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Imagination and Its Place in the Christian School

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June 2018

> As created beings, one of our greatest treasures, perhaps the dearest fingerprint of God in us, is our ability to imagine. But inevitably, whenever I speak about the "biblical imagination" someone will object, "Isn't the imagination a bad thing? Doesn't the Bible say our imagines are "evil"?
>
> - Michael Card, Christian musician, 2011.

INTRODUCTION

Rajaram Bojji is a former managing director of the Konkan Railway Corporation. The Konkan railway line is 738 km long on India's west coast, linking Mangalore with Mumbai, and was completed in 1998. As an engineer, Bojji oversaw the construction of many sections of the line, including the famous 424 meters long and 67 meters tall Panval Nadi Viaduct near the port city of Ratnagiri beside the Arabian Sea.

Fig 1. Panval Viaduct on an Indian postage stamp

In 2012, as a part of his *Extreme Railways* series for Channel 5 television in the United Kingdom, Chris Tarrant travelled the Konkan railway. During the filming, he interviewed Rajaram Bojji and together they inspected the Panval Viaduct, watching as a passenger train traversed its heights. In describing the marvel of the viaduct – the largest in all of India – Bojji in words similar to this said to Tarrant, "There must be some kind of divine spirit that makes humans imagine and do things that look impossible."

The story of the creative genius behind the Panval Viaduct introduces us to the wonders of the human imagination. It also shows a Hindu engineer unwittingly acknowledging the biblical perspective that creative imagination is a part of the very character of God, and is something that he has graciously bestowed upon humanity, his image bearers. In this paper, we shall begin to explore imagination in its full biblical context:

- from its glorious divine origin in God's creation story in which God graciously gifts this capacity to humanity, the pinnacle of his imaginative creation,
- through its distortion and idolatry because of the Fall,
- through its redeemed character because of the Cross of Christ and in which God's people are challenged with imagination's renewal and the opportunity to use of this divine attribute rightly,
- and finally through to the glorious restorative completion at the return of the Lord Jesus.

As we tell this story, we also shall explore how significant Christian writers in recent times have explored the issue of imagination, we shall engage in a critique of some ways that imagination has been used/misused in contemporary society, and we shall give special attention to the place of imagination in the Christian school.

At the beginning of this exploration, it's important to define what we are talking about. In his doctoral work on imagination in education, Meyer (2012) identifies eight different definitions of imagination. One of them, for example, is the ability to produce items or models (pictures, art, sculpture, choreographed sequences etc.) consistent with reality, whilst at the other end of the spectrum, another definition defines imagination as the production of materials that are fanciful or unrelated to reality (talking horses, science fiction etc.). The Oxford English Dictionary tries to simplify matters by defining imagination as, "the creative faculty of forming new ideas or images." Gene Veith (2014), co-author of *Imagination Redeemed* (2015), offers a one-sentence definition (later expanded in a very helpful way) of imagination as, "the human capacity to picture things in our minds" (Block, 2014).

Renowned educator Philip Jackson (1996, p.12) reminds us that even our definitions are a non-neutral part of our argument, and the Oxford definition, reflecting as it does a secular view of the world, fails to put imagination into a Christian worldview context. We offer the following definition (Edlin, 2015) which expands on some of the thinking of Michael Card (2011): "Imagination is our minds working with our hearts and hands to be inventive and creative (in obedience or disobedience to God's creation norms)[1]." The significance of this definition will become apparent throughout the paper.

IMAGINATION THROUGH A BIBLICAL LENS

Evangelical Christians want God's inspired written word, the Bible, to illumine our thinking and living, consistent with the affirmation of the psalmist that God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119: 105). Depending upon the translation that you use, the term "imagination" or "imaginings" occurs up to 36 times in the Bible. Disturbingly for some, 35 of these references are in the negative. Here are three examples:

- **Genesis 6: 5-8.** The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that <u>every imagination of the human heart was only evil all the time</u>. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.
- **Romans 1:21.** For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but they became <u>vain in their imaginations</u> and their foolish hearts were darkened.
- **2 Corinthians 10:5.** We <u>demolish imaginations and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God</u>, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In the light of the predominance of this negative view of imagination in the Bible, some Christians have concluded that imagination is a sinful characteristic and should be shunned at every opportunity – see for example, Costella (2011), and Card's comment at the beginning

[1] The words "in obedience or disobedience to God's creation norms "are enclosed in parentheses because, though they are applicable to a definition of imagination when describing people, obviously given his perfect and incorruptible nature, they do not apply to imagination when talking about God.

of this paper. The way advertising appeals to the self-centered imagination is one contemporary example that critics of imagination point to, as is the combination of sinful imagination and witchcraft in the Harry Potter stories. Even the Narnia Tales of C. S. Lewis, despite their allegorical attachment to solid biblical themes, are frowned upon by these folk because of their imaginative references to witches, animals that talk etc. Appeal is made to the rejection of images in churches by many reformers such as Calvin, Zwingli, and others in support of this position. The false perspective that God can be understood independently through the imagination, a position that spurned the development and worship of wooden and sculptured images within the Roman Catholic Church, seems to give some extra credence to this negative viewpoint of the imagination.

But does the Bible really view imagination as inherently evil? We suggest not. The one positive reference to imagination from among its 35 biblical appearances occurs in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In an amazing string of superlatives, Paul says,

> now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all that we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever, Amen. (Ephesians 3:20)

There is not hint of condemnation of imagination in that passage. Furthermore, on a much broader and even more compelling front, the entire Bible itself is full of glorious imaginative language. Rather than coming to us as a systematic, step-by-step systematic theology instruction manual, God has chosen to reveal himself biblically through powerful, image-filled literature. As just one magnificent example, consider the imagination evoked in Psalm 23 (NKJV):

> The Lord is my shepherd;
> I shall not want.
> He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
> He leads me beside the still waters.
> He restores my soul;
> He leads me in the paths of righteousness
> For His name's sake.
> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
> I will fear no evil;
> For You are with me;
> Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
> You anoint my head with oil;
> My cup runs over.
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
> All the days of my life;
> And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The Bible is full of wonderful miracles, all of which are factual and true. But also consider the power of the parables of Jesus – imaginary stories he told to emphasize key concepts during his earthly ministry. The parable of the Good Samaritan, created by Jesus to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor," is just one case in point (Luke 10:29-37).

On the other hand, we have the true account of God's own people, the Israelites, constructing a golden calf, a God-replacing idol of their own imagination, as just one demonstration of the truth of Genesis 6: 5-8 quoted earlier. This is imagination as a tool of the devil.

Displaying its neo-Platonic foundations, popular expression seems to confirm this ambivalence towards imagination, with tainted utilitarian economic rationalism at one end of the pole, and elevated, autonomous freedom of expression at the other. Roques, referring specifically to the arts but reflecting upon the broader issue of imagination as a whole, expresses this dilemma as he understands many people to perceive it:

> If we follow the thinking of materialist philosophers and educationalists, who tend to construe reality in terms of mathematical, physical, and chemical conglomerates, then art [and the imagination] becomes highly problematic. If the real stuff of life concerns mastering and controlling 'nature', then art becomes merely a self-indulgent game, an amusement to distract you...At the very most, it can become a willing slave of industry and...so we tap the artistic gifts of men and women to create clever commercials.
>
> On the other hand, if we follow the thinking of those sympathetic to the 'romantic' movement, art and artistic activity are the only true meaningful things in life. To engage in art is this to become a superior being, unsullied by contact with commerce or science. (Roques, 1989, p.143)

The Importance of a Full Biblical Metanarrative and of Avoiding Decontextualised Proof-texting

How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction wherein the Bible is claimed by some to condemn a mode of communication (imagination) that the Bible itself liberally uses in order to communicate? The answer provides a salient lesson in ensuring that our theological positions (1) avoid out-of-context proof-texting, and (2) recognize the integrity and metanarrative (i.e. big story) of the Bible as a whole. In the same way that family, work, sexuality or culture are abused by humanity in all of history subsequent to the Fall, these characteristics, along with others such as imagination, were initially created good by God. In what is called the Cultural Mandate or the Creation Mandate (Genesis 1:28 & 2:15, Psalm 8), God gave to human beings the unique capacity to explore and shape these characteristics. The characteristics are not evil in themselves, but what fallen humanity has done with them has debased them. Wonderfully, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ makes possible their redemption – implemented in the light of the Cross through the sanctified activities of Christ's followers in this epoch between Christ's ascension and his second coming.

The picture being described here is often referred to as the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Fulfilment (CFRF) motif, which takes the whole Bible into account when understanding any part of it. Appeals to individual passages from Scripture are still valid and important in providing a sure footing for belief and action (as is done in this paper), but this appeal must be consistent with both the immediate and overall context in which those passages are found. This perspectival view of the Bible emanates from a biblically faithful worldview. Worldview is described as a way of seeing and being in the world (Edlin, 2008), and the CFRF model is framed from within a reformational worldview and reflects the sweep of human history narrated in the biblical story.

According to a CFRF perspective, there is a key concept that can be explored at each of the four motif stages, as illustrated in Fig. 2, for every aspect of God's created order. It's the statement that occurs directly under the stage title – for example, for the Creation stage, the concept is "How God intended for things to be." The model has its defects. It only describes a linear pattern for example, and this is inadequate since working with the model in the real world reveals a blend of several of the stages across a culture at the same time. Also, the centrality of the Cross is not sufficiently prominent in the model. Nevertheless, CFRF is a useful application of the imagination to the task of understanding the Bible aright

God's Big Story (a reformational perspective)			
CREATION →	FALL →	REDEMPTION →	FULFILMENT
How God intended for things to be	How Humans have mucked it up	God's Restoration Through His Son Jesus Christ	Full Accounting & Restoration at Christ's Return
Creational Order for: Agriculture Family Sexuality Government Education Law Imagination…	Humanity's Abuse of: Agriculture Family Sexuality Government Education Law Imagination…	Christians as God's Shalom Representatives in: Agriculture Family Sexuality Government Education Law Imagination…	Separation of God's people from everyone else; The Great Judgment; Heaven Hell

Figure 2. Creation-Fall-Redemption-Fulfilment (CFRF) Motif

The Meaning for Imagination of a Creation-Fall-Redemption-Fulfilment Motif

The CFRF motif being described here, when considering imagination, provides us with an answer to the key concept in each stage of the motif. The answers, shown in Fig. 3 below, give us biblically faithful insights into the nature of imagination at each key stage of the biblical metanarrative and of human history

IMAGINATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A BIBLICAL METANARRATIVE FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION	
Imagination: Our minds working with our hearts and hands to be inventive and creative (in obedience or disobedience to God's creation norms).	
CREATION	Creator God made humanity in His image. He displayed imagination in his creativity. He gave that imaginativity to humanity, and blessed our use of it (Genesis 1, Psalm 8)
FALL	Along with all of our God-given capacities, sin has distorted and warped our imaginative faculties so that though still useful, it has become a tool of self-aggrandizement and autonomy at one end of the spectrum, and of despair and hopelessness at the other. This is unregenerate imagination. (Gen 6; Romans 1)
REDEMPTION	In Christ, brought under his Lordship and His redeeming work on the cross, imagination can be reformed to reflect God's initial glorious character and intention. Make every imagination obedient to Christ. **(2 Cor 10:5)** This is regenerate imagination, and is what we strive for as Christian educators. **(Romans 12:2)**
FULFILMENT	The perfection of God's initial creation restored in all its glory in the new heavens and the new earth upon Christ's return. This is fulfilled, regenerate imagination**. (2 Peter 3; Rev 21)**

Figure 3. CFRF model applied to the concept of Imagination

This brings us back to the apparent conflict in the Bible concerning imagination. As explained in Fig. 3 above, a full biblical metanarrative shows us that there is no conflict at all. Imagination, as a delightful aspect of the very character of God himself, was endowed by God as a gift to human kind as a part of our being made in God's image. It was given to enable us to carry out the Cultural Mandate by imagining names, creating cultural structures etc., as we exercise stewardly dominion over God's creation. In this context and period, imagination was untainted by evil. It glorified God and brought pleasure and satisfaction to humanity.

With the disobedience and Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, evil entered the world and all of God's creation became fractured and distorted. The imaginations of human hearts became sinful, and now tended towards evil. It was this period of human history that the 34 negative biblical references depict, concerning the evil imaginings of human hearts, minds, and hands. As Genesis 6:5-8 records, "every imagination of the human heart was only evil all the time," and the whole creation has been groaning for a release from this terrible bondage (Romans 8:22). In contemporary western culture, Schindler suggests that a postmodern worldview, reflective of this fallen condition, has stripped everything including imagination, of ultimate sense and meaning.

> The life of the senses can be enjoyed in detachment, or, conversely, the senses can be dispassionately exploited – 'raped' – ultimately because sense experience does not mean anything in itself. In this case, imagination becomes simply trivial, and so too does the natural world the imagination mediates. (Schindler, 2006, p.538)

God's glorious plan for the world in general, and for humankind in particular, has not been to leave us in the despair of the Fall. God so loves his creation that he sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sinful rebellion against him (John 3:16). Now, through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, and his bodily resurrection, the power of sin and death have been defeated, and the possibility of a restored relationship and created order has been made possible. Those who put their trust in the finished work of Jesus on the Cross are now holy partners in God's great restorative plan. Among other things, once more a regenerate concept of family, government, education...and imagination becomes possible, championed by the people of God. Our calling in the 21st century (what Rod Thompson terms the period of "the church", and N. T. Wright controversially terms "the fifth act") is to engage with the culture, proclaiming and living the Good News of salvation in Christ which impacts every part of God's creation both now and for eternity.

Yes, although the Bible describes imagination as evil and fallen, in the grand metanarrative of God's grace those who trust in Christ are not left in this hope-less position. Now imagination can be restored to the good and powerful gift that was God's original intention. Yes, empowered by the Holy Spirit we can bring every imagination under the lordship of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), and dream big dreams (or imaginings) about what God can do through his people in a still fallen world.

Christian musician Michael Card summarizes the matter this way:

> When we "imagine," what is it we are doing? I don't pretend to fully understand the mystery of the human heart, but I believe it is safe to say that when we "imagine," something is taking place in our hearts; literally our minds are working with our hearts to create images (hence *image*-ination). But the heart and mind must work in concert; they must be connected by a bridge. In my thinking, this is what I call the imagination. It is a bridge between the heart and mind. It seeks to re-integrate and reconnect them, since they were fragmented by the Fall. The imagination that has been surrendered to God for this process of listening to the scriptures, I call the "biblical imagination." (2011, p.2)

IMAGINATION AS EXPLORED BY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

God has not abandoned the imagination, and neither have his people. In fact, in recent decades, despite the continued distortion of imagination by many non-Christians, some biblical scholars have begun re-exploring imagination in creative and God-honoring ways. We welcome this current trend to rediscover the biblical authenticity and beauty of a redeemed imagination as a legitimate expression of life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Although he does not self-identify as a Christian, Swiss educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1998, 2015), who stresses a community aspect of imagination, has provided a useful stimulus

to the postulations of Christian authors on the issue of imagination. At times, there is a plurality of meaning among Christian writers concerning the concept of imagination that can be confusing. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to observe that the unfortunate rejection of imagination per se that reflects an Enlightenment "proof-text" approach to the Bible has been in decline in neo-Calvinist and some other Christian circles.

A century ago, Abraham Kuyper (1943, p.142) set the scene by claiming that, "As image-bearer of God, [a human being enjoys] the possibility both to create something beautiful, and to delight in it." This is a perspective reaffirmed by Goheen and Bartholomew (2008, p. 157) who anchor imagination's value in God by rightly claiming that, "Part of being made in the image of God is that he has graced us with something of his own capacity for creativity."

Kuyper's rediscovery of the faithful potential of imagination and the creative arts was embraced by Francis Schaeffer. Whilst famously exclaiming that, "The Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars" (1973, p.61), Schaeffer introduced a new generation of evangelical Christians to the value of the arts and imagination as tools to interpret culture. The subsequent work of Cal Seerveld, in particular his 1980 (recently reprinted) work *Rainbows for the Fallen World*, has given increased impetus to this resurgent interest among Bible-believing Christians in imagination - extracts from *Rainbows* are included later in this paper when discussing how teachers can incorporate imagination into their classrooms. Seerveld's comments on the reality of the imagination in *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature* (1995 – especially pp. 84-88) also are worthy of deliberation.

Leland Ryken (2006), from Wheaton College, has had significant influence in his advocacy of a renewed celebration of a faithful, Christian imagination, reminding readers that the Scriptures, rather than being a step-by-step instruction manual for Christian living, in reality form a rich, metanarrative where God guides his people by the use of an abundant panoply of tools including metaphor, story, poetic love language, and other imaginative literary techniques.

J. K. A. Smith, from Calvin College, has interjected a largely helpful new perspective on imagination into the discussion. By stressing formation rather than information as a key educative concept, and by emphasizing the importance of the affective domain in shaping attitudes and practices of Christians, Smith has given new prominence to the use of imagination, and its habit-forming tendencies, in shaping how Christians develop their beliefs and subsequent worship structures. Smith further highlights the importance of imagination, by titling the second volume in his trilogy of cultural liturgy books, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (2013).

Veith and Ristuccia (2015) frame an understanding of imagination within the context of a biblical metanarrative. Given by God to humanity as a precious gift at the time of creation, imagination became distorted and untrustworthy as a result of the fall, but under the cross of Christ it can be restored to its original, God-glorifying and human-fulfilling capacity. Thus, Veith and Ristuccia agree with Forster (2014) that, "All sin is at some level an idolatrous attempt to live in a misconstrued imaginary world rather than the real one (where God is in charge)." However, because they acknowledge the broad sweep of the biblical story, they

also agree with the contention of this paper, that, ”Imagination is [both] the source of idolatry and also a means of contemplating truth.” (p.66).

Veith and Ristuccia do not accept the implicit separation of imagination from worldview found in others’ writings. They recognize that a worldview is not merely a cerebral way of seeing the world, but is much more holistic, being better described as a way of seeing and being in the world (Edlin, 2015). Thus they assert that, “worldviews have to do with the imagination. Worldviews are generally communicated and transmitted by works of the imagination – stories, music, arts, drama, architecture, rituals, conversations, and cultural artifacts of every kind” (Veith and Ristuccia, p.92). Mosley (2015) affirms a similar understanding, but adds a critical realist dimension (though he does not use that term). In his view, human imagination, whilst able to be an extremely useful tool in helping us to comprehend the nature of God’s world, is based upon a limited and contextualized exposure to reality. Thus, even in its redeemed sense, human imagination will not equate exactly with God’s created reality itself.

Cooling and Green (2015) build on insights by Wenger, Smith and others to understand imagination as what we might call worldviews-in-practice, “located in a shared meaning or context shaped by assumptions about the nature of reality” (p.97). They encourage Christian educators to dispense with the competing imaginations of secularism and economic rationalism. They suggest that, by focusing upon a reframing of teaching and learning practices that are shaped by a biblically authentic understanding of the end or purpose of life and humanity, a revised and culturally engaging Christian pedagogy can be developed. Such instructional perspectives and practices would extend beyond the more limited nurturing of spiritual values and empathetic relationships that seem to characterize much of contemporary Christian schooling today. As some of the examples in the implications section of this paper indicate, Christian teachers have the capacity and authority to imagine afresh the ways that they teach and the cultural contexts in which they position their instruction, and thus develop classroom experiences that genuinely reflect a celebration with their students of the lordship of Christ over all aspects of life.

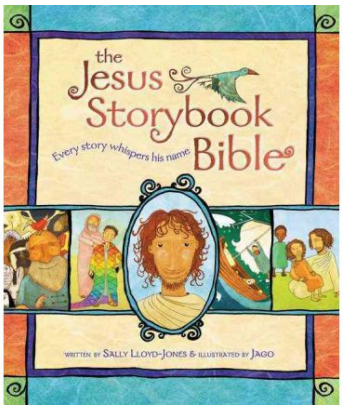
ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE (MIS) USE OF IMAGINATION

Children’s Story Bibles

Many efforts have been made to unpack the biblical metanarrative in a way that children can understand. Unfortunately, this laudable intention at times has gone awry. Sometimes, the Bible is depicted as a series of individual stories about people in particular places. In essence however, the Bible is not about Noah or Joseph or David or Samson or Paul. It’s about God and his faithful plan to make a people for himself and to draw that people back to him despite their sin and rebellion. Essentially, the Bible is God’s big story centering in the incarnation and the redemptive work of Jesus, and we human beings are privileged to have a grand role to play in that story.

There are some children’s story Bibles that present this imaginative and faithful view of God and the Bible. One example is Sally Lloyd-Jones’ *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (2007). In pictures and words, it tells the following message (from the product description):

The *Jesus Storybook Bible* tells the Story beneath all the stories in the Bible. At the center of the Story is a baby, the child upon whom everything will depend. Every story whispers his name. From Noah to Moses to the great King David every story points to him. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together. From the Old Testament through the New Testament, as the Story unfolds, children will pick up the clues and piece together the puzzle. A Bible like no other, The Jesus Storybook Bible invites children to join in the greatest of all adventures, to discover for themselves that Jesus is at the center of God s great story of salvation and at the center of their Story too. (Lloyd-Jones, 2007, blurb)



Another imaginative book that is to be commended is *Jonah*, illustrated by Kurt Mitchell (1981). The only text in the book is the NIV version of the book of Jonah. Each page of text is accompanied by a full-page illustration. The illustrations imagine and depict Jonah as a mouse, and the city of Nineveh as a city of cats – an image that describes the horror that Jonah must have felt when God commissioned him to take a message of repentance to these wayward people.

A third delightful little example of biblically faithful imagination combining literature, art and history, and that places it in a special cultural setting (Maori New Zealand), is the booklet written by Joy Cowley and illustrated by Mary Glover, (2009) entitled, *Tārore and her Book.*

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, and the Misuse of Imagination

In 1968, a then up-and-coming musician, Andrew Lloyd-Webber, partnered with an up-and-coming lyricist, Tim Rice, to construct a musical entitled *Joseph and* the *Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat.* The musical was performed as a 15-minute choir piece at Colet Court, the prep school of St Paul's School in London. Its third performance was actually given in St Paul's Cathedral itself, also in 1968. By 1974, *Joseph* has been extended to its full, current form. It has since been performed by tens of thousands of groups, including many Christian schools, all around the world. The BBC produced a video version of the rock opera, with Donny Osmond in the lead role, in 1999, and Lloyd Webber announced in 2013 that due to its popularity, a new film version of *Joseph* was being considered.

Though many of Rice and Lloyd-Webber's productions have been extremely popular, perhaps none have sustained the enduring appeal of *Joseph*. Its catchy tunes, its variety of musical genres, its acknowledgement of the essential religious nature of life, and its mixture of pathos and humor, have caught the imagination of millions of people. Its themes of sibling rivalry, good overcoming evil, and all living happily ever after, have universal appeal.

Joseph's appeal within Christian circles also has been widespread, with many Christian commentators viewing it as an authentic re-telling of an important biblical story, thus providing a useful platform for evangelism. One producer of the play for an evangelical church in the USA commented as follows:

> It serves numerous purposes: to train our young people in drama and music, to put on a production that unbelievers might come to and hear the Gospel, and to encourage the spiritual growth of our high school students...Not only has the show been God-honoring, but my children have been challenged in their spiritual disciplines, their heart attitudes, and their love for the church. No one walks away from any performance thinking that the Word of God has been dishonored or made light of. (https://mytwocents.wordpress.com/2008/03/22/covenant-life-performs-andrew-lloyd-webber-why/).

In like manner, dozens of Christian schools have performed *Joseph*, apparently believing it to be a faithful, imaginative and attractive recreation of a biblical story. How misguided they are!

True, *Joseph* is an example of the creative use of the imagination. Superimposing Elvis over the character of Pharaoh, the contrasting musical styles such as calypso and western pop music, the appeal to naive innocence through the use of child performers and choirs – these are just a few examples of the imaginative use of music, words and context that give the show its appeal. However, it is far removed from a faithful re-telling of the Bible story. This writer concurs with others that *Joseph* represents a powerful misuse of the imagination that deliberately detracts from the authority of Scripture and mocks the core message of the gospel. Consider the following issues:

- Genesis 37-50 records God's dealings with his people during the life of Joseph. It is a narrative that points to God's merciful, covenant-keeping activities to preserve a people for himself. It's not Joseph's story, it's God's story. It does not glorify Joseph; it glorifies God. The musical inverts this pattern, with God not actually mentioned by name at all.
- *Joseph and* the *Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* was constructed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This begs a simple question: how did one get psychedelic, technicolor dreams in that time period? The answer, of course, is through reality-distorting drugs such as LSD and/or eastern mystical religions. In that context, in this musical version of events, Joseph probably never physically escapes from the horrors

of mistreatment by his brothers and imprisonment in Egypt, but only does so mentally through the mind-bending escapism of illicit drugs – euphemistically characterized by his multi-colored coat. At the end of the musical, his current fix (imbibed when he was in the Egyptian prison) that had given him the wonderful dreams of success and superiority, begins to wear off, so Tim Rice has Joseph pleading for another fix to escape his miserable condition ("Give me back my coloured coat" is the musical's final plea). Viewed through this interpretive lens, *Joseph* is a cunningly constructed, escapist delusion.

- The message of the Bible is that we are all religious creatures, seeking after God (see Edlin's [2014] exploration of this issue in *The Cause of Christian Education*, pp. 19 and following), creatures for whom hope and salvation exist through Jesus Christ alone. The message of *Joseph and* the *Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* is that whilst we are all searching for meaning and purpose in life, any form of escapism, such as the drug culture or eastern mysticism, can satisfy this eternal desire. Any dream will do. The musical's theme song, that Rice claims in his autobiography is one of the most powerful that he has ever written, labors this point, and is in direct conflict with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here are the words of this theme song - the finale that Rice has Joseph sing:

I closed my eyes, drew back the curtain *To see for certain what I thought I knew* *Far far away, someone was weeping* *But the world was sleeping* *Any dream will do* *I wore my coat, with golden lining* *Bright colours shining, wonderful and new* *And in the east, the dawn was breaking* *And the world was waking* *Any dream will do*	*A crash of drums, a flash of light* *My golden coat flew out of sight* *The colours faded into darkness* *I was left alone* *May I return to the beginning* *The light is dimming, and the dream is too* *The world and I, we are still waiting* *Still hesitating* *Any dream will do*
Give me my coloured coat, my amazing coloured coat; *Give me my coloured coat, my amazing coloured coat.*	

- Even a superficial background study into the other works of Rice and Lloyd-Weber will immediately draw one's attention to another of their rock operas, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In that musical, Christ is depicted as a well-meaning but bewildered individual, thrust into unexpected leadership that he really does not know how to handle. The only person in this rock opera who understands reality is Judas Iscariot! How can the authors of such a travesty ever be considered to have produced in *Joseph* anything other than a compelling, imaginative lie?

Music and the performing arts are wonderful and powerful imaginative gifts that God has given to humanity. The glorious value of this divine gift has been underappreciated in some Christian circles, whilst it has been emotionally commercialized in others. These gifts can be used affectively and cognitively to bring us closer to God and to celebrate his goodness and character, or they can distort reality and be used to worship and serve the creature rather than the creator (Romans 1:25). According the Bible, these are the only two alternatives. Take your pick.

The Imaginative Artwork of Thomas Kinkade

Thomas Kinkade lived in the USA, from 1958 until his untimely death in 2012. He was a self-confessed Christian universalist who painted and franchised popular, idyllic scenes. His Disney-linked paintings, including Cinderella's castle, are globally recognized, and his works hang in millions of American homes. His personal life had its controversies (alcoholism, business problems and divorce).

Kinkade called himself a "Painter of Light.' Rather than painting photo-like images of reality, he liked to imagine and then paint nostalgic, perfected scenes where trouble and disturbing concepts are removed from one's visage, as in the samples in Figure 4. Once again, we find ourselves asking the important question, "Is this artistic imagination a faithful representation of God's created reality and the CFRF biblical metanarrative?"

Figure 4

Leading Christian art critic Dan Siedell has attempted to put the imagination of the artist in a biblical context. He comments as follows:

> Too often Christian approaches to art and culture tend to deny this [human] frailty, the experience of fragmentation and loss. The classical artist entered the studio to serve the public, fulfilling a commission from the church or the state. But the modern artist enters the studio to deal with his own self and hopes that this struggle, which can never be separated from a struggle with God and the world, can address the struggle of those outside the studio. If classical art addresses the

> viewer as a member of a vibrant and powerful religious or political community, modern art addresses the viewer as a vulnerable wanderer, a son or daughter of Cain who fears both God and neighbor. (2015, p.2)

Siedell possesses a reformational worldview, informed by Jamie Smith's more recent encouragement to recognize the affective and the liturgical aspects of belief. In bringing this holistic (as opposed to a purely intellectual) understanding to the world of art, Siedell (2014) offers a critique of Kinkade's work. His evaluation may be controversial, but it is worthy of serious consideration as we consider the visual arts and imagination:

> It is inevitable, as an art historian and a theologian of culture, that in attempting to follow St. Paul and take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10: 5), I run the risk of over-interpretation, finding theological significance under every aesthetic and cultural rock, some of which might better be kept unturned. Yet it is a risk I am willing to take.
>
> Visual images, including works of art, are not passive and harmless. They exert their presence, demand recognition, and shape us, whether or not we are aware of it. They do so because they are aesthetic artifacts of human intentionality, bringing us in relationship to embodied thought, feeling, and action.
>
> I suggest[ed] that Kinkade's quaint and nostalgic images, as pleasant as they seem to be, are dangerous, offering a comfortable world that silences the two words with which God speaks to us (law and gospel). These images seem to say, the world isn't so bad, faith isn't so hard, grace therefore not so desperately sought... Kinkade's desire to depict a world before the fall is Christ-less Christianity in paint. (2012. p.2)

IMPLICATIONS OF A REDEEMED IMAGINATION FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING

What follows are twelve discussion points for Christian schools raised by the imagination perspective presented in this article. Each one is worthy of further discussion and critique by stakeholders in Christian school communities.

1. <u>There is such a thing as a Christian Imagination.</u> Imagination is not inherently evil – it is a part of the very character of God that he has graciously gifted to humanity. The responsibility of Christian school communities, as they nurture children with the challenge of the Lordship of Christ over all creation, is to explore every subject – including the way imagination contributes to every key learning area – from a biblically faithful worldview or metanarrative perspective. Applying this perspective in a musical imaginative context, DeMol (1999) suggests the following:

   > Music itself is a cultural product, something humankind has made with the materials God provides. Music is a conscious and deliberate (and therefore creaturely) shaping of sound, for which we are responsible. (DeMol, 19991, p.5)

2. <u>Celebrate the Imagination and the Aesthetic – Do not allow school curricula to be</u>

swamped by economic rationalism and its prioritization of STEM. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are important subjects, but they are not the sum of the curriculum. When communities allow an economic rationalist perspective to dominate the curriculum space to the degree that aesthetic subjects are squeezed out, or imaginative approaches to subjects are replaced by cerebral "teach-to-the-exam" routines, we are practicing an idolatrous pre-emptive capitulation that is detrimental to our students and detrimental to the vibrancy of our wider culture. Just as every child learns about science and arithmetic, so every child should learn about and practise age-specific music and the performing arts. They also should be allowed to explore key learning areas in contextualized, real-world settings that recognize the value of testing regimes, but are not artificially controlled by standardized testing.

3. Allow Imagination to Permeate One's Content Material and Pedagogy. If, in fact, imagination is a part of the character of God that he has given to human beings, then as teachers we should feel liberated enough to allow the surprise of imagination to adorn our content material and our pedagogy. Furthermore, our own learning experience tells us that when our teachers (either parents at home or educators at school) balance trusted nurture with the imaginative and joyful surprise of the unexpected, the potential for meaningful learning increases enormously. For example, Seerveld encourages teachers to apply imagination and contextualized, delightful inquisition to their questioning techniques as a rich appropriation of imagination into their classrooms:

> A leading question playfully initiates guidance and moves a student from a position of rest to new activity, into the agitated, troublesome condition of struggling to apprehend what is not yet obvious... Illustrations, metaphors, wit, dramatizations and comic relief are all [imaginative] ingredients proper to teaching that operates in God's world where reality is bursting with good news and where aesthetic life is an opening lever to move a student's resident knowledge and competence to reach out for new things. (Seerveld, 1980, p. 148)

The imagination-filled joy of learning among students is enhanced when accompanied by the imagination-filled joy of teaching among teachers as they practice their craft. David Smith (2018), in his encouragement of biblically faithful and creative pedagogies, makes the same point.

4. Music and the performing arts, like all other subjects, are religiously committed. Gloria Stronks (2014) comments that, "A deep appreciation of the world around us, of music, of art, or of poetry will not make one become a Christian. But Christians who have developed a knowledge and appreciation of these aspects find that their faith deepens because they have richer ways of responding to their Creator." In the Christian school, these subjects should be taught by knowledgeable and skilled Christian men and women should have the aim, through their subjects, of challenging students with a celebration of the Lordship of Christ over all creation. These teachers will recognize that, in one fundamental sense, there is no such thing as a division between "Christian" music or art and "secular" music or art, since all art and music represent a person's heart response to life and its creator. Music and art, of any genre or type,

represents a faithful or distorted view of God's world. It is all religious, and like all key learning areas, should be critiqued and learned as such by Christian teachers and their students.

5. These subjects, again like all others, are both reflections and shapers of culture. In a Christian school, imagination and the musical and performing arts should be taught in such a way as to increase one's understanding of culture and to enhance one's ability to shape culture in fruitful, God-honoring ways. Several decades ago, Frank Gaebelein (1962) commented as follows:

   > The great principle, no Christian education without Christian teachers, applies just as much to the school musician as it does to the academic teacher. No one who does not love music and know it at first hand can teach it with full effectiveness. No teacher of music in a Christian school or college, Bible institute, seminary, or church who is not himself a regenerated person, knowing through commitment of heart and life the living Lord, can [fully] teach music as an integral part of God's truth. Music is a demanding art. To achieve excellence in it requires hard discipline and unremitting work. Yet with all his devotion to it, a Christian musician must keep his priorities clear. God is the source of all talent. When He gives talent, including musical talent, He gives it, not to be made an idol of, but to be used to His glory... Music is indeed a great gift but it is the Giver, not the gift, who must have the first place in the teaching and practice of music in Christian education.

6. The perspective of a comprehensive biblical metanarrative is vital. Imagination-rich learning, reflecting a biblically authentic worldview based upon a CFRF approach or its various useful extensions as advocated by biblical scholars such as Thompson (2005) and others, can provide children with a realistic but hope-filled understanding of the world and their places and task in it under the authority of a just and loving Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer God (Hebrews 1:3). As Kropp commented some decades ago, imagination, "[and] the visual arts are a way of serving God... Christians are called to use these special gifts and activities to proclaim the gospel which includes the despair and distortion of sin as well as the love and grace of God" (1977, p. 88)"

7. Learning about aesthetic subjects should be rigorous, not some "fill-in" activity late on Friday afternoon. Art and music are products of the informed imagination. Art is made to be viewed; music is made to be performed. School curricula and timetabling should allow for art and music's investigation and celebration at both the intellectual and the emotional level.

   A celebration of imagination in the Christian school should not be compromised by second-class scholarship. A rigorous examination of curriculum patterns and materials is necessary to avoid situations such as that surrounding the ill-considered adoption by some Christian schools of Lloyd-Weber and Rice's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* as a purported example of Christian imagination.

   But rigor and delightful creative expression are not enemies. A careful investigation into imaginative art, music, acting, and literature should co-exist with a playful, hands-on interaction by children with creative expression, and the display of such works on classroom walls, in school magazines, and in musical performances and science fairs. Roques describes an example of this whereby children in a French language class

wrote and performed a drama in French, that was entertaining, full of imagination, and exhilarating, "where children who normally claim to hate French [were] loving it" (Roques, 1989, p.147).

8. Intellectual aspects of imagination in music and the performing arts could be nurtured by surrounding students with examples of imaginative works. In terms of art, for example, Stronks (2014) recommends that prints of selected artists be hung in Christian school classrooms. She suggests the following:

Grade Level	Artist / Art Works
Kinder	Pieter Bruegel—The Adoration of the Kings, Peasant Wedding, A Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap
1	Johannes Vermeer—The Girl with a Pearl Earring
2	Vincent Van Gogh—Starry Night, Bedroom at Arles, Portrait of Artist
3	Georgia O'Keeffe—Red Poppy, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Red Canna
4	Rembrandt van Rijn—Self-Portrait, The Prodigal Son, The Night Watch Kathe Kollwitz—Loving Kindness Grant Wood—American Gothic
5	Claude Monet—Morning Haze, Marine Near Etretat, Lily Pond Pablo Picasso—Guernica, Three Musicians, The Three Dancers, Self Portrait: Yo Picasso, The Old Guitarist
6	Leonardo da Vinci—The Last Supper, Mona Lisa, Madonna and Child Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec—Portrait of Vincent Van Gogh, Moulin-Rouge, The Jockey
7	Marc Chagall —Over Vitebsk, The Violinist, The Praying Jew, I and the Village Paul Klee—Fish Magic, Around the Fish, Landscape with Yellow Birds
8	Salvadore Dali—The Persistence of Memory, Crucifixion, The Sacrament of the Last Supper Andy Warhol—Campbell's Soup Can, 100 Soup Cans, Money Kathe Kollwitz—Lamentation

At senior levels, Stronks quotes Van Wyk, by suggesting that more controversial works be shared with students:

> Add more difficult and controversial works for the older kids, such as works by Jackson Pollack and the other abstract expressionists. Also, add nihilist works such as those by Duchamp and the pop/conceptual works of artists in the 60s and 70s, such as Andy Warhol, Marc Hanson, and George Segal that are more of a social critique. We want students to realize that contemporary people don't all live among flowers and that they don't all acknowledge God's grace in this world. This would give teachers a chance to talk about common grace and realize that Christian and non-Christians alike produce

beautiful/truthful things for us to contemplate and put in proper perspective. (Stronks, 2014)

We might add the often complex and stark works of Edvard Munch, (the scream), Breugel, and Picasso to Stronks' list.

9. Construct an annotated list of appropriate music and visual arts artifacts/productions suitable for the Christian school. This could be done in conjunction with like-minded teachers from other Christian schools, and made available to all Christian schools as a vital service to them.

10. Find linkages with other Subjects. Every history teachers requires students to exhibit good grammar and sentence structure in their exploration and written discussion of history. Conversely, every English teacher requires some content material to teach grammar, clear paragraphing. Progressive schools often construct integral curriculum patterns to allow complementary key learning areas to benefit from this holistic realization. Blomberg (2007) artfully encourages Christian educators to adopt an integral approach. For their part, teachers of visual and performing arts can enhance students' learning and enrich imaginative instruction by cooperating with teachers of other key learning areas and approaching skills and content instruction in a manner that enables the visual arts to enhance other areas of learning – and vice versa.

    Good pedagogy will ensure that children's imaginations are full of how any one particular area of study fits within God's greater creation picture. Seerveld reflects this concept plus the idea of "the teachable moment" when he says,

    > Christian teaching will be ever ready to clarify how newly found matters fit into the whole configuration of what one is about, and will sketch the outline joining the pieces together with a sense of dramatic timing to get maximum exposure for the truth and to reinforce the cohering vision precisely when it is most critical for the little one who is learning. (Seerveld, 1980, p. 149)

    The possibilities are endless, as in the French example from Roques referred to earlier. As another example, science classes can be enhanced by using artistic imagination to diagram relationships or illustrate concepts or actual environments. Roper (1980, p.161) reminds us that home economics is concerned not just about how to make palatable products for eating and drinking, but it requires vision and imagination to create foods that look interesting, and which appeal to the culturally bound aesthetic of taste preferences. Steensma and van Brummelen make a similar point on a broader level:

    > To do justice to the study of a culture or historical era in social studies for example, one must study its art forms, including the visual arts, music and architecture. A literary work related to a particular culture or historical period makes such phenomena real because it portrays life. The aesthetic condition of our environment should be one of the concerns in our science and geography programs. (Steensma and van Brummelen, 1977, p. 75)

Imagine what this might mean in the social-media saturated landscape of children and adolescents living in the 21st century!

11. Don't restrict imagination to the visual and performing arts. It's interesting to note that in Genesis 2:9. When God made trees, the imaginative God did not just have utility in mind. He also created vegetation with the aesthetic very much as a part of his creative activity. "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that *were pleasing to the eye* and good for food" (Genesis 2:9 NIV). Earlier we saw imagination being used as a tool of the devil. In its primary creation sense however, we see it as a divine delight. Imagination and the aesthetic are wonderful tools that God has given us to use in the exploration of every aspect of his world. All key learning areas can be enriched by the use of them. For example, Meyer (2015) has demonstrated how judiciously applied imagination improves student learning even in the abstract area of electrical physics.

11. Use a Sanctified Imagination to view pedagogy differently. Research by Cooling and Green (2015) confirms the "Essence of Christian Schooling" survey conducted by Edlin among dozens of Christian teachers in Australasia. In both of these studies, the overwhelming majority of teachers in Christian schools imagine that the primary relationship between their Christian faith and their teaching is in the area of interpersonal relationships, and so-called "spiritual matters" such as Bible memorization and personal salvation issues. These things are important, but the Christian school is not a church. Done properly and imaginatively, Christian school education within the subject areas themselves will challenge students with the hope-filled wonder of God and his world. As David says in Psalm 19, "the heavens declare the creator's glory."

Modern Christian teachers need to be encouraged to imagine their vocation differently – to see the worldview assumptions of education in general, the context of learning, and the very nature of the subjects they teach, as being deeply religious. There is no such thing as a valid division between faith-based schooling and non-faith-based schools. All schools are faith-based in that they work out from convictions about what makes for good education. All schools have student outcomes in mind, that reflect a certain set of beliefs about the world and our places and tasks in it. This applies as much to the secular religious school as it does to the Christian or the Muslim school. In this sense, as Edlin (2014, 2017) explains in more detail elsewhere, there is no neutrality. All schools are religious schools. A Christian school will confess that because of common grace, its pedagogy has some commonalities with a secular approach, but at its hearts and in its goals, practices and outcomes, a Christian pedagogy will also be distinctively different. An awareness of this reality and the re-imagined exploration of a biblically authentic worldview in teacher professional development is essential for Christian schools to be true to their calling of challenging students with a celebration of the Lordship of Christ over all of creation.

Consequently, Cooling and Green's "What if" approach to pedagogy encourages Christian teachers to explore the meaning of their faith in the classroom not just in the classical "spiritual" areas, but in their fundamental educational assumptions and practices as well. Thus, for example, language instruction should not select content and contexts which assume that the primary reason for learning a foreign language is to be a more self-fulfilled tourist, but will have the biblical concept of service to the stranger in mind.

CONCLUSION

As Rajaram Bojji unwittingly confessed regarding the Konkan railway, imagination is an aspect of the very character of God that he has wonderfully chosen to endow upon humanity when he made us in his own image. Every aspect of life is touched by it. The young couple in love become engaged as they look forward to (i.e. imagine) a future life together. The grandmother and daughter play morning tea, pouring imaginary hot tea into imaginary cups, and drinking it down with satisfying slurps and gulps. The architect listens to the priorities of town planners and imagines what their desires might look like in specific geographic settings, and draws up blueprints accordingly. The author, the poet, and the playwright all try to give expression in various forms to the imaginations of their minds. Railway engineers like Bojji imagine possibilities for overcoming geographic challenges to railway construction and design incredible constructions (like the Panval viaduct) accordingly. Science teachers create imaginary models to explain principles and aspects of reality invisible to the naked eye. Musical directors choreograph dances to complement musical scores. Pious Christians, in daily prayer, have a biblically informed imagination of the just and merciful nature of their heavenly father to whom they are praying. Imagination is everywhere. Imagination – a divine delight. Let our classrooms in every subject be rigorous, and also imaginatively laden with "aesthetically pregnant" (Seerveld, 1980, p.150) possibilities.

But imagination has often been a tool of the devil. In our contemporary world imagination is distorted and marred by sin. When left to its own deluded devices, imagination emanating from sinful human hearts, minds and hands leads to selfish delusion, despair and idolatry. One evening spent analyzing the advertising on television is enough to convince us of that.

We sin in our imaginations, as Jesus reminds us concerning adultery in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:28). We are all God-seekers, but in our fallen state we imagine God in our own image to suit our distorted desires. Therefore, the surprise and anticipation of creative imagination in the Christian school classroom will be tempered by the gentle, guiding hand of the teacher, consistent with the school's mission statements and graduate attributes. Despite its joyful adoption of imagination, the Christian school does not countenance unrestrained creativity which, because of the Fall, tends toward self-centered anarchy and a distorted understanding of the world.

In Christ however, all things are made new. Through the imagination, we can empathise with others, and an imagination shaped by the Lordship of Christ provides direction for a biblically faithful worldview and educational practice.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, a redeemed imagination forms a foundation for Christian witness and cultural engagement. According to Gene Veith, C. S. Lewis created the Narnia tales specifically with the power of the imagination in mind, to overcome pagan imaginings about God:

> Lewis says that part of his goal in writing The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is to present Christian truths through an imaginary world, in the hopes that they will

> steal past the 'watchful dragons' of the mind which try to keep out these truths... He's still pointing to the actual gospel in real life. It's a great example of imaginative apologetics. Lewis is a master of both rational and imaginative apologetics, and made them work together. (Block, 2014)

Imagination, in the visual and performing arts and in every area of life, can be used to honor and serve God, or to honor and serve a god-substitute. There is no other alternative. A God-honoring imagination is a vital component of Christian schooling. When brought under the Lordship of Christ, and when explored with playful passion and rigor in both a recreational and an academic sense, a redeemed imagination enriches life, declares God's glory, and draws us closer to our Creator. Van Brummelen sums up a redeemed imagination in the following manner:

> [Imagination and] the arts often affect our lives more directly than scientific formulas or economic theories. They enrich life through joy, delight, playfulness, and creativity. They can change and enhance the way we see ourselves, others, our society, and the purpose and meaning of life. They affect our perspectives by symbolically presenting points of view in aesthetically striking ways. They stimulate us to investigate the perspectives and values of others. We discover some of life's possibilities through [them]. They may lead to the surprise and wonder that enrich life. (Van Brummelen, 2012, p.213)

Christian educators who nurture children from the perspective of a godly, hope-filled imagination, should inspire their students to soar above the limitations of youngsters' own limited and frail-filled experience as these young people begin to dream about how God sees them, and the place and tasks he has for them in the world. This puts flesh on the bones when we legitimately claim for our Christian communities God's promise through Jeremiah to his flawed people in exile: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11). Imperfect teachers, led by a Christ-centered imagination, can help students imagine in their own developing understanding of the world what it means to know Christ, and "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

It is in this light that a Christ-honoring, hope-filled imagination, nurtured in every aspect of the life of the Christian school, can celebrate Paul's claim (Ephesians 3:20) that God, by his power within us, and to his glory, is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or imagine" as we live purposeful lives for him.

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