

Implementing Effective and Meaningful Environmental Graphic Design Within Modern  
Protestant Church Buildings in the U.S.

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**Abstract**

The Church, the body of Christ, is filled with people gifted in visual arts, which should present boundless creative opportunities to encourage the body and glorify Christ. However, many modern Protestant churches in the U.S. do not reflect this creative potential in their interior spaces. Christian graphic designers have the unique gift of bringing all the visual arts together into a whole solution that communicates the message of the gospel with richness, power, and beauty. This thesis will show the process of creating environmental graphic design solutions that are intended to encourage a local church and glorify the Lord, building on a foundation of research in church history, biblical and cultural graphic design philosophy, and an understanding of the medium of graphic design.

**Implementing Effective and Meaningful Environmental Graphic Design Within Modern  
Protestant Church Buildings in the U.S.**

One thing have I asked of the Lord,

that will I seek after:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,

to *gaze upon the beauty* of the Lord

and to inquire in his temple. [emphasis added] (*ESV*, Ps. 27:4)

The real-life picture of the beauty David speaks of and dreams of in this song is severely lacking in many churches in America today. When one steps foot into a modern Protestant church today, they are often met with walls and spaces containing no beauty or meaningless beauty, no design or ineffective design. Arts and design have long been avoided by this wide category of churches. While it may not seem to be important to the average churchgoer, there is a hole there that must be filled for human beings to engage with truth through sight. The purpose of this paper is to show that a means by which beauty may be brought back into the church is environmental graphic design, done with local church bodies and the Lord in mind.

To see why the church needs this, one needs a grasp of church history, biblical and philosophical ideas surrounding art and design in the church, and graphic design briefs in a church context. After explaining these areas, the paper will cover a creative solution meant to provide a proof of concept to incorporate meaningful graphic design into church buildings. The goal of the project is to inspire and encourage graphic designers and pastoral leadership to work

together to prioritize the enrichment of their congregation by investing time and resources into art and design.

### **Church Building History**

According to Merriam Webster, a church is simply “a building for public and especially Christian worship” (“Church”). The definition of a church building lends itself to the idea that any building will do as a gathering and worshiping space for Christians; that is, the focus seems to be on function, not form. The timeline of church history shows a period right after Jesus’ resurrection where Christians used any type of building to gather. Before Christianity was legal, Christians could be persecuted for meeting in recognizable spaces, so they would meet in areas that could function as basic gathering places, such as apartments, storage buildings, and even catacombs. In modern times as well, churches often meet in spaces like this: buildings that are used for other purposes and then sold or rented to a congregation to become a church.

However, anyone who has seen cathedrals or other forms of older churches can see that the designers seemed to focus on form and function in a creative way. After Constantine, the emperor who legalized and encouraged Christianity in the fourth century, churches established themselves in dedicated buildings, likely for clarity’s sake and to gather large groups in one spot (Ferguson). Construction had the financial and cultural backing of Constantine, which resulted in the ability to attempt to communicate the glory of God and heaven through the architecture of the church buildings. Much of what church design entails integrates with modern environmental graphic design. Environmental graphic design, or EGD, is a field of graphic design involving graphics and environmental designs for specific spaces that convey a visual message. When architects and designers of churches throughout history designed the interiors, they had a

common goal of creating a space that communicated the glory of God, as will be shown in the next sections. Modern-day environmental graphic designers share the same goal of creating a communicative space, which is why this paper will show that EGD would be a great tool for churches. While that messaging looked different depending on the architectural period and the church culture of the time, it has remained the same at its core and it has shown the power of EGD. Churches throughout history have reflected the significance of design through their architecture and decoration, which this section will show through a few noteworthy churches from the Early Christian period to the Renaissance.

In the Early Christian period (300-527), churches were not distinct buildings of their own until Constantine, as noted earlier. Constantine brought up churches all over Rome, but the most significant of these churches in architecture and style was the Old St. Peter's Basilica. Built from about 319 to 329, the Old St. Peter's Basilica falls under the Roman style of architecture. It was built before the Byzantine style had taken over Rome (Davies et al. 163). Historians rely on eyewitness accounts and plan sketches to fully understand Old St. Peter's because it was torn down and replaced with the current St. Peter's Basilica in 1609. While it looked like Rome on the outside, the interior decoration and flow of the building was tailored to the Christian tradition of the time. Deciding to build Old St. Peter's, Constantine chose the original site because it is above St. Peter's grave, thus the name. Shrines honoring St. Peter's gravesite filled the original church, as well as other relics of the Christian faith's history (Davies et al. 163). The long structure of the building directed visitors' attention primarily to the altar, where Communion was taken, and the decoration along the walls told the stories of the Bible through a variety of mediums. To make the purpose of the church building explicit, there were a number of Latin

engravings adorning the walls and arches. Most notably, eyewitness Maffeo Vegio wrote that the following words were written on the triumphal arch: “Because, under Your command, the world raised triumphs to the stars, Constantine the victor built this hall for You” (I.1.4). The purpose of the greatness of this first major church was clear, Constantine created it to bring glory to God in the style of his time. Every detail contributed to that message.

In the Byzantine period (527-565), Christian art and architecture reigned because Christian emperors reigned. Having dedicated buildings for church with specialized interiors was more common, and as construction technology steadily advanced, architects sought to communicate more through the building itself. The most significant church built in this period was the Hagia Sophia, created around 535. Technology made it possible to achieve fantastical feats with the building, feats that pointed to a vision of heaven and glory. The most notable piece of the construction is the dome because it seems to merely hover over the rest of the building, despite its enormous weight and size (Davies et al. 177). The ring of windows that bridges the gap between the dome and the building with light accomplishes that effect. The structure seemed impossible at the time, but it resulted in a magnificent look. Justinian’s court historian stated, “Whenever one enters this church to pray, he understands at once that it is not by any human power or skill, but by the influence of God, that this work has been so finely turned. And so, his mind is lifted up toward God and exalted, feeling that He cannot be far away, but must especially love to dwell in this place that He has chosen” (Davies et al. 177). Although architecture sometimes requires more context than other means of visual communication, the intention of the Hagia Sophia’s structure is not lost to history.

In the Renaissance period (1400-1600), art and architecture of all types were flourishing. Each art discipline had masters that pushed the discipline farther than before, and the results were astonishing. The clearest example of excellence in church design in this period was the Sistine Chapel, constructed and painted from 1473-1512. While the architecture and exterior are beautiful, the area that holds the most explicit meaning is the painted ceiling and walls of the interior. They are covered in frescoes done by the artist Michelangelo and they depict biblical stories, prophets and Christ-types, and even some Greek prophetesses (Davies et al. 345). Instead of allowing the paintings to be merely decorative, Michelangelo used emotion and full body language in the panels to give clearly communicate each story. He also worked with the style of the time, which included heavy emphasis on the human body, to communicate glory and beauty instead of settling on the lust of man. Author John W. Dixon stated this on the overall purpose of the chapel art:

It was not made for the sake of form or intellect, which were only servants to the central act, but as an act of worship and proclamation. It can be understood only by participating in the act, which is an act of worship. It is not an argument, a display of an iconographical program, or an illustration of verbal ideas, although all these things are present in the work. Rather, it is a Christian liturgical act and can rightly be understood only as it is apprehended in its performance. (Dixon 503)

The Sistine Chapel is a beautiful testament to the power of intentional graphics in a church space.



### **Biblical Philosophy of Design**

The previous examples of beauty in church show that churches and environmental graphic design (or churches and visual beauty itself) have not always been so awkwardly split. In the past, churches commonly employed beautiful decorations and structures that were soaked with meaning. In the following section, the biblical foundations for how Christians can view design in the church will be laid out, as well as a brief history of what caused confusion and hesitancy about image and design. It will also show the value of beauty from a philosophical and practical standpoint and connect that back to environmental graphic design.

### **Biblical Passages on Design in the Church**

This section will cover some of the major biblical passages related to design in the church, enabling designers to bring a solid biblical background into any work they do in the church. Graphic design is not the creation of beauty for beauty's sake, it is art applied for a specific, given purpose: to communicate. It is an art form with heavy responsibility and great power, so understanding how biblical truth applies to its use is crucial. The Bible discusses design in a few different contexts, with the primary contexts being design as idolatry and design as skill.

The first passage many think of regarding idolatry is Exodus 20:4-5a, which states, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (*ESV*). From this passage, it is clear that God wants His people to have nothing to do with idols. The controversial part involves

defining what designing idols looks like. Is it when a designer creates any objective design, representing elements of creation? The purpose and use of design, described in the phrases “You shall not make for yourself...” and “You shall not bow down to them or serve them...”, seem to overshadow the description of design replicating creation (*ESV*, Ex. 20:4-5). By beginning the passage with the purpose for idols and ending with the use of idols, God bookends the description of the design content with intentional statements to help people discern what idolatry is. In its clearest reading, this passage seems to be saying that idols are designs made selfishly to be worshipped over the True God, not any objective design.

The Bible also mentions design as a skill and spiritual talent. God blesses the artist Bezalel and the assistant Oholiab in Exodus with the talent to create beautiful elements of the Levite priesthood, and commands that they make the beautiful things (*ESV*, Ex. 31:1-6). There are several other passages throughout the Old Testament describing artists’ tasks for designing spaces of worship, primarily the temple. If He did that for the artists of the Old Testament, why would He not bless the artists of today? When there are so many creative people abounding in the church, it would follow from what is seen in Scripture that God has blessed them with talent too. Not only would it benefit the church with a different form of communication and beauty than is typical, graphic designers and artists carving out a place to serve creatively in the body of Christ is a duty. In 1 Peter, Peter writes, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (*ESV*, 4:10). Although art and design are not explicitly listed as a spiritual gift in the New Testament, artists and designers can serve through their craft to enrich worship and uplift the body.

### **A Brief History of Iconoclasm in the Church**

If the Bible is relatively clear on art and design in the church, why is church history riddled with division over the subject? Church members have always and will always struggle with unity over certain topics because of the pride that arises out of fallen nature, but there is a more thorough answer at the root of this particular topic. It begins with a Greek philosopher named Plotinus who lived around 200 A.D., and he had a radically eastern and mystical view of God, souls, and matter for that time. He thought that all things began with the substance of the “One” and overflowed from that into intellect, soul, and eventually into matter (Sumner 31). A follower of Plotinus named Dionysus left writings about the whole concept, and around 500 A.D., the early church mistook that Dionysus for another Dionysus, a follower of Paul mentioned in Acts 17:34 (Sumner 33). They thought the author was involved in the early church, so Christians began to absorb his writings, all because of a misunderstanding. The result of this was a strong belief in the power of matter, because it was believed that God was a part of it. Many Christians clung to icons of the saints, thinking that they had divine intercessory and healing powers (Sumner 34). The idolatry of icons did not come from the fact that art was in the church, but instead the church was taken “captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (*ESV*, Col. 2:8). Once icons had taken hold, they did not get seriously shaken out of the church until Martin Luther, who spurred the Protestants to split from the Catholics for a multitude of reasons. While Luther simply had a distaste for icons because he believed they distracted people from God, others took a much stronger stance against icons themselves and banned image altogether (Sumner 63).

The icon controversy between Protestants and Catholics has instilled ideas about word versus image that may also be working against artists and designers today. Modern Protestant churches' views originate at the division between the Catholic and Protestant church, so they have been pushed towards pressing into the verbal word of God via printed and digital Bibles. While illustrative elements are no longer considered heretical, they certainly take second-place to the written word. However, the origins of the anti-image tendencies are pagan philosophies, which should raise concern about leaning into the physical words exclusively, as opposed to consuming supplemental visual communication (Anderson 193). If Protestant church leadership only understood the background of their preferences, aware that visual communication is important too, it would help them realize that the biggest factor in avoiding well-informed, executed, and intended graphic design pieces in church buildings is tradition.

Today, there are new arguments that stem from this tradition against design in the church, especially design that relates to the space and environment of the church building. The leadership members of most protestant churches seem to agree with and utilize some types of graphic design, such as branding or pamphlet design, but EGD is not as readily accepted. According to respected artists, this is the result of a variety of concerns, including the fear of bad quality, visual oversaturation, distraction, and wrong interpretations (Craft, "The Dangers"). There is also the opinion that leaning into the arts more is a following of worldly culture, and Christians would do better not to be involved with it (Glaspey). However, these concerns can be remedied with a careful and calculated method for the visual solutions, if the concerned leadership is willing to let designers try solving the problems. Graphic design specifically lends itself to preciseness and problem-solving, making it an optimal option for addressing the modern surface

concerns of church leadership. Addressing these would possibly lead to a stronger questioning of subtle iconoclastic tradition, opening the door for conversations about design in modern church buildings.

### **The Value of Visuals in the Church**

Today, artists and designers are not creating work for the church because at worst, it is seen as potentially dangerous, and at best, simply unnecessary. Christian traditions and beliefs have ties to the physical body and senses, but in the realm of visual beauty, the need to stimulate these senses is rather dismissed. In *The Faithful Artist*, Anderson explains that many modern evangelicals are “drawn to contemplative practices that are nothing less than *meditations* on the character of divine beauty” [emphasis added] (Anderson 22). In other words, they meditate on beauty without having it in front of them, thinking that this amounts to all the value they would get from physical and communicative beauty. Human beings were designed to engage physically with the created world around them through their senses, in addition to engaging with the spiritual world.

It was stated by a historian that the effect of the Hagia Sophia’s magnificent design was that one’s “mind is lifted up toward God and exalted, feeling that He cannot be far away, but must especially love to dwell in this place that He has chosen” (Davies et al. 177). The Christian God is omnipresent; He is in all places at once and there is no place that a believer can worship where He will not be present. However, worship spaces should matter to Christians. Spaces have the potential to inspire imaginations and make the “things that are above” more tangible (ESV, Col. 3.2). Spaces also provide an outlet through which believers with artistic gifts can exhort fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and be co-creators with God as creatives are called to be. For

these reasons, and for the impact that church design has had for centuries, Christian designers should pay more attention to the way their church visually communicates the glory of God and encouragement for believers. Designers today have the responsibility to usher in a new era of church design with the technology and methods at hand.

### **Defending What May be Deemed Unnecessary**

Although this reframing of visual communication through meaningful design may sound like a great thing to most church leadership members (as again, most are not iconoclastic in belief, but instead in tradition), their first response would likely be that that kind of thing takes money, and they do not have the financial backing of a Christian empire. The truth is, however, resources are allocated based on what is deemed necessary. In a country where most people are literate, the absolute necessity of biblical art or other forms of environmental graphic design on the walls and in the windows seems debatable. Design in the church is seen as more of a beautification than anything else, something cosmetic. As mentioned above, visuals could have tremendous value in the church, but their *absolute necessity* is the ultimate concern for churches in this practical age. However, one of the greatest artist-theologians of our time, Makoto Fujimura challenges the need to conserve resources in this way because he believes in supporting soul-feeding beauty. In his book *Culture Care*, he says:

... even if we would agree that beauty is not necessary to our daily survival, it is still necessary for our flourishing. Our sense of beauty and our creativity are central to what it means to be made in the image of a creative God ... Because it is gratuitous, beauty points beyond itself, beyond survival to satisfaction. We think of it in opposition to

narrowness, scarcity, drudgery, and constraint ... It points backward and outward and forward to our ultimate Source and Sustainer. (Fujimura 42)

Churches should care about design and beauty because it has potential to connect people back to the heart of humanity and of God, something sorely missing in today's utilitarian America. Not only should the concept of image in the church be reframed as not dangerous, but beauty through the means of visual communication should be valued as necessary and functional in its own way.

As a brief note, beauty is not only to be valued from a Christian perspective, but it is also something to be valued from a graphic design perspective. Despite the popular notion of purely functional design, famous designer Stefan Sagmeister spoke out about how important beauty is in design. His stance is instinctively similar to Fujimura's, and he stated in a Design Week interview in 2016, "Our entire obsession is with functionality. I've seen many people put functionality as their main goal. Not only are the [creations] awful, bring humanity down and are actually soulless and terrible for us, in the strangest way they often do not function" (Roberts). Even secular designers recognize the need for beauty as an element that makes art and design attractive to human beings.

### **Execution Principles**

When doing any type of graphic design, precision of meaning is necessary. The client and designer must work together to create expectations for the finished design. Too often, creatives in the church are employed to make something "beautiful" and the result falls flat or vague or plainly heretical. One major aid in effective graphic design is a well-constructed brief, and the following section will show how briefs could be used by churches with their graphic designers to

create something satisfying and meaningful. It will discuss the motivations for the most common church design aesthetics, how to combat them for the sake of something better, and how to use combined expertise to bolster truth.

As mentioned above, Protestants today subtly carry the tradition of iconoclasm in their churches, even if it is not conscious. While avoiding image has its own issues, as discussed, the empty space left by removing the design has created another mentality directly influenced by Modernism over the past century. The interior walls of the sanctuaries of most modern protestant churches in the United States are made up of a combination of cream paint, gray acoustic panels, and a large brown or black cross attached to the wall. Even after the iconoclasts destroyed image, Protestant churches retained unique and beautiful architecture and decoration, and the creators would not have dreamed of such stark interiors as exist today. Thus, this shift is not only a result of iconoclasm, it also indicates pervading functionalism that entered churches' thinking with Modernism. Functionalism is essentially the idea that the form of a design should follow exactly what its purpose is, leaving nothing unnecessary (Holland 84). In theory, this design-thinking makes sense, as most good graphic designers would agree that there should not be unnecessary elements in their design. However, the idea becomes problematic because of the definition of necessary and unnecessary. Many Modernist artists and designers have "absurdly reduced" humanity's needs to machine-like functionality, and a particular style of plain and clean design elements has incurred (Holland 86). While that style in itself is not bad, its origins do not appear to align with the Christian view of humanity's needs, which was explored earlier. Going with that style blindly or unconsciously can create a real absence of soul-feeding beauty and meaning. To help graphic designers create something meaningful and truthful with a solid creative brief, it is



important for pastors and their project managers to think outside the box of what is currently being done.

### **The Creative Solution**

With the above in mind, pieces of environmental graphic design are the best solution for the current time and problem. Graphic design is meant to convey meaning, making it a practical medium for visual communication. The way that art used to function in the church is the way that environmental graphic design functions in other spaces today, making it a perfect option for mending the relationship between the arts and the church. Graphic design is also inspiring and educational, two qualities desired in church messaging. Design also adds beauty to spaces, it makes them more engaging to look at and be a part of. If churches want to invite people in and attract them to the space, design is the way to do it.

The creative solution for implementing effective and meaningful graphic design within modern Protestant church buildings in the U.S. will be shown below. It is composed of three fictional personas, creative briefs based off the personas and AI generated church spaces, and the design process for creating environmental graphics that satisfy each of these creative briefs. The reason for creating these moving parts is to set up situations that generally illustrate the principles set forth up until now, without getting too narrowed to a specific church or prescribing a particular style or solution. The hope is that graphic designers and churches will be able to learn from the research and process in a way that helps them implement environmental graphic design in their own churches.

## **The Personas**

User personas are fictional people that provide an example of the audience that a designer is attempting to reach with a creative solution. Using personas for this project was important to me because they serve as a general picture of a population better than real individuals would. The goal of the solution is to provide a general concept and illustrate the design process for approaching a project like this. The personas are all fictional pastors from different areas of the country, denominations, and backgrounds. Their goals for the encouragement of the church congregation and the glorification of God through the environmental graphics all vary, but their purpose is to emulate what some real goals might be in the church world. Any similarities between actual personal information, church names, or backstories are purely coincidental and not intended.

### ***Persona 1***

Matt Hurley is the creative arts pastor of Victory Baptist in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He is 32 years old, married, and has three young children. In his free time, Matt is outside and walking through parks with his family, enjoying creation. He became involved with Victory Baptist in an internship role directly after finishing seminary. The lead pastor and other leadership noticed his taste for and pull towards the creative arts and decided that he would be able to best serve the church by nurturing all things creative. While not having a direct background in the arts, Matt has excelled in finding and aiding people to help with worship service production, web design, and outreach marketing. Since he has been on staff, he has also gotten the brand refreshed and reinforced through their signage and handouts. In his time in creative ministry, he has grown passionate about imagery and storytelling, especially when it

involves the text of Scripture. He and the other church leadership serve their mid-size congregation that is diverse in age and stage of life and is predominantly Black and African American (“Rocky Mount City”).

### ***Persona 2***

Dr. Hudson Todd is the pastor of Ebenezer Presbyterian in Hays, Kansas. He is 61 years old, married, and has two adult children. In his free time, he enjoys coaching all kinds of high school sports. Dr. Todd began coaching when his oldest was in middle school and has loved being a part of sports and the coaching community ever since. He took over leadership of Ebenezer Presbyterian from his father when he stepped down, just as his father had taken over for his grandfather before him. The church building and its many members have been in the care of the Todd family for three generations and they are deeply important to Dr. Todd. For him, stepping into the digital age has been difficult, and he tends to stick with tradition in most that he does because he inherited so much knowledge from his father. Although he may not grasp social media or online presence, he loves and shepherds his congregation well, always trying to exhort them through his speaking and living towards them. His congregation is made up of predominantly older white people, although some of the loyal families’ younger generations attend as well, and it is a small church overall (“Hays City”).

### ***Persona 3***

Noah Diaz is the outreach pastor of Dove Evangelical Church in San Diego, California. He is 40 years old and is a widower with no children. Noah spends most of his time on city streets preaching the word, and in his little leisure time he enjoys going to local art spaces to

think and meditate. He devoted his life to full time ministry at Dove Evangelical Church after his wife passed, and eventually became the outreach pastor. Because he is so passionate about reaching others with the gospel, the church has put its marketing strategy in his care, so they can bring in more and more people to the family of Christ. Noah is ecstatic that their growth has been exponential over the past few years, to the point that they have had to shift spaces to accommodate everyone comfortably. The large congregation is a primarily made up of a mixture of white and Hispanic young people, although Noah is always searching for people of different ages and cultures to bring to the Lord (“San Diego City”).

### **The Spaces**

Below are the three fictional spaces, Hurley’s Victory Baptist (see fig. 1), Todd’s Ebenezer Presbyterian (see fig. 2), and Diaz’ Dove Evangelical Church (see fig. 3). I took the photos at a local church but removed any branded elements to keep the spaces generic. In the briefs, the visual goals for each area are explored.

*Fig. 1.*

*Photo of the fictional Victory Baptist, taken in a local church by Hannah Gilmer.*



*Fig. 2.*

*Photo of the fictional Ebenezer Presbyterian, taken in a local church by Hannah Gilmer.*



Fig. 3.

*Photo of the fictional Dove Evangelical Church, taken in a local church by Hannah Gilmer.*



### **The Briefs**

As seen below, I envision briefs given from pastors to graphic designers to be a sharing of their heart for the church. They do not need to entail specific graphic details, as that can be up to the designer to decide on for best communication, but the briefs should have enough practical and emotional context for the designer to make informed decisions. If there is any scripture or biblical passage to be expressed in the design, the interpretation should be discussed or given to the designer to avoid confusion or mistakes, because the overarching goal is to make design an encouragement and not a stumbling block.

***Brief 1: Victory Baptist, Pastor Hurley***

At Victory Baptist, we have a beautiful, open space for both our sanctuary and our foyer, but we have a sore need for color and visuals. There are several plain walls that I feel could be utilized so much better by being transformed into an encouraging symbol of who we are. One empty wall is adjacent to a huge window that always has an unhindered view of the trees and property we own, and I think that would be the best placement for a graphic. I'm open regarding the style of the graphic, but I want to push people to look out the window and adore the Creator. We all get very busy, and things get hectic on Sundays, so maybe having a designated space to meditate and come away from the fun chaos for a moment would be a good use for this space. Currently, our brand colors are purple and green, and we would love for those to be incorporated to keep consistency.

***Brief 2: Ebenezer Presbyterian, Dr. Todd***

Although not much has changed in our building over the years that my family has been shepherding this church, I think it is time for something new to inspire the congregation outside of singing and hearing the word on Sundays. I want to commission a piece that symbolizes who we are for the back wall of our sanctuary. We need to keep up the energy of the congregation for the Lord. We understand that the stamina needed for the Christian walk comes from Christ and because of this, Hebrews 12:1-2 is near and dear to our hearts. We have many older people here, and they are always needing encouragement to see the purpose in the short bit that they have left on earth, and I don't want them to become weary of doing good. For the few younger people, they need to understand the same thing, to commit their days now so it is a habit for them in the future. I also love the cloud of witnesses because everyone here, myself included, has family and

friends in heaven with Jesus cheering them on. Our history is a huge part of who we are, and it would be great if the piece could symbolize that. We definitely do not want colors that are too crazy or experimental, I want to encourage without completely changing the atmosphere in the sanctuary.

***Brief 3: Dove Evangelical Church, Pastor Diaz***

Being an avid evangelist, altar calls are very important to me. I love that our leadership allows the time and space each week for people to come down and experience Jesus for the first time, surrounded by people who can get them connected into discipleship. That being said, many newcomers to the church seem to be uncomfortable with coming down and participating in altar calls. I and the other pastors at Dove want to create a welcoming atmosphere for the aisle, through the floor space if that is possible. We figured that as people look down the aisle to decide whether to come or not, the floor is the first place they will look. Since we are called Dove, something incorporating that imagery would be interesting. We serve people from a variety of cultures here, so it would be wonderful to have some different languages or cultural colors represented in a way that isn't overwhelming. We like to use Sans Serif fonts in our brand and typically more neutral colors, but we are open to a more colorful floor.

**Process for Completing Brief 1**

To begin the solution for Brief 1, I dug through passages of scripture that would provide relevant themes and truths surrounding creation. In the photo of the church space, I noticed a tree and thought about using a portion of Jeremiah 17 for the root imagery and sketched a few related ideas. However, I consulted the brief again and realized this would not be close enough to the



desired theme of creation, so I researched further. Revelation 4:11 seemed like the most direct and concise connection between creation and worshipping God. It also carries a beautiful depiction of the praise in heaven, pushing people to remember the kingdom of heaven God is propagating through the church. By researching scripture that connected to Pastor Hurley's theme, could encourage the local body of believers, and glorified the Lord, I prepared for a well-informed visual solution.

As I sketched and ideated, I tried to lean into the words themselves and how they could be bold and eye-catching. Later in the process, because of Professor Wright's suggestion, I decided to design a graphic that could cling across the window that Pastor Hurley mentioned instead of the adjacent wall. Since the goal was still to view creation through the window, I thought in terms of large, chunky letterforms that could be appropriate for a young to middle aged audience. The process for developing the arrangement of the type is shown below.

I also decided to add illustrative elements to add beauty and visual interest to the graphic. Professor Wright also pushed me in this area, one which I neglected because I naturally think of illustrative elements as excess. Following the research on beauty above, I created a little more intricacy for the sake of enriching beauty. Figures 8 and 9 display the final graphic.

Fig. 4.

Initial sketches for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

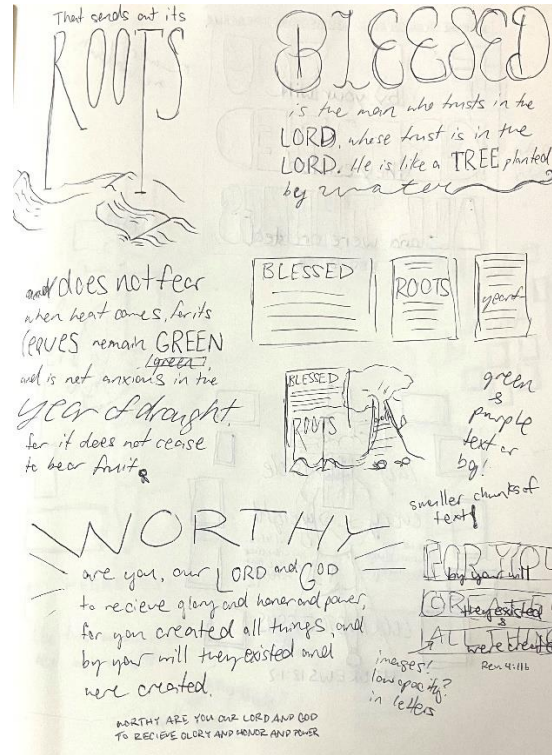


Fig. 5.

Rough sketch for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

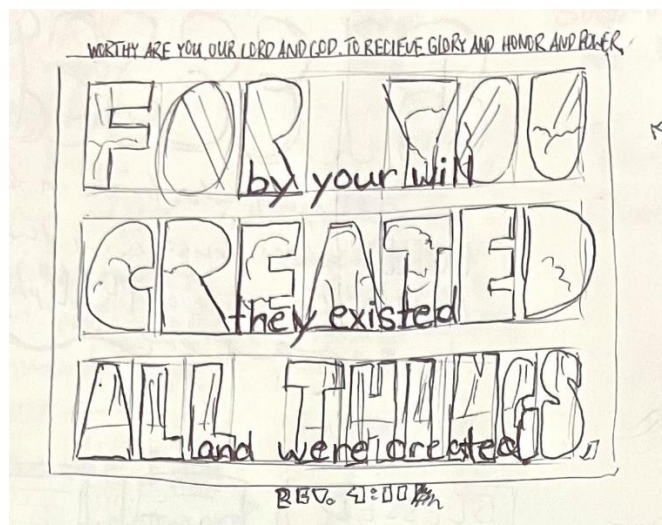


Fig. 6.

Mockup of the first draft for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.



Fig. 7.

Mockup of the second draft for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.



Fig. 8.

*Flat final draft for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.*

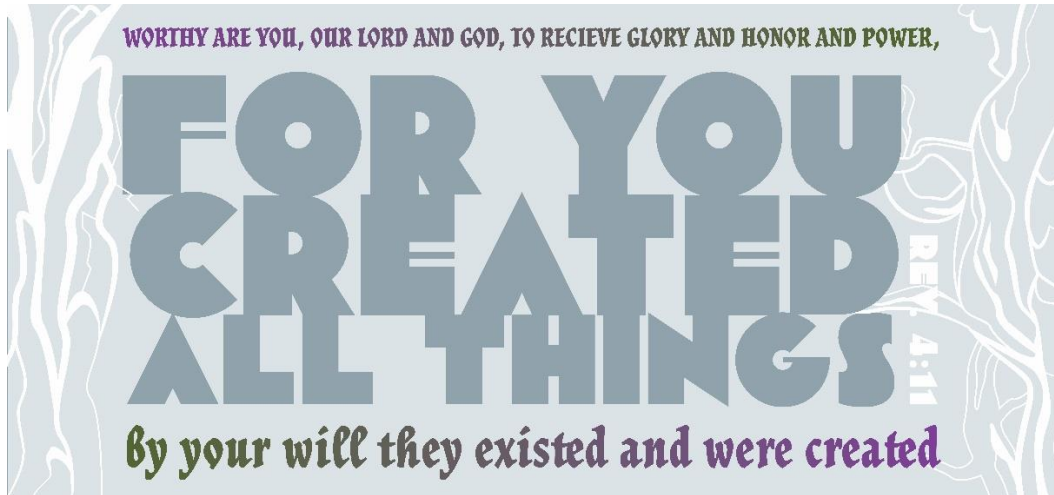


Fig. 9.

*Mockup of final draft for Brief 1's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.*





## **Process for Completing Brief 2**

Brief 2 has a very clear scriptural direction, so I had a clear place to begin. I started by analyzing Hebrews 12:1-2 and thinking about its imagery. As seen in the sketches below, I experimented with the idea of using picture frames in memorial of the church members who had passed away. It would represent the cloud of witnesses watching over this local body specifically, in addition to the biblical witnesses in heaven. I also wanted to represent the rest of the verse through customized imagery, which I worked out in the sketches below.

“Looking to Jesus” is the piece of the verse I wanted to illustrate, but instead of using a literal illustration of Jesus, I decided to use symbols to show Him. I settled on the idea of the cross, so it could serve the double meaning of representing Jesus and showing what He endured while focusing on the joy set before Him. The cross alone didn’t seem to communicate enough of the verse, so in my sketches I began including a bright sunrise to represent the joys of heaven. By layering these elements, the design would show the layers of the journey the church members will face in their walk.

In the first digital drafts of this solution, I tried a different direction. Upon reflecting on Dr. Todd’s persona and brief again, I thought a retro sporty theme might be interesting to implement. While I carried this idea to fruition, it did not work as well as I had hoped. Professor Wright and Dugan both had several revisions, and I was hesitant about this idea, so I decided to shift back towards the original idea. Professor Dugan also suggested using an illustration for the person running to make him more relatable and less confusing, so I went fully illustrative for the final idea. I used Adobe Illustrator’s Text to Vector Graphic AI feature to create the base illustrations for the man, cross, and sunrise seen in the final design in Figure 13. I edited them

some and combined the elements together. I used the typeface from the first draft of the design, because it was communicating the clarity and old nostalgia that I wanted it to. I worked on the composition to make it more legible and organized for the older population of the church. Then, I applied it to the back wall surrounded by empty picture frames for the photos of church members that have passed on. The final design is pictured in Figures 13 and 14.

Fig. 10.

Initial sketches for Brief 2's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

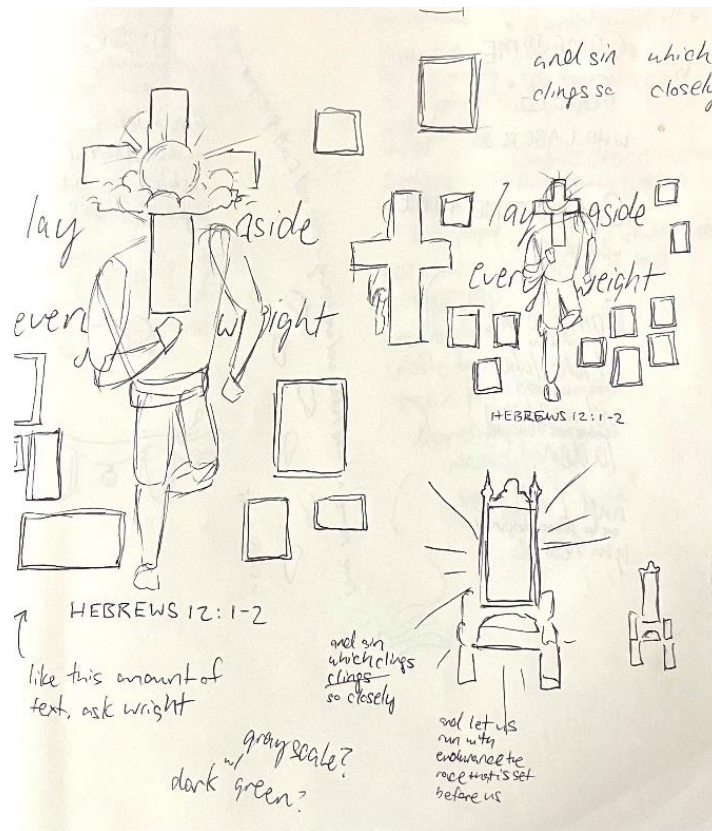


Fig. 11.

Rough sketch for Brief 2's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

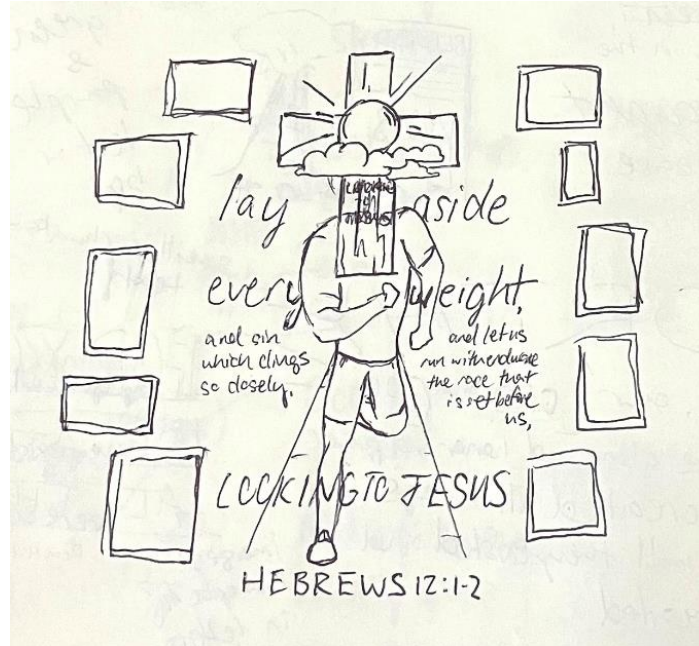


Fig. 12.

Mockup of the first draft for Brief 2's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.



Fig. 13.

Flat final draft for Brief 2's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

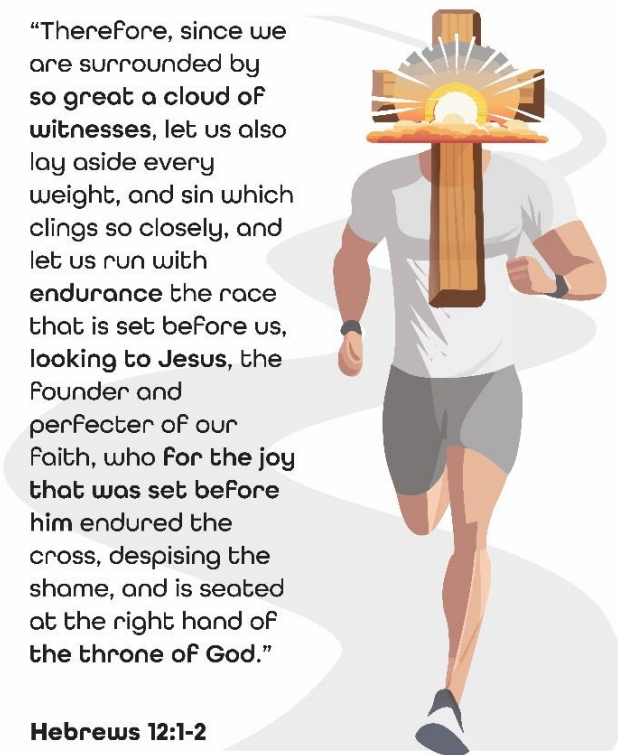


Fig. 14.

Mockup of final draft for Brief 2's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.





### **Process for Completing Brief 3**

When reading through Brief 3, the first verse I thought of in relation to a church's altar was Matthew 11:28-30. It has been used before many times in that area of the church, and I believe it is still fitting. Through this verse, Jesus is inviting the very people that Pastor Diaz wants to invite into vulnerability, prayer, and the hope of salvation at the altar. Through this solution, I worked to bring a fresh and fitting look to a tried-and-true passage of scripture for inviting the weary and heavy laden to Jesus.

In this solution, I sought to bring attention to the words by choosing fonts that would surf today's trends. With Dove Evangelical Church being in Southern California and its members bring comprised of primarily young people, the design would likely be most attractive to them if it follows what they're seeing a lot of in the design world currently. I also leaned into the more nostalgic side of the trends to provide a level of comfort and familiarity. In the brief, Pastor Diaz wished for the design to include other languages or cultural colors, so I incorporated the Spanish translation of the verse in a way that contrasts with the rest of the design to draw attention to it.

In my sketches and ideation, I started very simple in color palette and overall design. I wanted it to blend in with the existing neutral colors of the church and not be overwhelming graphically as one tries to walk and read it. I stuck to a black and off-white design for quite a bit of the process and had one symbolic graphic of a yoke with feathers to illustrate the light burden of following Christ. However, Professor Wright asked me to push it further in the illustration and in the type, which caused me to reevaluate. Professor Dugan also pointed out that the light background is not a practical idea for a floor graphic because of how much dirt will be dragged across it in its lifetime. Because of these critiques, I added detail to the illustration by recruiting

the help of Illustrator’s AI again. I used it to make individual feathers and a wood texture that I composed back into the original illustration, giving it some color and fresh detail. Inspired by the colors in the illustration, I revamped the color palette by adding a calming navy-blue background and making the text gold and yellow. I added in some texture from the wood to the sides of the graphic to give it more visual interest as well. Figures 17 and 18 show the final design.

Fig. 15.

Initial sketches (left) and rough sketch (right) for Brief 3’s solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

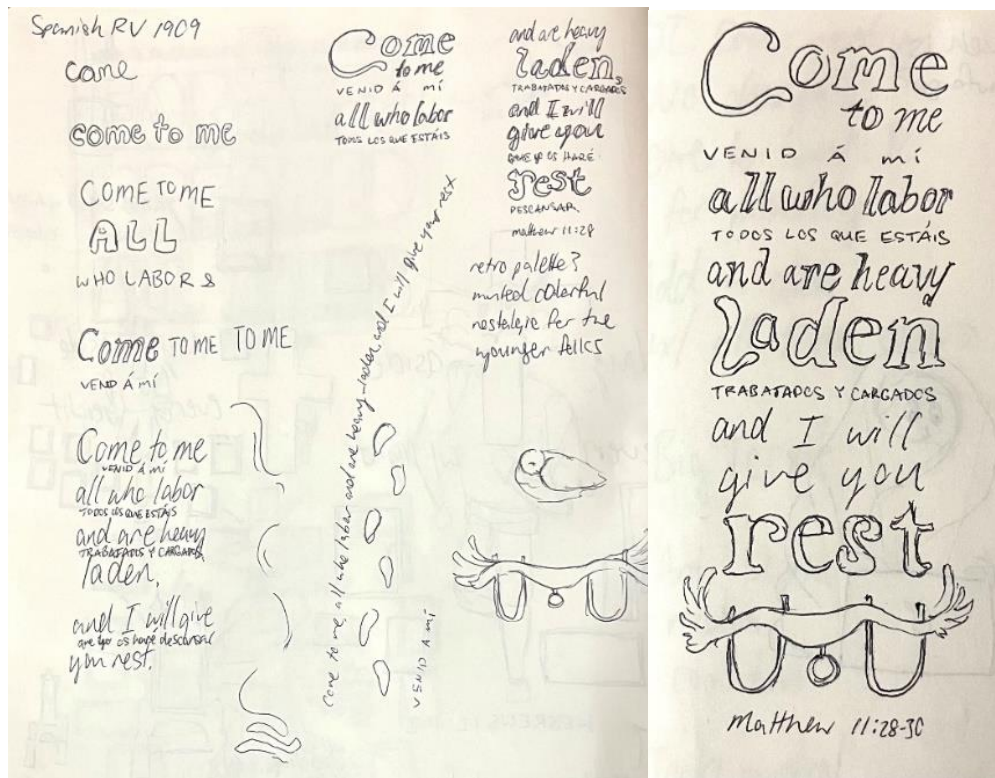


Fig. 16.

Mockup of the first draft for Brief 3's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.



Fig. 17.

Flat final draft for Brief 3's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer.

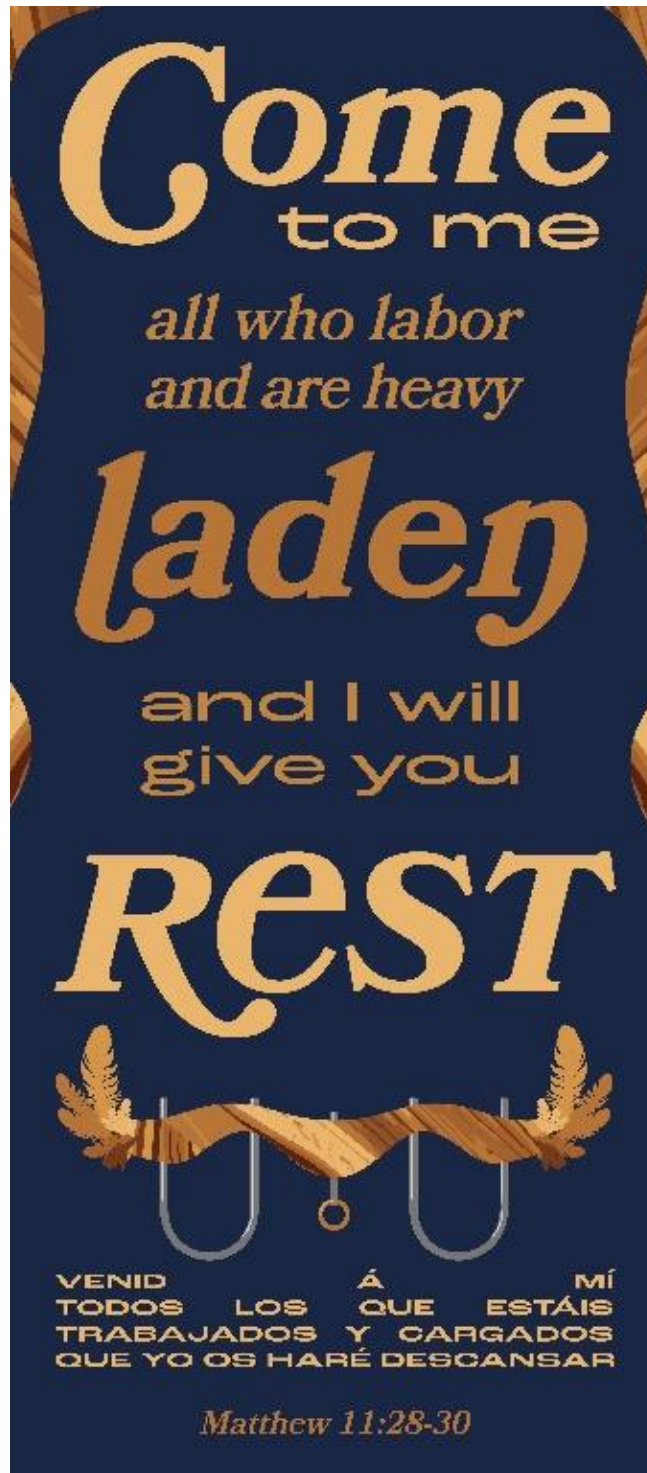


Fig. 18.

Mockup of final draft for Brief 3's solution, created by Hannah Gilmer



## The Conclusion

In this final section, I will discuss the creative solution portion of the project and how it relates to the research stated earlier. While discussing the results of the creative portion, I will elaborate on opportunities that I see for learning more about this topic or for creating a better example process for designing for a church. Altogether, this section will connect the dots and provide next steps for anyone picking up this research.

**Why This Solution?**

The environmental graphic design pieces created in response to the three user personas' briefs serve as examples of applying the research stated above. Graphic design is an effective medium for bringing meaningful beauty into the church for the purpose glorifying God and lifting up believers, as illustrated by the examples. They are effective pieces because they are fitting for their spaces, they precisely communicate biblical truths, and they add beauty.

When discussing design in the church throughout history, it was shown that architects and designers used the mediums of their time and styles that would be most attractive to their audience to communicate the glory of God and encourage church members. The creative solutions employ this principle in their processes by the consideration of demographics and physical spaces. Each piece used fonts, colors, and composition styles that would be fitting for its respective church's members. Each one also fits into its space uniquely, taking advantage of the dimensions and qualities of the area to communicate meaning. Thus, the solutions were fitting for their spaces.

Controversy over design in the church has always stemmed from a misunderstanding or abuse of scriptural truth, either in the design itself or about design in general, as was stated above in the brief history of the church's design controversies. By using Bible passages word-for-word in their proper context with the counsel of a pastor, the creative solutions have protections against the twisting of scripture. They also include logical and easily explainable imagery that can be general understood by laymen, providing the most clarity possible without overexplaining.

Finally, these creative solutions add beauty to their spaces, a quality that is lacking and necessary in modern Protestant church buildings as stated above. The designs display beauty through their pleasant colors, level of detail, and clear type. These elements add visual interest in an organized way, allowing the design to be elevated above the bare bones of only what is needed to communicate. Professor Wright and Dugan both helped improve the designs in this area, pushing them to represent the artful craft of graphic design.

### **Next Steps**

In conclusion, environmental graphic design can be a way in which designers bring meaningful beauty back into church buildings. This conclusion is drawn from pieces of history, biblical truth, design principles, and a real example of the graphic design process applied to design in the church. By using this research as a starting point, Christian designers can begin to develop their own methods for preserving biblical truth and communicating effectively through church design.

I would love to see designers adopt and adapt the methods shown here to find something better. If there is a specific style that would suit this era of Christian design, I want to see designers pushing to discover it. What I have created within the bounds of this research is just one solution to the problem. With additional time, resources, and creative individuals working to incorporate creativity and beauty in the confines of church buildings, a revolution of Christian design could begin. Ultimately, designers may take inspiration from this research to claim their value to create meaningful beauty in church buildings for the chance of exhorting Christians and bringing glory to God.

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