Better Together: Some Reflections on Library Cooperation and Consortia with Special Reference to ANZTLA Consortia

by Ruth Millard

Introduction and Definitions

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a consortium as "an agreement, combination, or group (as of companies) formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member."¹ And the glossary of the Rod Library (University of Iowa) defines a library consortium as "A formal association of libraries which is established to develop and implement resource sharing among the members and thereby improve the library services and resources available to their respective target groups."² So the purpose of consortia is to assist member libraries to carry out their mission of improving users' access to information resources. And the goal of consortia is for libraries to pool their financial resources in order to exercise greater economic control over their marketplaces.³

Library Cooperation and Consortia – Some History

Consortia are cooperative efforts among libraries and the history of library cooperation is a long one. I would like to outline some of the highlights of this history, and will focus chiefly on developments in the USA.

In 1876 the American Library Association formed the Committee on Cooperation in Indexing and Cataloguing College Libraries. In 1901 the first regional union catalogue was developed at the California State Library.

In 1898 the University of California librarian announced he was willing to lend to any other libraries that were prepared to reciprocate.

In 1913-1914 the first South American 'expedition' for cooperative purchasing took place. Here we have an example of one of the issues that still exercise consortia today, in that once they got home, the organizers had difficulty in agreeing on how to allocate the costs among the participants.⁴

¹ Merriam-Webster OnLine. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consortium (Accessed 12/6/2010).

² Rod Library, University of Iowa Glossary. http://www.library.uni.edu/orientation/glossary#l (Accessed 12/6/10).

³ Thomas A. Peters, "Agile Innovation Clubs," Journal of Academic Librarianship 27, no. 2 (2001): 149.

⁴ Katherine A. Perry, "Where are Library Consortia Going?: Results of a 2009 Survey," *Serials* 22, no. 2 (2009): 122.

"The development of rail, telephone and postal services in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the USA facilitated the development of a reliable interlibrary loan service, which was the first successful cooperative effort to impact users and libraries on a mass scale."

Between 1870 and 1900 twenty-five union lists were published.⁵

There was strong intellectual support among library leaders for cooperation, but actual library cooperation was slow in developing. The development of rail, telephone and postal services in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the USA facilitated the development of a reliable interlibrary loan service, which was the first successful cooperative effort to impact users and libraries on a mass scale.⁶

The Great Depression of the 1930s saw libraries' budgets slashed and this provided further stimulus for libraries to cooperate. The Cooperative Cataloguing Program began in 1932 to address the issue of duplication of effort in processing books. Over a number of years 400 North American Libraries contributed cataloguing records for over 60,000 titles that were published by Library of Congress as a union list of cataloguing records.⁷

Hard economic times stimulated cooperation between libraries, but so did the affluence of the post World War 2 years when bigger and more ambitious programs of cooperation developed. The scope of cooperation expanded into new areas such as the creation of depositories, and the coordination of foreign acquisitions among research libraries.⁸

Enhanced computer capabilities expanded the scope of cooperative endeavours. New technology was first applied to cooperative cataloguing. The online OCLC (Ohio College Library Center) database of cataloguing records was established in 1971. This electronic depository of cataloguing records dramatically increased access to information and decreased technical processing costs for libraries. OCLC began with just 54 Ohio libraries and in the late 1990s had 24,000 participating libraries and over 38 million records in its database.⁹

In a 1970 report sponsored by the System Development Corporation, Ruth Patrick identified six key cooperative activities in academic library consortia in the USA:

- 1. Reciprocal borrowing privileges;
- 2. Expanded interlibrary loan services;
- 3. Union catalogues and lists of services;
- 4. Photocopying services;
- 5. Reference services; and
- 6. Delivery services¹⁰

- ⁶ Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down," 264-268.
- ⁷ Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down," 268.
- ⁸ Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down," 269-270.

⁵ Joseph E. Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Development of Cooperative Service and Resource Sharing in Libraries: 1876-2002," *The Reference Librarian* 83-84 (2003): 265.

⁹ Straw, "When the Walls Came Tumbling Down," 272-273.

¹⁰ Tracey Westmoreland and Beverley Shirley, "The State of Consortia: Promises to Keep," *Texas Library Journal* 80, no.2 (2004): 52.

"Participating in consortia enables libraries to deliver more information content than any library is able to deliver on its own. By working together libraries increase negotiating abilities with vendors." In the 1970s the sharing of print based resources and union online catalogues were often the catalysts for the formation of consortia. In the 1990s there was a significant shift so that consortia efforts centred on electronic resources and digital library initiatives.¹¹

A 1984 report on theological libraries for the twenty-first century noted that:

"A primary challenge of library development will be to foster a vital diversity within systems and structures of cooperation.... In the library community increased reliance on computer technologies and especially the large bibliographic utilities has established a climate, indeed, the fact of cooperation far beyond that which was reasonably anticipated a decade ago. The electronic environment into which we have moved forces libraries in the direction of an interdependence which requires a posture of concentrated cooperation. The urgent task now is to harness the means of effective library cooperation to achieve goals which sustain excellence in theological library service."¹²

Along with a change in focus, the pace of consortial activity also quickened in the 1990s as libraries faced new challenges, notably

- the escalating number of publications;
- massive increases in the prices of many scholarly journals;
- rapid technological change internet-based technologies made collaboration both more possible and more necessary than ever; and
- rising user demands for most libraries not providing electronic resources was no longer an option. User expectations had increased the need for libraries to collaborate, and consortia are a means for libraries to obtain essential electronic content.¹³

Participating in consortia enables libraries to deliver more information content than any library is able to deliver on its own. By working together libraries increase negotiating abilities with vendors.¹⁴

ANZTLA Consortia

History

It was against this background that, at the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association (ANZTLA) in July 2002, a Task Group was appointed to investigate the establishment of an association-wide consortium for the ATLA

¹¹ Peters, "Agile Innovation Clubs," 149.

¹² Stephen L. Peterson, "Theological Libraries for the Twenty-first Century:

Project 2000 Final Report," Theological Education 20, no.3 Supplement (1984): 13.

¹³ Susanne Clement, "Skills for Effective Participation in Consortia: Preparing for Collaborating and Collaboration." *Collection Management* 32, no. 1-2 (2007): 192; Peters, "Agile Innovation Clubs," 149.

¹⁴ Clement, "Skills for Effective Participation in Consortia," 195; David A.
Wright, "Library Consortia: Do the Models Always Work?." Resource Sharing & Information Networks 18, no. 1-2 (2005/2006): 50.

"Vendors were not able to give us an indication of pricing until they received details of libraries wanting to participate in consortia, and libraries could not commit to participating without knowing the costs involved." (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database online and ATLA Serials.

The ATLA Religion Database is probably the key finding resource for journal articles, book reviews and essays in multi-author books in the subject areas of theology and religion. It was a product that many of us knew the value of, having subscribed to it in its print format and/or on CD-ROM. Prior to 2002 there had been some success in establishing an ATLA Religion Consortium, mainly by Melbourne College of Divinity Libraries, but it was felt that an ANZTLA based approach would be of great benefit to more theological libraries across Australia and New Zealand. The online version had the substantial advantage over the CD-ROM of offering unlimited and offsite access for subscribers. The incentive for forming a consortium for this product was that the cost of subscribing to the ATLA Religion Database online was financially way beyond the reach of probably all individual libraries in ANZTLA.

ATLASerials was a new database being promoted as offering fulltext of 50 theological journals going back 50 years. Although many libraries expressed initial interest in subscribing to this database, no libraries subscribed in the first year, probably because the product was not well known or established, and the interface at that time was very user-unfriendly.

The Task Group began by contacting libraries via the ANZTLA Forum and individually, and obtaining initial expressions of interest via a questionnaire. About 50 libraries expressed interest in being part of an ATLA Religion Database consortium. Many of these libraries also expressed interest in being part of an ATLAS (full-text database) consortium. Gathering the questionnaires from libraries was a time-consuming and frustrating one, both for libraries and for Task Group members. Without email the process would have been well nigh impossible, and even with email, communication was often difficult and slow. Incomplete questionnaires had to be followed up, emails were lost in cyberspace, internet systems went down, people went on holidays, and we had to contend with different time zones. Probably most significantly, libraries had many questions, the chief of which was "How much will it cost?" And this question we could not answer. Vendors were not able to give us an indication of pricing until they received details of libraries wanting to participate in consortia, and libraries could not commit to participating without knowing the costs involved. We endeavoured to make it clear to libraries that expressions of interest were obligation free, but libraries were still understandably wary.

ATLA products were not available online direct from the American Theological Library Association, and still are not. So contact was made with the 5 online aggregators, represented by four vendors, which offered the ATLA products online at that time. Some trials of the various databases were set up to give libraries the opportunity to assess them.

Online Aggregators	Vendors		
CambridgeScientific Abstracts	Cambridge Scientific Abstracts		
EBSCO	EBSCO		
OCLC First Search	OCLC First Search		
Ovid	Ovid		
SilverPlatter	Ovid		

We supplied each vendor with details of interested libraries. They in turn had to approach ATLA in order to provide the Task Group with quotations. Jocelyn Morris, the convener of the Task Group, also had some direct contact with ATLA. The whole notion of a consortium of relatively small theological libraries in Australia and New Zealand was a new one not only to us, but also to the vendors and to ATLA itself, so the process was cumbersome and timeconsuming, but eventually the five quotes came back to the Task Group. The quotes varied considerably, and asking the question of each vendor "Is this your best price?" resulted in some lower quotes being submitted. After consideration the Task Group decided to eliminate the three highest quotes from the process and seek "second round quotes" from the two aggregators with the best quotes -EBSCO and SilverPlatter.

So we went back to the libraries to ask for a firmer commitment to the consortium. Again it was frustrating that we still could not give an exact price because the price would change as the number of libraries interested in participating changed. However we asked libraries to commit on the basis of the price not going above a certain level. Eventually twenty libraries indicated that they wanted to be part of the ATLA consortium and so began another protracted round of negotiations between the 2 vendors, ATLA and the Task Group. The final prices quoted by EBSCO and Silver Platter were almost identical. We decided to proceed with Silver Platter, because this was the interface preferred by the participating libraries. In March 2003, with the approval of the ANZTLA Board, we accepted the quotation from SilverPlatter and an ANZTLA ATLA Religion Index Consortium was established. Each library was invoiced separately by Silver Platter, and signed its own contract with the vendor.

The whole process took over six months and was a steep learning curve for Task Group members, and also, I think, for ANZTLA librarians, the vendors and ATLA. We are glad we persevered though, as the outcome was excellent, and once established the consortium operated smoothly.

It was therefore with more confidence that in the latter part of 2003 we began to look towards consortia subscriptions for 2004. The Task Group decided to seek quotes only from SilverPlatter and EBSCO. It was almost as an aside that the EBSCO representative told me about the Religion and Philosophy Collection (RPC), a full-text online database covering about 300 theological journals and

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produced by EBSCO itself. A trial was established and strong interest was expressed by libraries in RPC, as well as in the ATLA Religion Database and ATLA Serials. We had learned much from our experiences of 2003. We refined and improved the questionnaire we sent out for 2004, and the vendors had worked with us before. We had twenty libraries that knew firsthand the benefits of being part of a consortium and many others that had observed the initial consortium with interest from the sidelines. These factors meant that the 2004 renewal process was more streamlined and saw the ATLA Religion consortium being renewed with more participants, and new consortia being established for ATLA Serials and RPC. Due to the high level of interest in EBSCO's product, RPC, and the seamless interface provided between ATLA Religion and RPC on the EBSCO interface we moved from SilverPlatter to EBSCO. The consortia have remained with EBSCO since then. In 2005 we added three new databases to our consortia offerings – Catholic Periodical Literature Index (CPLI), New Testament Abstracts (NTA) and Old Testament Abstracts (OTA).

Although we did not know this at the time, the move to EBSCO was fortuitous in another way, in that there are now only two online aggregators offering ATLA products online – EBSCO and Ovid. And CPLI, OTA and NTA are available only through EBSCO.

The number of libraries participating in the ANZTLA consortia has increased over the eight years we have been operating. We began with a consortium of 20 libraries subscribing to one database, and in 2010 have consortia for six databases and 46 member libraries.

	ATLA	ATLAS	RPC	CPLI	NTA	OTA	Total Libraries	Total Databases
2003	20						20	20
2004	27	11	18				31	56
2005	30	12	28	7	4	4	37	85
2006	32	12	34	8	4	4	41	94
2007	32	14	36	9	6	6	44	103
2008	34	15	32	9	5	5	44	100
2009	37	18	34	8	6	5	48	108
2010	35	23	32	9	6	5	46	110

Libraries participating in ANZTLA Online Databases Consortia with EBSCO

Choice of databases

It has become apparent over the years that it is important that the products offered by consortia are of core interest to libraries involved. This was clearly the case with ATLA Religion Index. Subscriptions to ATLASerials only increased as the product became more established and improved - it now offers 150 titles dating back to as early as 1908 - and was integrated into the EBSCO interface. The Religion and Philosophy Collection (RPC) offered full-text theology journals on the EBSCO interface and so was readily taken up by libraries. Along the way there has been some interest in consortia for databases offered by EBSCO in subject areas such as philosophy, education and psychology but none of these has taken off. Since 2006 EBSCO has offered access to LISTA (Library & Information Science Technology Abstracts) at no charge. In 2010 EBSCO also offered free access to the Teacher Reference Center. A substantial number of libraries take advantage of access to these two databases, but I expect this is only because they are free. To establish a consortium for a product that is not well known or is not of core interest to enough libraries is very difficult, however good the databases are. An example of this is the offering in the last two years of three Alexander Press databases (the Digital Library of Classic Protestant Texts, the Digital Library of the Catholic Reformation and the Digital Karl Barth Library). Many libraries took up the offer to trial these databases, but only three are subscribing.

There is a danger with starting new consortial services that consortia may spread themselves too thinly.¹⁵ I think this is particularly so for a small organization such as ANZTLA. Consortia are a cost effective way for publishers to deliver their products to libraries, so publishers like to deal with them. The down side for consortia organizers or staff is that they can be overwhelmed with information, products and offers from publishers.¹⁶ Some consortia, like ours, operate using member time donated by individual library staff and/or member institutions. Others begin this way, but go on to have their own office and staff.¹⁷

The nature of the "beast"

Consortia tend to be cumbersome beasts. Our consortia are small ones in relative terms, but even so there are a number of parties involved - libraries, the ANZTLA Task Group, the Australian EBSCO office, the US EBSCO office and ATLA. Diana Costello, in an article about the work of the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), comments on the problem for us in Australia and New Zealand of publishers offices being located overseas, most usually in the USA. She writes, "Time and again we have proved that face-to face communication can shorten negotiations by months, if not years."¹⁸

There are various points where delays, and misunderstandings and blame-shifting can and do occur, and the responsibilities of various parties are not always clear.

"Graceful and travel light' is not the description of consortia,"¹⁹ but as Thomas Peters points out "the lure of consortial activity is not efficiency, but cost avoidance and capitalizing on opportunities that would be difficult or impossible to realize if libraries acted unilaterally."²⁰

Of course, many consortia provide centralized management of the whole process which does have a time-saving benefit for libraries and reduces duplication of effort.²¹

It is of interest that the ProQuest Religion consortium that many ANZTLA libraries participate in operates, apparently effectively, with Proquest dealing direct with individual libraries rather than via a task group that represents the libraries.

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Consortial Purchasing," Journal of Library Administration 35, no. 1-2 (2001): 178.

²⁰ Peters, "Consortia and Their Discontents," 111.

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¹⁵ Thomas A. Peters, "Consortia and Their Discontents," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29, no. 2 (2003): 113.

¹⁶ Westmoreland and Shirley, "The State of Consortia," 54.

¹⁷ Perry, "Where are Library Consortia Going?," 124.

Diane Costello, "The Role of CAUL (Council of Australian Libraries) in

¹⁹ Westmoreland and Shirley, "The State of Consortia," 52.

²¹ Eva McDonald, "Thinking Consortially," *Feliciter* 49, no. 6 (2003): 293.

"The pricing model we used was the most straightforward one and yet it allowed all the participating libraries to subscribe to valuable resources at an affordable price."

Pricing

It is important to develop and implement fair cost allocation models for libraries participating in consortia.²² The ANZTLA consortia divide the cost of each database subscription equally between the participants, regardless of their size. In 2004, one of our smaller libraries asked the Task Group to consider introducing a tiered fee structure, in which smaller libraries would pay less than larger ones. Such a model is one frequently used by consortia. For a number of reasons the Task Group decided at the time to stay with the model of each library paying the same amount. The main reason was that, although some of our institutions have many more theological students than others, all our numbers are relatively small, and none of us could afford to subscribe to the databases without the consortia. The pricing model we used was the most straightforward one and yet it allowed all the participating libraries to subscribe to valuable resources at an affordable price.

Ongoing Participation and Future Possibilities

The dropout rate from the ANZTLA consortia has been very low. Since the ANZTLA consortia began only nine libraries have dropped out. Two of these libraries rejoined the consortia at a later date. Of the remaining seven, one college closed, 3 became affiliated with universities and no longer needed their own subscriptions to online databases, one became affiliated with another college and 2 were very small colleges for whom participation in the consortia was not viable.

	New Libraries joining ANZTLA Consortia	Libraries leaving ANZTLA Consortia	Total Libraries
2004	13	2	31
2005	8	2	37
2006	4	0	41
2007	4	1	44
2008	2	2	44
2009	4	0	48
2010	0	2	46

This year, 2010, is the first time in the life of the ANZTLA Consortia that no new libraries have joined. Given the membership of ANZTLA, the consortia have probably now almost reached their maximum size, as the participation rate is very high. It will be interesting to see how the consortia develop in coming years as the landscapes of theological education and consortia continue to change. I make mention of two trends I have noticed beginning to develop:

²² Angee Baker, "The Impact of Consortia on Database Licensing," *Computers in Libraries* 20, no. 6 (2000): 47.

"My understanding from EBSCO is that the ANZTLA consortia arrangements are a rare bird".

- 1. A number of theological schools are becoming affiliated with universities. This often means that the schools leave the ANZTLA consortia, because their students can access religion and theology databases via the universities' subscriptions.
- 2. New players are emerging in terms of offering membership of consortia. For example, the Council of Private Higher Education Incorporated (COPHE), to which a number of our institutions belong, is beginning to offer membership of online database consortia.

The Bigger Picture

My understanding from EBSCO is that the ANZTLA consortia arrangements are a "rare bird". With the possible exception of medical libraries, we are the only group of small specialist libraries joining together to form consortia for EBSCO products here in Australia. In the main, EBSCO deals with very large consortia, and I would like to give you some snapshots from the "big picture" of consortia activity.

Electronic Purchasing in Collaboration (EPIC), New Zealand

Electronic Purchasing in Collaboration (EPIC) is a New Zealand initiative that provides access to electronic resources (e-resources) through a consortium of member libraries. EPIC licenses packages of electronic resources to be used in New Zealand libraries across all sectors and its vision is to provide access to high-quality electronic information for all New Zealanders.²³

Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) was established in 1965 for the purposes of cooperative action and the sharing of information. In 1996 CAUL took on the role of a consortial purchasing agent, on behalf of its members and associated organizations in Australian and New Zealand. The Electronic Information Resources Committee of CAUL (CEIRC) was formed in 1998 and negotiates terms and conditions for access to online databases on behalf of its members. In 2007 the Committee was handling over 140 products from nearly 100 vendors.²⁴

²³ Electronic Purchasing in Collaboration (EPIC). http://www.epic.org.nz/ about-epic (Accessed 14/6/2010).

²⁴ Costello, "The Role of CAUL (Council of Australian Libraries) in Consortial Purchasing," 175; Andrew Wells, "Looking at Licences," *InCite* 28, no. 6 (2007): 8.

"The International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) ... serves participating organizations by facilitating discussion among consortia on issues of common interest, such as pricing practices of electronic information providers, and by providing information on new electronic information resources."

2000 CHOL Statistics						
CAUL	Number of Universities	Number of Libraries	EFTSU (Equivalent Full time Student enrolments)			
Australia	41	221	778,156			
New Zealand	8	47	128,043			
TOTAL	49	268	906,199			

2008 CAUL Statistics²⁵

Gulliver Group, Victoria, Australia

Gulliver is a collection of databases that has over 21,000 resources including full-text journals, books, newspapers and pictures. All are available at nearly every public library branch throughout Victoria and also for Victorian public library members to use at home.²⁶

ERA, Australia

ERA is a national purchasing consortium formed in 2007. In 2009 it had 1,193 participating libraries (public, academic, school, TAFE, special, state & national libraries) providing access to Australian full-text content to around 8,500,000 Australians.²⁷

Statewide consortia in the USA

Over the last 25 years state-wide consortia have been established in the U.S.A., for example:

- OhioLINK was established in the late 1980s. In 1990 OhioLINK began work on a shared catalogue, and also loaded the consortium's first four databases.
- VIVA (The Virtual Library of Virginia) started in 1994.
- Galileo was established in Georgia in 1995.
- The California Digital Library began in 1997.
- The TENNSHARE project is Tennessee's statewide consortium.
- TexShare is a multitype library consortium in Texas.²⁸
- The "Consortium of Consortia"

The International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) first met informally as the Consortium of Consortia (COC) in 1997. The Coalition is an informal, self-organized group. All library consortia anywhere in the world that are in general agreement with Coalition statements issued over the years are welcome to participate in the activities of the Coalition and identify themselves as participating consortia. The Coalition holds two meetings a year. It serves participating organizations by facilitating discussion among

²⁵ Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). http://www.caul.edu.

au/ (Accessed 16/6/2010).

²⁶ Gulliver Group, Victoria. http://www.libraries.vic.gov.au/cgi-bin/library_ links/dbases.cgi (Accessed 23/5/2010).

²⁷ Roxanne Missingham, "Encouraging the Digital Economy and Digital Citizenship," *Australian Library Journal* 58, no. 4 (2009): 393.

²⁸ Perry, "Where are Library Consortia Going?," 122; Wright, "Library Consortia," 56.

"No theological library exists unto itself; no institution exists without the help of others. Through thoughtful and intentional collaboration, strategic alliances between libraries ... can not only take us through these difficult economic times, they can take us to places we could never have gone alone."

consortia on issues of common interest, such as pricing practices of electronic information providers, and by providing information on new electronic information resources. During meetings, the Coalition may meet with selected information providers, providing a forum for them to discuss their offerings and to engage in dialogue with consortia leaders about issues of mutual concern.

The Coalition has grown rapidly. In 2000 there were 135 consortia in the Coalition. Two thirds of these were in the USA and the other third came from 21 other countries. In 2009 there were 211 consortia of which 129 were in North America. Eight consortia were from Australia or New Zealand. In less the ten years the number of consortia had increased by 56% with most of the growth occurring outside of North America.²⁹

Conclusion

I conclude with two quotes that summarize the importance of library cooperation and consortia:

"Consortia efforts are time-consuming, frustrating and difficult to build and sustain. But still, they are potent, social, economic and political forces in reducing the unit cost of e-information and increasing the resource and user base and help libraries to achieve more collectively than they could accomplish individually."³⁰

"No theological library exists unto itself; no institution exists without the help of others. Through thoughtful and intentional collaboration, strategic alliances between libraries ... can not only take us through these difficult economic times, they can take us to places we could never have gone alone."³¹

²⁹ International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). http://www.library. yale.edu/consortia/ (Accessed 23/5/2010); Perry, "Where are Library Consortia Going?," 123.

³⁰ Rama Nand Malviya, and Anil Kumar, "Networking and Consortia Management Techniques," *DESIDOC Bulletin of Information Technology* 27, no. 3 (2007): 29.

³¹ Ann Hotta, "Is There a Strategic Alliance in Your Future?: Lessons Learned from Library Consortia," *Theological Education* 40, no. 1 (2004): 96.

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