

CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA: DEVELOPING A VISIONARY AND TRANSFORMATIVE MINISTRY MODEL

Alexander Situmorang

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Providensia

Email: alexanderstumorang62@gmail.com

Elis Louisa Ay

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Providensia

Email: elis.louisa@gmail.com

Abstract

The era of globalization presents both significant challenges and opportunities for church leadership. Rapid technological, cultural, and social changes are reshaping church life, compelling leaders to adopt visionary and transformative ministry models. This research aims to develop a leadership framework rooted in biblical values while remaining responsive to contemporary global dynamics. Using a qualitative descriptive method with literature analysis, the study identifies essential leadership characteristics: visionary, transformative, creative, communicative, and empowering. The findings reveal that churches need leaders capable of integrating theological reflection with strategic action, utilizing technology, and fostering spiritual maturity within congregations. The study concludes that a visionary and transformative leadership model is essential for churches to maintain their relevance and mission impact in the globalization era.

Keywords: Church Leadership, Globalization, Transformative Ministry, Visionary Leadership

Introduction

Globalization has become an unstoppable force that affects every aspect of human life, including religious and spiritual communities. In the contemporary world, churches no longer operate within isolated, homogeneous societies but are actively engaged in dynamic, pluralistic, and interconnected environments. Rapid advancements in technology, shifting cultural values, and the rise of individualism and materialism have significantly reshaped societal structures. As a result, church leadership must adapt to these changes while remaining faithful to biblical truth.¹ This context demands a fresh examination of how church leaders can effectively minister in an era marked by the profound influence of globalization.

Church leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity, relevance, and mission of the church. Without visionary and transformative leaders, churches risk becoming stagnant, irrelevant, or even losing their theological identity amidst the cultural tides of globalization. Therefore, this topic is significant as it addresses the urgent need for leadership models capable of

¹ Anthony Hatcher, "Review of: When Religion Meets New Media, by Heidi A. Campbell" (Taylor & Francis, 2016). 110

navigating complex global realities while preserving spiritual authenticity.² Churches that fail to anticipate and respond wisely to global challenges will struggle to fulfill its calling in society.

In recent years, numerous scholars and theologians have examined leadership paradigms in various religious contexts. Studies have emphasized the importance of transformational leadership, visionary leadership in ministry, and the role of digital technology in religious life. The rise of global digital culture has also led to new discussions about religious authority, leadership authenticity, and the integration of technology in ministry practices. Existing research highlights the essential qualities of effective church leaders, such as being visionary, communicative, and spiritually grounded, while also addressing contemporary social issues.³ Future leadership models must therefore embody both theological fidelity and contextual adaptability, ensuring the church remains a relevant, prophetic, and transformative presence in the modern world

Despite these valuable contributions, a significant gap remains in providing an integrated model of church leadership specifically designed for the globalization era. Much of the current discourse focuses either on secular leadership theories or isolated aspects of church leadership without offering a comprehensive, biblically grounded, and contextually relevant framework. Moreover, limited attention has been given to leadership models that not only respond to technological and cultural changes but also empower congregations and foster transformative ministry.

This research seeks to fill that gap by developing a leadership framework that is both visionary and transformative, rooted in biblical principles, yet responsive to the demands of the globalized context. The primary aim of this study is to propose a practical and theological leadership model for churches to navigate the complexities of the 21st century effectively. By identifying key leadership qualities- visionary, transformative, creative, communicative- the study offers a blueprint for church leaders to enhance ministry relevance while upholding their spiritual mission.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining theological reflection, leadership theory, and analysis of global cultural trends to produce a leadership model tailored for contemporary church life. This study contributes not only to the field of ecclesiastical leadership studies but also offers practical guidance for church communities seeking to thrive amid globalization's challenges.

Method

This research applies a qualitative descriptive methodology, using a literature-based approach to examine church leadership models in the context of globalization. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in theological and ecclesiastical studies because they facilitate an in-depth exploration of values, beliefs, and socio-cultural factors shaping leadership practices within the church. As John W. Creswell observes, qualitative inquiry offers a nuanced perspective on intricate

² Amos Yong, "Renewing Global Christianity," *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology--A Chinese Perspective*, 2020, 190.

³ Rudy Pramono and Lorens Manuputy, "The Challenge of Church Leaders with the Decline of Youth Spirituality during the Period of the Society 5.0 Revolution," 2025. 112-125

religious and social dynamics by providing detailed, context-sensitive interpretations.⁴ The design of this study involves systematically collecting, organizing, and analyzing textual data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of biblical texts, theological literature, and official ecclesiastical documents on leadership. Secondary sources include scholarly books, journals, and reputable online resources that discuss leadership theory, globalization, and the use of digital media in ministry contexts.

Furthermore, the methodological framework is guided by qualitative research strategies outlined by Sharan B. Merriam, who underscores the value of rich, descriptive data and interpretive analysis for exploring meaning in social and organizational contexts.⁵ Merriam's framework ensures that this study remains contextually sensitive and analytically rigorous as it interprets leadership models and ministry challenges within contemporary church life.

The data collection process identifies key themes such as visionary leadership, transformational ministry, congregational empowerment, and the strategic use of technology in ministry. These thematic categories provide a structure for organizing the literature and highlighting both existing strengths and gaps in the available models of church leadership.

Content analysis of selected texts reveals patterns, concepts, and theological principles that can inform the development of an adaptive leadership framework. This analysis is further integrated with a theological reflection model that correlates biblical teachings on leadership with contemporary leadership theories and the pressing challenges posed by globalization.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute both to the academic discourse on church leadership and to provide practical guidance for ministry leaders confronting rapid social and technological change. The integration of qualitative inquiry with theological analysis produces a leadership framework that is both contextually relevant and theologically grounded.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that globalization has significantly reshaped the landscape of church leadership, posing both opportunities and challenges for ministry in the 21st century. Through a qualitative literature review and content analysis of relevant theological and leadership texts, four central leadership models emerged as crucial for contemporary church ministry: visionary, transformational, communicative, and empowering leadership. These leadership styles collectively offer a biblically grounded and contextually responsive approach to addressing the complexities of ministry in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

Definition

Globalization in Term, Definition, and History

The term globalization refers to the process by which economies, societies, and cultures become increasingly interconnected and interdependent on a global scale. Evolving from early

⁴ John W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th Ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018). 80-89

⁵ Sharan B & Elizabeth J. Tisdell Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016). 45-50

trade routes and migration patterns, globalization today encompasses complex dynamics in technology, politics, finance, communication, and culture. Scholars in recent years emphasize not only its economic dimensions but also its cultural, religious, and digital implications, reflecting a broader understanding of globalization's reach in the 21st century.

In a recent study, Gauthier defines globalization as “a multi-dimensional phenomenon involving the intensification of global social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”⁶ This definition underscores the dynamic reciprocity between local and global forces, a characteristic that shapes contemporary religious and cultural landscapes.

The historical development of globalization can be traced to ancient transcontinental interactions, such as the Silk Road and early maritime trade. However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a significant acceleration due to technological revolutions in transportation, digital communication, and the internet.⁷ The post-2015 era has particularly seen a dramatic increase in digital globalization, with social media platforms and digital commerce transcending traditional geopolitical boundaries.⁸ For churches and faith-based institutions, the globalized era presents both opportunities and challenges. While it allows for broader missional outreach and intercultural dialogue, it also demands critical reflection on how to maintain theological integrity and cultural relevance amid rapid societal transformations. The role of visionary leadership becomes vital in this context, equipping church leaders to anticipate future developments, communicate compelling, biblically grounded visions, and leverage technological advancements in faithful, ethically responsible ways.

In sum, understanding globalization's terminology, history, and evolving dynamics is indispensable for church leaders and scholars who seek to responsibly engage a rapidly changing global landscape while remaining anchored in enduring spiritual values. Future research should continue examining the theological, ethical, and missiological implications of globalization to foster resilient, transformative Christian communities in an increasingly interconnected world.

Within this context, globalization poses both opportunities and challenges for religious communities, especially Christian churches operating across national and cultural lines. The rise of religious pluralism, migration, and online faith communities requires church leaders to navigate new ethical, missional, and theological complexities. Understanding the terminology, historical background, and evolving definitions of globalization is essential for addressing these realities in ways that are faithful to biblical principles while responsive to contemporary contexts.⁹ Understanding the terminology, historical background, and evolving definitions of globalization is essential for addressing contemporary realities in ways that remain faithful to biblical principles

⁶ François Gauthier, *Religion, Modernity, Globalisation: Nation-State to Market* (Taylor & Francis, 2020). 100-110

⁷ Don Kalb, “Value and Worthlessness,” *Value and Worthlessness*, 2025.

⁸ Nakhi Mishol-Shauli, *Orthodoxy in the Digital Age: Social Media Use and Identity Dialectics in Jewish Ultra-Orthodoxy* (University of Haifa (Israel), 2021). 210

⁹ Rodrigo Otavio Serrao Santana De Jesus, “Winning ‘Americans’ for Jesus?: Second-Generation, Racial Ideology, and the Future of the Brazilian Evangelical Church in the US,” n.d.

while being responsive to the demands of an increasingly interconnected world. As globalization continues to reshape cultural, social, and religious landscapes, church leaders must equip themselves with a nuanced awareness of its dynamics and implications. This knowledge enables leaders to engage emerging ethical, theological, and missional challenges thoughtfully and courageously.

Moreover, the globalized era, characterized by religious pluralism, digital interconnectedness, and the rapid migration of peoples and ideas, presents both significant opportunities and profound challenges for Christian communities. To remain relevant and transformative, churches must critically reflect on their theological frameworks and pastoral strategies, ensuring they are grounded in Scripture yet adaptable to shifting global contexts. Recent scholarship underscores the importance of cultivating leaders who can navigate these

Leader, Leadership, and Christian Leadership

In organizational and social contexts, the term leader generally refers to an individual who exercises influence over others, guiding them toward the achievement of shared objectives. Leaders are characterized not merely by formal authority but also by the ability to inspire, motivate, and direct the behaviors and attitudes of their followers. Raelin defines a leader as an individual who influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal, emphasizing both interpersonal influence and the presence of shared aspirations.¹⁰ In various fields, leaders are acknowledged for their capacity to effect change, provide direction, and foster a sense of purpose within groups or organizations.

Leadership, by extension, denotes the process by which an individual influences a group to achieve predetermined goals. Leadership is not confined to positional authority but involves relational dynamics, strategic thinking, and ethical guidance. Contemporary leadership theory has expanded beyond traditional hierarchical models, incorporating participative, transformational, and servant leadership paradigms. Rothwell describes leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.¹¹ Effective leadership is, therefore, multidimensional, integrating vision, communication, and action within various organizational contexts.

In theological and ecclesiastical settings, Christian leadership encompasses these general leadership principles but is distinctly shaped by biblical values, Christ-centered mission, and spiritual discernment. Christian leadership is fundamentally the practice of leading others by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. It seeks not only organizational effectiveness but also spiritual growth, communal unity, and the advancement of God's kingdom. Banks and Ledbetter emphasize that Christian leadership is a dynamic, relational process in which people, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, influence others using Christlike character and service to accomplish

¹⁰ Joseph A Raelin, "Leadership-as-Practice: Theory and Application—An Editor's Reflection," *Leadership* 13, no. 2 (2017): 215–218.

¹¹ William J Rothwell, Behnam Bakhshandeh, and Aileen G Zaballero, *Successful Supervisory Leadership: Exerting Positive Influence While Leading People* (Productivity Press, 2023).

God's purposes in the world.¹² In this sense, Christian leaders prioritize servanthood, integrity, humility, and a commitment to scriptural authority in their leadership practice.

Moreover, Christian leadership is distinct for its theological and missional dimensions. Leaders in the church are entrusted not only with managing programs or directing human resources but with shepherding communities toward spiritual maturity and faithful witness in the world. As globalization and technological change reshape societal structures, Christian leadership must remain vigilant in maintaining gospel-centered priorities while engaging meaningfully with contemporary challenges. Scholars like Daughrity (2020) affirm the necessity of equipping Christian leaders to navigate increasingly pluralistic, interconnected societies with theological clarity and ethical courage.¹³ Thus, Christian leadership is integrative, balancing practical competencies with spiritual formation and missional vision.

In conclusion, while the concepts of leader and leadership share universal traits across contexts, Christian leadership is distinguished by its grounding in biblical principles, Christlike character, and a transformative vision rooted in God's redemptive work in the world.

Visionary Leadership in a Globalized Era

In the context of the 21st century, visionary leadership has become an essential attribute for church leaders navigating the complexities of globalization. As the world continues to experience rapid technological advancements, cultural shifts, and interconnectedness, church leaders must not only respond to these changes but also cast a forward-looking vision that remains faithful to biblical principles while addressing contemporary challenges. Visionary leadership is pivotal in helping churches maintain relevance, mission clarity, and spiritual vitality amid the globalized world's diverse influences.

Globalization, with its extensive impact on societal, cultural, and technological aspects of life, has fundamentally altered the church's role and operation in communities worldwide. In particular, the proliferation of digital technologies, migration patterns, and the global exchange of ideas have reshaped how churches engage with their congregants and the larger world.¹⁴ As such, church leaders today are expected to guide their communities through these transformations by providing a clear, biblically grounded vision that unites believers across cultures, languages, and socio-political contexts. This vision becomes essential in fostering spiritual growth, community cohesion, and missional engagement. As the church adapts to these transformations, it remains anchored in the timeless truth of the gospel while embracing innovative methods to connect, inspire, and lead its congregants to pursue that vision, and use both traditional and modern tools to engage their communities. As globalization continues to evolve, visionary leaders will be tasked with navigating the complexities of an interconnected world while remaining faithful to their

¹² Robert J & Bernice M Ledbetter Banks, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches*, 3rd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book Academy, 2016). 320-325

¹³ Dyron B Daughrity, "Christ and Culture: A Global Perspective," n.d.

¹⁴ Heidi A Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority* (Routledge, 2020).

mission of proclaiming the gospel to all nations.¹⁵ In facing the realities of globalization and the rapid transformation of cultural, technological, and social landscapes, church leadership must embrace both theological depth and contextual agility. Visionary leaders are urgently needed to navigate the complexities of a highly interconnected and pluralistic world while remaining steadfast in the mission of proclaiming the gospel to all nations. The integration of digital culture, migration, and global idea exchange has redefined how churches engage with their communities, making it imperative for leaders to cultivate authenticity, spiritual integrity, and cultural sensitivity. Ultimately, the future vitality and relevance of the church in a globalized era depend on the ability of its leaders to faithfully steward their calling amidst constant change.

Transformational Leadership for Congregational Empowerment

In the rapidly evolving social and cultural landscape of the 21st century, churches are challenged to remain faithful to biblical principles while simultaneously responding to the complex needs of their communities. One leadership model increasingly recognized for its capacity to inspire meaningful change and communal resilience is transformational leadership. This leadership approach emphasizes personal development, organizational vision, and cultural engagement, making it particularly effective for congregational empowerment in a globalized and pluralistic world.

Transformational leadership, originally conceptualized by Daugherty, involves leaders who inspire, challenge, and motivate followers to exceed their interests for the sake of the collective mission.¹⁶ In a church context, this model is especially valuable because it prioritizes spiritual growth, relational unity, and missional involvement, essential elements for congregational vitality. Recent studies have demonstrated that transformational leadership not only enhances organizational performance but also fosters stronger congregational engagement and spiritual formation. Meaning recent studies affirm that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in the life of the contemporary church by not only improving organizational effectiveness but also deepening congregational engagement and fostering spiritual formation. By inspiring a shared vision, nurturing personal relationships, and equipping believers for active participation in ministry, transformational leaders cultivate church communities that are spiritually vibrant, missionally focused, and resilient in the face of cultural and societal changes. This leadership model offers a biblically grounded and contextually relevant framework for empowering congregations to thrive in an increasingly complex and globalized world.

A key aspect of transformational leadership is vision casting. Church leaders must articulate a clear, compelling vision that resonates with both biblical truth and contemporary realities. This vision serves as a unifying force, guiding the congregation through cultural, social, and technological changes. Research indicates that churches led by transformational leaders experience higher levels of congregational cohesion and community involvement.¹⁷ This is crucial

¹⁵ Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Future Faith: Ten Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century*, vol. 1 (Fortress Press, 2018).

¹⁶ Daugherty, "Christ and Culture: A Global Perspective."

¹⁷ JOSÉ LUIS PÉREZ GUADALUPE, "Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America," n.d.

in an age marked by individualism, secularism, and cultural fragmentation, where people increasingly seek communities that provide meaning, belonging, and purpose.

Another crucial dimension of transformational leadership is personalized care and discipleship. Transformational leaders invest in the individual well-being and spiritual development of their congregants. By empowering members through mentoring, leadership training, and pastoral care, churches cultivate a culture where members actively contribute to the mission of the church. Scholars note that such leadership practices have resulted in enhanced volunteerism, deeper discipleship pathways, and increased retention rates within church communities.

The integration of digital technology into ministry is also a vital aspect of transformational leadership in today's globalized environment. Leaders must not only adopt new tools but also critically engage with the implications of digital ministry for spiritual formation and community building. Transformational leaders leverage technology to extend the church's mission beyond physical gatherings, creating opportunities for virtual fellowship, online discipleship programs, and digital outreach initiatives. A 2020 study found that congregations utilizing digital platforms under transformational leadership experienced growth in both online engagement and in-person participation post-pandemic restrictions.¹⁸ This hybrid approach has become a model for sustainable, mission-oriented church life in the digital age.

Furthermore, transformational leadership addresses the challenges posed by globalization, such as the rise of religious pluralism, declining institutional loyalty, and shifting cultural norms. Rather than retreating from these realities, transformational leaders engage them with wisdom and theological discernment. They foster inclusive, adaptable congregational environments that remain rooted in the gospel while welcoming diverse perspectives and backgrounds. According to recent research, churches adopting transformational leadership strategies have demonstrated resilience in the face of cultural tensions and have maintained high levels of community trust and relevance. Transformational leaders foster inclusive and adaptable congregational environments that stay firmly grounded in the gospel while embracing the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds present in today's globalized society. Recent research highlights that churches implementing transformational leadership strategies are better equipped to navigate cultural tensions, maintain unity amidst diversity, and sustain high levels of community trust and societal relevance.¹⁹ This approach not only ensures the church's faithful witness but also positions it as a vital, compassionate presence within an ever-changing world.

Thus, transformational leadership provides a robust and dynamic model for congregational empowerment in the contemporary era. By focusing on visionary leadership, personalized care, technological integration, and cultural engagement, church leaders can navigate the complexities of globalization while remaining faithful to their theological convictions. As churches continue to serve increasingly diverse and interconnected communities, transformational leadership will be

¹⁸ Wanda Elaine Belvin, "Perceptions of the Pastoral Role in Fostering Generation Z and Millennials' Spiritual Growth Using Digital Platforms," 2024, 112–18.

¹⁹ JOHN DANIEL SMITH, "DEVELOPING CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERS FOR THE MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH" (GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 2022).

indispensable for fostering spiritual maturity, organizational resilience, and missional effectiveness.

Communicative Leadership and Digital Ministry Adaptation

In the contemporary era of globalization and digital advancement, the church is challenged to rethink not only its methods of ministry but also its leadership models. Among the approaches gaining significant attention is communicative leadership, a leadership style that emphasizes transparent, participatory, and dialogical communication as the foundation for organizational direction and relational trust. In the context of ministry, communicative leadership becomes essential as churches navigate the complexities of digital engagement, social media presence, and online worship communities.

Communicative leadership is characterized by its focus on active listening, reciprocal dialogue, and the co-creation of meaning between leaders and congregants. Unlike traditional hierarchical leadership, communicative leaders foster open communication channels where feedback, shared vision, and collaborative decision-making are valued.²⁰ In faith communities, this leadership model nurtures relationships of trust and mutual accountability, contributing to stronger congregational cohesion and more responsive ministry practices.

The rise of digital ministry has further heightened the importance of communicative leadership. As churches increasingly employ digital platforms-ranging from livestreamed worship services to online discipleship groups and social media, the nature of pastoral communication has fundamentally changed. Leaders are now required to engage audiences not only from the pulpit but also through digital channels that demand clarity, consistency, and cultural sensitivity.²¹ The shift to digital ministry, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed both the opportunities and challenges of virtual pastoral care, online preaching, and digital community building.

Recent research highlights that churches led by communicative leaders are more adept at managing this digital transition. These leaders employ communication strategies that are not only technologically effective but also relationally meaningful. They prioritize two-way interaction in digital spaces, encouraging congregants to voice concerns, share testimonies, and participate in online discussions. This dialogical approach transforms passive online spectators into active participants in the church's mission and spiritual life.

Additionally, communicative leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing issues of digital fatigue, misinformation, and the fragmentation of online communities. By fostering environments of openness and integrity, leaders can guide their congregations through the ethical and spiritual challenges posed by constant digital engagement. Scholars have noted that churches adopting communicative leadership practices exhibit higher levels of digital ministry effectiveness and

²⁰ Sven Hamrefors, "Communicative Leadership," *Journal of Communication Management* 14, no. 2 (2018): 141–152.

²¹ Yvette Lau and Ying Wai, "The Blessed Assembly: Irreplaceable Physical Co-Presence in Worship and Healthy Hybridity Reimagined after the Pandemic in the Digital Age," 2024.

congregational satisfaction.²² This is largely because such leaders do not treat digital platforms merely as tools for broadcasting but as spaces for fostering authentic community and discipleship.

It means, communicative leadership offers a timely and biblically grounded framework for church leaders adapting to the realities of digital ministry. By prioritizing dialogue, transparency, and relational engagement, communicative leaders are better positioned to guide their congregations in an era of rapid technological change. As the church continues to navigate digital frontiers, this leadership model ensures that the heart of ministry-meaningful, Christ-centered relationships-remains central in both physical and virtual spaces.

Conclusion

In an increasingly globalized and digitally connected world, church leadership has become more complex, dynamic, and essential to the church's ongoing witness and mission. As globalization reshapes societal values, cultural identities, and modes of communication, church leaders are called to preserve the timeless truth of the gospel and engage meaningfully with contemporary realities. Visionary leadership remains crucial, offering a biblically grounded and forward-thinking direction that unites diverse congregations and anticipates future ministry opportunities.

Simultaneously, transformational leadership has proven vital in fostering congregational empowerment, spiritual formation, and organizational resilience. By inspiring a shared vision, nurturing authentic relationships, and equipping believers for active ministry, transformational leaders guide their communities through social and cultural tensions while maintaining trust and relevance.

Moreover, in response to the proliferation of digital technologies and online communities, communicative leadership emerges as an indispensable model for contemporary ministry. Through transparent dialogue, active listening, and ethical digital engagement, communicative leaders sustain relational trust, promote participatory ministry, and navigate the challenges of digital culture with wisdom and integrity. They ensure that digital ministry initiatives are not merely technological adaptations but expressions of meaningful, Christ-centered community.

Taken together, these leadership approaches equip the church to remain faithful to its theological foundations while being adaptable to changing contexts. Visionary, transformational, and communicative leadership models enable churches to thrive amid globalization's complexities, technological shifts, and cultural pluralism, ensuring that the gospel continues to be proclaimed with clarity, compassion, and credibility in every context and generation.

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