists." (*Apol. I*, 46.1-4)

He writes further that:

All right principles that philosophers and lawgivers have discovered and expressed they owe to whatever of the Word they have found and contemplated in part. The reason why they have contradicted each other is that they have not known the entire Word, which is Christ. (*Apol. II*, 10.1-3)

In his use of the concept 'Logos', St. Justin Martyr was certainly not viewing these *logoi spermatokoi*, these divine sparks in men, as being of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the divine Logos itself, though they clearly share in his mind, in some insubstantial, created, and relatively distant sense, in the divinity of the Logos (*homoiousios*). He avers that Christ was already present in local cultures in an imperfect way even before the Word of God was preached to these cultures. This he understood in reference to the scriptural parable of the sower (Mtt 13:3-9), as grace sowed already in the hearts of men, or in terms of creation, where men even before the coming of Christ were already created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27).

An image which scholars have used to explain St. Justin Martyr's concept of Logos Spermatikos is Plato's chariot allegory of the soul. In his dialogue *Phaedrus* (sections 246a - 254e), Plato uses the allegory of a chariot to explain his view of the human soul. Plato describes the inner workings of man as a charioteer governing a chariot pulled by two horses, one white and one black. The white horse is long-necked, well bred, well behaved, and runs without a whip. The black horse is short-necked, poorly bred, and undisciplined, requiring constant guidance. St. Justin Martyr would make his *logos spermatikos* the charioteer charged with the task of using intellect and reason, that is, *logos*, to guide the white horse of the soul (*psyche*), and its rational moral impulses, and the black horse of the body (*soma*), with its irrational and concupiscent nature, to the true and the good. To St. Justin, the governing principle in us, the *spermatikos logos* or *zotikon pneuma*, is the source faculty of the natural moral law, the law that God has placed in the heart of man and which distinguishes him from beasts. It is what makes him a child of the one only God, and makes him brother with all those of his kind. It is the ruler, the pilot, of his lesser natures, part rebellious, part docile (Lex Christianorum 2010).

Justin the Martyr holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He saw culture as a prefiguration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him.

Amadioha in Igbo Traditional Religion

Amadioha also known as Igwe is the son of *Chineke*, and sometimes referred to as the husband of *Ala*. In some parts of Igboland, it is referred to as *Amadiora* or *Kamalu*. The colour of this deity is red, its symbol is a white ram and its day for worship is the Afo market day. This explains why during sacrifices to Amadioha, a white ram is always preferable (Kanu 2018). It is a god of justice, in that it carries out vengeance for the weak; it is the god of love, peace, unity and the messianic hope of those who are in great need; and also, the god of enterprise that brings personal wealth.

Amadioha stands for the collective will of the people. This is derived from its etymology which means 'man of the people'. Its associate is the Anyawu, the god of the sun, and the sun, astrologically, is its governing planet. This explains why, while Anyawu is popular in the northern part of Igboland, Amadioha is well revered in the southern part of Igboland, however, Amadioha remains a very popular deity in the entire Igboland (Kanu 2018). It is similar to the god Shango in the Yoruba religion, who is also considered as the god of thunder and lightning, and also Sokogba (Nupe) Ogiuwu (Edo); Eto, Itiri, Egba (Urhobo).

Amadioha is considered the "Owner of the Sky." Whenever lightning kills a person or strikes an object, the event is often considered a sign or message from Amadioha. Lightning was believed to have its track and so the Igbo would always avoid those tracks. It is also referred to as the husband of *Ala*. Just as a husband fertilizes his wife so does *Amadioha* fertilize his wife *Ala* through rainfall. Dibia, or priests, are, therefore, asked to determine what wrong has been committed by the victim or the owner of the object. Not minding the violent image that thunder and lightning carry, Amadioha is presumed to be a gentle deity who gets violent only when provoked (Kanu 2018). Amadioha is an agent of *Chukwu* against undetected crimes and who brings divine blessings to people. Through his intercession, *Chukwu* nourishes the green vegetation of the earth, sees to the health of the living, lightens up the world and gathers evidences as well as bears witness for good deeds and against evil deeds. It can pull down or up trees that have evil hidden in them, and such events is usually understood as an exposure by Amadioha. It can also destroy farmlands where people have buried charms to harm their enemies or kill their opponents. It ensures that the natural order as set by *Chukwu* is not upset. Its principle is simple, 'eye goes for an eye and a tooth goes for a tooth'. Whatever one sows, one will reap" (Kanu 2013). Amadioha is, therefore, referred to as the deity that manifests the wrath of *Chukwu*.

Apollos (2002) avers that in the shrine of Amadioha, there is usually a long bamboo pole normally suspended horizontally in the air by two strong big forked sticks, one on each side. Some charms and medicinal grass are tied to the suspended pole, smeared by blood of a fowl, and pasted with feathers. It is believed that any evil doer can never pass under it and go free without being struck to death or afflicted with an incurable disease. Big trees and thick bush normally surround the Amadioha shrine, with antiquated objects like broken pots, boxes, bottles, mirrors, iron pots and cups found inside the grove. Other special instruments found in the shrine include: Ogu (hoe), Mpi Okpu (animal horn), Opi ele (antelope horn), Igbugbo (metal gong) and Nma (knife). Animals dedicated to Amadioha include: Ebulu Amadioha (ram of

Amadioha). Aturu Amadioha (sheep of Amadioha); Ehi Amadioha (cow of Amadioha). These are regarded as the daughters and property of Amadioha. Nobody dares harm or kill them to avoid the wrath of Amadioha.

From Amadioha to Jesus Christ: Revisiting the Missionary Mandate

The missionary enterprise in Africa was contrary to the scriptural missionary mandate on various fronts. The missionary enterprise in Africa was overtaken by personal biases, ignorance, etc. The Pauline Areopagus method (Act.17.23-31) of evangelization is at the heart of the missionary mandate of Christ. At Paul's meeting in Athens with the Athenians, Saint Paul, though he was not impressed at the sight of Athens, an idol-ridden pantheistic city and people, he –Paul the missionary *per excellence*, did not *prima facie*, condemn neither the idols nor the people. Paul's sympathetic, non-dominant and non-derogatory approach created a free and natural ground for what Okonkwo (2019) referred to "his missionary-depth-grammatical-message-delivery" (p. 17). Paul proceeded with a secular wisdom and called the 'idol-ridden-pantheistic Athenians-a God-fearing and extremely scrupulous people in religious matters (Act, 17:23). Paul did not gloss-over their religious and cultural values but rather showered understanding to them. St. Paul after his polite and humane method of meeting with foreigners – the gentiles, he still was vehement and firm in his solemn proclamations as the method *per excellence* for the condemnation of false gods and idolatry. Obviously, Saint Paul began from what the Athenians knew to what they did not know. He led them from their unknown gods, which were known to them, to the unknown God known to him.

The Pauline method of evangelization is in accord with the economy of the incarnation and reflects in a profound manner in the teaching of Pope Pius XII, who in his *Evangelii Praecones* (Missionary Encyclical) which addressed the missionary mandate and missionaries thus:

The Church from the beginning down to our time has always followed this wise practice: Let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land, destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful. For the Church, when she calls people to higher culture and a better way of life under the inspiration of the Christian religion, does not act like one who recklessly cuts down and uproots a thriving forest. No. She grafts a good scion upon the wild stock that it may bear a crop of more delicious fruit (no. 66-67).

The missionaries would have made a greater impact, if they had begun from the religious categories of the African people, from the gods they knew to the God that they knew not. An attempt would be made, therefore, to show through identifying the similarities between Amadioha and Jesus Christ, that Amadioha was actually a prefiguration of Christ in Igbo culture.

Table 1: Showing the Relationship between Amadioha and Jesus Christ

No	Jesus Christ	Amadioha
1.	Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father. The Nicene Creed reads:	Amadioha, also known as Igwe, is the son of <i>Chineke</i> .

	"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father". In the Apostles' Creed it reads: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."	
2.	Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. The Nicene Creed refers to Jesus as: "Light from Light, true God from true God" In the Gospel of John Jesus says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (8:12) "When I am in the world, I am the Light of the World." (9:5)	Amadioha is symbolized with Lightening. Whenever lightning kills a person or strikes an object, the event is often considered a sign or message from Amadioha. Even in pointing out these similarities, huge differences are noticeable, explaining why it is called a prefiguration.
3.	Jesus is symbolized in the Lamb. "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." (Rev. 12:11)	Amadioha is symbolized in the ram. Wherever a shrine is dedicated to Amadioha, the symbol of the ram is always present. Moreso, those who bring sacrifices to be offered to Amadioha always bring Ram as the choice sacrifice for Amadioha.

	""These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." (Rev. 17:14)	
4.	Jesus is an intermediary between God and His children on earth. <u>"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all—the testimony that was given at just the right time. For this reason I was appointed as a herald, an apostle, and a faithful and true teacher of the Gentiles". (1 Tim 2:5-6)</u>	Amadioha is an intermediary between traditional Igbo society and Chukwu. Amadioha is a functionary in the theocratic governance of God. It can also be referred to as a dean of God's creation.
5.	Jesus was sent by the Father and so He did only what the Father wanted of Him. Jesus says: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:28)	Amadioha does nothing of its will. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end, and everything it does is dependent upon Chukwu's approval; this does not in any way change the fact that it is a powerful spiritual being.
6.	Jesus was fully part of the creation of the world: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." (Jn 1:1-4)	Amadioha is also considered to be a creator God.
7.	Jesus was not created by the Father, but proceeds from the Father.	Amadioha was not created by Chukwu. It emanated from Chukwu.

	The Nicene Creed reads: "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father".	
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Although the above table has attempted at a comparative study between Jesus Christ and Amadioha, it is not an attempt to show that Amadioha is the same as Jesus Christ. There are very obvious differences between Jesus Christ and Amadioha, such as- Christ is not just the Son of God, He and the Father and the Holy Spirit are equal in essence, brightness, glory and power, a place which Amadioha does not enjoy in relation to Chineke. Amadioha is associated with much violence, but Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. These differences were not highlighted because it is not the focus of the paper. The concern looming at the horizon of this paper is to show that there are relationships of interest between Jesus Christ and Amadioha, and that an understanding of Amadioha could be of help for a better understanding of Jesus Christ.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing has studied, in a comparative style, the relationship between Amadioha of Igbo traditional religion and Jesus Christ of the Christian religion. It began by exposing the missionary compromise of the missionary mandate. That is, Christ's personal mandate and charge for the evangelization of peoples. His personal charge and mandate called up in Mt. 28: 18-20 states: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations"- this according to Okonkwo (2002) involved breaking, inter alia, the boundaries of cultural, political, socio-economic, socio-linguistic, ecological and socio-psychological heritages and identities. This missionary mandate must reach all extensive possibilities embracing, collecting and connecting nationalities and peoples, with all the linguistic and cultural differentiations involved. Thus, the Church in the *Ad Gentes*, calls for borrowing from the customs, traditions, wisdom and learning of local people.

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be (No. 22).

The document adds further that:

From here... the Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity (No. 22).

On these grounds, this work submits that Igbo traditional religious beliefs and culture, including Amadioha, were necessary paths that were preparatory for the reception of the Lord Jesus. In this case, Amadioha was a 'school master', given directory to the Igbo from above to help them understand and appreciate Jesus Christ.

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