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MISSIONARY MANDATE OF GOD IN JESUS

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1. Introduction

The missionary mandate of Jesus is God's demonstration of His age long eternal desire towards mankind. Beginning from Genesis, that is since He started His dealings with the human person (Genesis 1:26-30), He earnestly desired to be in covenant relationship with man. This was essentially the reason for the choice of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and consequently that of his choicest descendants - the nation of Israel (cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Psalm 57). Israel had always, in the plan and purpose of God, been responsible for communicating the message of God's grace to nations. Israel was meant to be a communicating nation.

Israel's failure, as a nation with God's mandate, was most obvious in this regard amidst the incessant nudges and harsh clarion calls of the various prophets. God in His characteristic manner of proffering solutions, even where and when it is extremely impossible, had to come in the person of the Son to accomplish this task (cf. Isaiah 59:16). Although glaring in almost all pages of the Old Testament, this author believes that the missionary call of Jesus is essentially implied in the commissioning conversation between God and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8) though the popular view is that the passage talks more about the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus the prophecy of the obedient servant-hood of Israel rather found fulfillment in the Servant - Son of God (cf.

Isaiah 49:1-6). This all important obedience of His earned Him the reward of being the Preacher that became the theme of later preachers' sermons, "Great indeed, we confess; is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). Everything about Jesus: His incarnation, private and public life and even His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension are missionary in essence.

II. The Incarnation of Jesus and Missions

The incarnation of Jesus brought about the fulfillment of generational prophesies of the "Davidic Messiah" whose reign would know no end (Isa. 9:6-7). Beginning from the Pentateuch prophesies of the "Seed of the woman" (Gen. 3: 15), the "Prophet" of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 till the Gospels' era when Jesus was born, expectations had been high among the Jews as to when the Messiah would come and how.

According to Derek Prime, the word incarnation itself comes from Latin term *incarnetus*, meaning "becoming in flesh", and it describes the amazing feat of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, taking human flesh upon Him and living among men and women (John 1:14). Similarly, Lawrence Ekcoma says that "The term incarnation is derived from the Latin word meaning literally "Enfleshment," that is, the assumption of humanity. But Mycr Peariman) simply explains that "Incarnation means that God (that is the Son of God) became man".¹ He had earlier affirmed that it was "upon the fact of the virgin birth" that the doctrine of incarnation is based.

The theology of Incarnation in Johannine account (John 1:1-5, 14; 1 John 1: 1-3), according to Robert Gundry, entails that "The word was in communion with God and therefore came from Him. Yet He was the same God ("the Word was God")."² The scriptures declare that Jesus Christ is the manifold wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 3:10-11; Col. 2:2-3) and the perfect revelation of the nature and person of God (John 13-5; 14, 1 8; Col. 2:9).

One may then ask, what is the implication of the incarnation for missions? In the first instance; that Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God reveals the heart and mind of God (John 14:9 cf. Matt. 11:27). Mission is the main reason for incarnation; that through the Son, the Father could make His mind and heart known to humanity. Secondly, according to Gundry, "He was the Creator, and by coming into the world, He became the source of spiritual life and illumination for all men. Those who receive Him by believing Him - in contrast with most of His own people, the Jews - become the children of God, and not by human powers of procreation, in other words, not by virtue of physical ancestry, Jewish or other - but by the action of God Himself". Until the

incarnation, humanity had tried in vain to please God, but by God's mercy through incarnation and the subsequent vicarious death of Jesus, grace was made available for easy access to God (cf. John 12:24; Eph. 2:8-9). Another missionary significance of Incarnation is the fact that "Christ came to reveal what true humanity should be." Jesus Christ, "was the model of a perfect manhood," who exhibited the highest moral excellence that should have existed but for the fall of Adam (Jn. 13:15; 1 Jn. 2:6; 1 Pet. 2:21)". This level of moral excellence was the requirement of the *Torah* (cf. Deut. 10:12-15) which Jesus fulfilled (Matt. 5:17) through His life and death, and commanded His disciples to go and teach the world all that they had seen and heard Him do (cf. Matt. 28:19-20).

Finally, Christ's Incarnation was to effect the salvation of mankind by His life and death. The entrance of sin into humanity was a direct work of the devil. He came that He might break the yoke of the devil, sin and death, that had been the enemies of man's soul (Heb. 2: 14-15; 1 Jn. 3:8). Salvation is, basically, the thrust of the incarnation. The same was the main theme in the message of Angel Gabriel to Joseph during His conception (Matt. 1:18 cf. Isa. 7: 14). The same is the main theme of Biblical studies which was the basis for the Apostles' missionary activities.

III. Jesus' Messianic Mission Statement: A Study of Luke 4:18 - 19

It was at the outset of His ministry when Jesus was at His hometown of Nazareth; and while in the Synagogue to worship on a Sabbath, that the leaders accorded Him the honour of reading the Scriptures. He read Isaiah 61:1:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4: 18 - 19).

The Holy Spirit in Luke's account plays such crucial role that it is sometimes called the *Gospel of the Spirit*. During the Birth narrative, the Spirit is frequently mentioned (Luke 1:5, 17, 35; 2:25, 26, 27). At the Baptism, Luke offers the most graphic and public picture of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus (Luke 3:21 - 22). Jesus begins His ministry "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1, 14, 18).

According to John Stott "All the Gospels report the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at His baptism, but Luke adds two further references to the Spirit's

empowering Jesus at the start of his ministry (4: I, 14), and then crowns these by recording Jesus' dramatic claim that Isaiah 61:1 has now been fulfilled in himself: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me At the end of the reading, Jesus said: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing³. Nelson explains that "The promise fulfilled was that the Messiah had come and would do all of the things told in the text"⁴

The themes discussed in the text include, in the first instance, "to preach the gospel to the poor, the destitute, the afflicted, the humble, those crushed in the Spirit, the broken-hearted and those who tremble at His Word (Isaiah 61:1-3). Secondly, to heal those who are bruised and oppressed. This healing involves the whole person, both physical and spiritual. Thirdly, Jesus was anointed to open the spiritual eyes of those blinded by the world and Satan in order that they might see the truth of God's good news (cf John 9:39). And finally, He was anointed to proclaim the time of true freedom and salvation from Satan's domain, sin, fear, and guilt (cf. John 8:36; Acts 26:18)."

Therefore, "In Jesus Christ, God was holding before men his gracious saving work more directly, and urgently than before. This shape of things to come, his kingdom, became exceptionally clear in the person, the words, and the deeds of the Messiah.⁵ He therefore, powerfully subdued those sinister forces which were destroying the souls and bodies of men and renewed those who were the victims and servants of those forces and, then, gave them missionary mandate. Thus, the coming of the Messiah brought about the beginning of the end of the total grip which the forces of darkness had hitherto had on the human person. This was demonstrated by the various miraculous works of Jesus especially in delivering those that were oppressed as recorded in the Gospels. The examples of such can be seen in the healing of the sick (Matt. 8:3. 13; 9:1-8 etc, the various exorcisms on dementiacs (Mark 5:1-20, and raising the dead (Mark 5: 21-43; Luke 7:11-10; John 11:38-45) to mention but a few. His exemplary living and teachings are also other means ensuring the total emancipation of mankind. In order to sustain this victory over the forces of darkness, Jesus commissioned His disciples who were to continue the mission of teaching, healing and casting out devils from those that are possessed before His ascension (Mark 16: 14-18, Matt. 28:18-20 cf. Acts 1: 6-8).

IV. Christological Titles of Jesus

Scriptures abound that attest to Jesus' messianic or Christological status. In the various Scriptures that speak of His Messianic status, mission is the main theme. This is evident in the Christological titles, some of which are examined below.

A Christ

The word *Christos* an adjective of the English “Christ”, and a transliteration from the Greek *Xptatoç* is a Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *מָשִׁיחַ* (Messiah.) Simply put, the term means “anointed one.” Raymond states that the word “occurs very infrequently in the Old Testament as reference to the further Davidic Deliverer of people of God - only three times to be exact (Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25, 26)”. Messianic or Christological ideas are found in many parts of the Old Testament. Asaju, for instance, writes that:

The election of the Patriarchs e.g. Abraham, as an act of God choosing a people (race) in whom all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3); even though the descendants of Israel were frustrated by the Egyptian bondage, God intervened, rather dramatically decisively. The role of Moses was prominent as Messiah. His duty as God’s instrument of salvation prefigured Jesus Christ and laid the basis for the expectation of a new ideal prophet, a new Moses (Deut. 13: 15-19). This could be seen as (1) foretelling the Messiah, or (2) another continuous line of prophets. The expectation of a “Prophet like Moses” was still rife even up till the time of the Ministry of John the Baptist⁶.

In Jesus’ Messianic Mission Statement in Luke 4:18-19, Jesus appropriated messianic passages in the Old Testament to Himself, thus inferring that mission was the reason for the anointing upon Him. He used the passage to outline the nature of His ministry as involving preaching, healing, and liberating the oppressed (Isa. 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-19). The Spirit anointed and empowered Him for His Mission.

B. Son of God

In the four Gospels namely Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, especially, the Gospel according to St. John, frequent use is made of terms that prove the Sonship of Jesus in direct relationship with God. Such terms include “Son”, “Father”, “The Father”, “My Father” and so on. In each of the occasions that the terms are used, the missionary mandate of Jesus and His pre-existence as the eternal Son of God are evident; “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27), “... and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High; and the Lord will give to him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32 - 33). In defense of

His source of authority and power to the Jews, Jesus says, “But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing bear me witness that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36).

In Matthew 11:27, for instance, we see the intermediary mission of Jesus when He says “no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” Although some have argued that the statement “implies the limitation or inferiority of the Son to the Father”⁷, on the contrary, Donald Guthrie says that the reciprocal “no one knows the Son except the Father” and no one knows the Father except the Son” does not, however, suggest inferiority”. He further declares that:

The fact that the Father delivers (ἀποδίδωμι, *paradidomi*) all things to the Son seems to be meant in the sense of the process of revelation. It is the Son who chooses to whom he will make the revelation⁸.

While Matthew II: 17 talks of the intermediary mission of the Son who chooses who He reveals the Father to, Luke 1:3-33 simply reveals the kingship of the “Son of the Most High” who will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” The word reign is from the word βασιλεύω, *basileuo* which means “to be king”, “to rule”. This primarily speaks of Christ’s mission of restoring the dominion which Adam lost to Satan in the garden of Eden hence Spiro Zodhiates et al in reference to this verse states that the rulership in question “applies to God (Rev. 11:15, 17; 19:6), ‘to Christ (1 Cor. 15:25)’, and to those who belong to Christ (Rev. 5:10; 20:4; 22:5)”⁹.

With respect to Jesus’ statement in John 5:36 on the difference between His testimony and that of John the Baptist regarding “the works which the Father has granted Him to accomplish,” Torrance and Torrance opine that Jesus in the passage” wants to be acknowledged as the Messiah promised by God, so that He may be heard. Hence, He insists that He is now revealed to be such as the Scripture proclaims.” Reacting to this view they further wonder “whether miracles have enough force to prove this since similar miracles had been already Performed by the prophets¹⁰. According to them (Torrance and Torrance) “those signs that God did by the hands of the prophets only answered the purpose they were intended for - namely, to show that they were ministers of God who would not get authority in any other way” and concluded that God “wished to exalt His Son more highly” and that this purpose of God should be regarded as the design of miracles.” Whether the intermediary role of the Son in Matthew 11:27, or the kingship role in Luke 1:32-33, or the proof of His

Messiahship through miracles, all that is intended to establish here is that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God spoken of by the prophets in the Old Testament literatures, whose life, work, death and resurrection brought redemption to humanity.

Based on the perspective of the stated purpose of the Gospel of John in 20:31-31, Geerhardus Vos insightfully describes John's Gospel as the gospel of Saviour Sonship¹¹. In *C.C. Ryrie's Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, the term *hui tou theou*, *hui tou theou* has Messianic implication.¹² And by the means of the sending in John 20:21 the Son extended His messianic mandate to the eleven which is a solemn mission or sending.

C. The Son of Man

The 'Son of Man' is another Christological title of Jesus that is missionary in all of its ramifications. Unlike 'Son of David' which basically speaks of Jesus' royalty, the 'Son of Man' saying presents Him as One "born of man who shares human natures and qualities" (Pealman, 1937), in true nature of the ordinary man, representing the ideal man in the society. A study of Daniel chapter 7 passages in connection with Jesus' Son of Man saying reveals that the "Man-like" figure in Daniel 7 is man-like only in order to highlight the contrast between Jesus Himself and the beast-empires and their kings. To His disciples, He exclaimed, what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" (John 6:62).

While all these communicate the divinity of Jesus or His preexistence, which is significant to His mission as the Son of Man, the same also include His claim to have authority to forgive sin (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24), and His claim to have the right to regulate even the observation of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5) which is most significantly evident in His dying the cruel death of crucifixion to the end that "he might ransom many" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45).

It is the suffering that brings salvation to mankind, "because man's eternal destiny would turn on his relation to the Son of Man" who taught that "unless the Son of Man gives a man life, there is no life for him" (John 6:53) Jesus preferred the Son of Man to Christ in expressing His notion of the Messiah in view of the distortions and political conception of the Messiah prevalent in His days. Just as He applied the figure of the Stone 'hewn from the Mountain' to Himself (Dan. 2:36-45), He also made the title, "Son of Man" His most characteristic way of referring to Himself as the One in whom and through whom the salvation of God's people must be realized.

D. Lamb of God

Jesus' title as the Lamb of God, in all aspects of His significance to missions, is mostly demonstrated in His Calvary cross experience where He "takes away the sin of the world" as exclaims John the Baptist (John 1:29). The Lamb of God saying, basically, is in reference to the Exodus "Passover Lamb and its blood" (Ex. 12). The same is referred to in Revelation 13:8 as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world which in Isaiah 53:7 is seen as "a Lamb to the slaughter". The practical expression and implication of this title will be fully discussed in a later segment in this section. The significance in Paul's missiology is more in the fact that he refers to it very often in his epistles. In I Corinthians 5:7 for instance, Jesus is referred to by Paul "as our Passover" who is sacrificed for us".

E. Logos

The term *logos* is an English transliteration of *λογος* and it was a common place in the Greek world. It conveys the idea of a person's thought, reason, or speech. This title is particularly substantiated in the prologue of St. John in John I : 1-18 where he identifies Jesus as the word of God who was with Him from the beginning. It is the view of Leon Morris and the Stoics that "reason is perceived philosophically as the soul of the universe and the rational principle of the universe ... the creature energy". Morris¹³ in particular, later states that the concept of logos in John shows scanty familiarity with and less dependence upon Greek philosophy. This clarification is important due to the acclaimed similarity of language between the Johannine and the Greek view of *logos*.

Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, believes the *logos* is distinct from the material word. But modern Christian scholarship discredits the fact that John's source of logos concept was the Greek Philosophy. Old Testament passages abound that reveal Jesus as the Lord, Reason or Wisdom. In Psalm 33:6, it is stated "By the word of the LORD were heavens made, the Starry host by the breath of his mouth." The word is sent in Psalms 107:20 to heal the sick. In Proverbs 8:1-36, Wisdom is seen personified.

Based on John 1: 1, Donald Stamps *et al* make the following assertion:

John begins his Gospel by calling Jesus "the Word" (Greek *Logos*). In using this designation for Christ, John presents Him as the personal Word of God and indicates that in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). Scripture declares that Jesus Christ is the manifold wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 3:10-11; Col. 2:2) and the

perfect revelation of the nature of the person of God (John 1:3-5, 14, 18; Col. 2:9)¹⁴.

Thus, Paul presented Jesus to his audience as the Word of God among men who left His heavenly glory and took the nature of man (Phil. 2:5-II), as the manifold wisdom of God and the perfect revelation of God among men.

V. The Cross of Jesus and Missions

Central to the Christological background to the Pauline Mission is the theology of the Cross. An upright stake or beam, the cross “was used in punishing and executing criminals, particularly, by the Romans¹⁵. The implication of the term in Christian theology is the fact that it “describes the painful form of death Jesus endured, and it is more often used as a one-word summary of the good news of salvation, that Jesus died for our sins”.¹⁶

At the beginning of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul declares that “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians. 1:18). In another place he announces one of the effects of the cross that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. for it is written “cursed be everyone who hangs on a cross” (Gal. 3: 13). The vicarious or substitutionary nature of Christ’s death on the cross is better explained in 2 Cor. 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Several views have been expressed by people, both for and against, on the theology of the cross. “Gandhi,” according to John Stott in 1894, declared that he could only “accept Jesus as a Martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born.” To him, Christ’s “death on the cross was” only just “a great example to the world, but there was nothing like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it.” In his word, “my heart could not accept”. Again, a German philosopher and philologist, Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁷, who perceives Christianity as a weak religion in 1895 described “depravity” as “decadence” and that nothing was more decadent than Christianity which “has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted.” He reserved his bitterest invective for “the Christian conception of God” as God of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit,” and for “the Christian Messiah¹⁷ who he dismissed contemptuously as “God on the Cross.” While Nietzsche and those like him perceive Christianity as weak for their theology of the cross, others see the Christian faith as barbaric. Alfred Ayer¹⁸, for instance, an Oxford Philosopher sees Christian teaching as barbaric. In an article

published in a London Guardian Newspaper of August 30, 1979 he writes that “among religions of historical importance, there is quite a strong case for considering Christianity the worst. Why so?” He continues, “Because, it rests on

the allied doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement, which are intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous.”

But the Christian scholars have different perception of the cross. Towards the dawn of the 20th Century CE, P.T. Forsyth writes: “Christ is just what his cross is.” He further asserts, that “All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there.... Christ, I repeat, is to us just what His cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand His cross”¹⁹. The point he makes in the poetic verse of his was that the cross is what makes Christianity what it is. The death of Jesus on the cross makes Christianity the strongest religion on earth because its Founder died, resurrected and finally ascended up to heaven where He sits at the right hand of God as teaches the Bible. This is the bedrock of the Christian message. The same the Christian missionary preach. Jesus is the cross, the cross is Jesus: fighting against the cross is fighting against God and His plans for humanity. Put in the language of the modern man “no cross no Christianity”.

Applauding Luther’s description of Christian *theology* as *Iheologici crucis*, Brunner asserts:

The cross is the sign of the Christian faith, of the Christian church, of the revelation of God in Jesus ... The whole struggle of reformation for the *sola fide*, the *solī deo gloriis*, was simply the struggle for the right interpretation of the cross. He who understands the cross aright - this is the opinion of the Reformers - understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ²⁰.

The view of Stephen Neill in his *Jesus of History*, most justifies the claim of this segment that the theology of the cross is central to Pauline or Christian mission:

In the Christian theology of history, the death of Christ is the central point of history; here all roads of the past converge; all the roads of the future diverge²¹.

That the cross of Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the Christian faith is a none-controversial truth. It was on the cross that the “Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) was slain. Neill had earlier stated that “Justin Martyr, the second - century Christian apologist, confessed that

wherever he looked, he saw the cross. Neither the sea is crossed nor is the earth ploughed without it”²²

Looking at the cross from the point of view of Luther’s *theologia crucis*, Ausgabe discloses that Luther refers to the “understanding of the whole of

theology as theology of cross, in that the cross is seen as the focal point of God's revelation of himself and therefore a foundation and centre of all truly Christian theology"²³. He later adds, "But in God's revelation of Himself in the cross. God shatters human preconceptions of divinity and human illusions about how God may be known". He affirms that "In the cross God is not revealed in power and glory which natural reason can recognize as divine, but in the very opposite of divinity, in human disgrace, poverty, suffering and death, in what seems to us as weakness and foolishness".

Paul's view of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2 Cor. 2:21; Gal. 3:13; Phil. 2:4- 11) which Christians, both scholars and devotionals alike, replicate in one way or the other in their various works entails that it is in the humiliation of the cross that Christ's divinity is most fully revealed. It is in the humility, lowliness, and suffering of the cross, that the true God expresses His divine nature, which is His freedom to love humanity in this way in contrast with all false gods who cannot do so.

Paul fought against this view vehemently (Phil. 3:6^A; Acts 22:4-5; 26:9- 11) till he was stopped and converted by Jesus on his way to Damascus when he was going to extradite the disciples who preached Jesus that was hanged on the cross. Right from this time, "his mind was changed about Jesus" who "though crucified", he saw "was the Messiah"²⁴. Thus Paul made the cross of Jesus the chief cornerstone of his message and ministry, instructing the world that it is only the basis of one's faith and that only in the vicarious death of Jesus on the cross that the individual can satisfy God who offered His son as ransom for total salvation of mankind from all forms of evil and their consequences. Hence, the Christians brand the day in which Jesus was crucified, "Good Friday".

VI. Conclusion

The mercy and grace of God epitomized in the incarnation, Ministry, and vicarious death of Christ gave rise to this paper. All the Messianic prophecies of the Davidic Servant-Son found fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth who claimed that the Old Testament scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39 cf. Luke 24:44). Although despised by many, His obedience to carry out God's desire to reconcile mankind to himself was fully accomplished at the cross through the help of the Holy Spirit whom He later sent to be with those that would continue from where He stopped (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8).

While the incarnation discusses the presence of God Himself among men teaching them the way of God in personal ways, the Messianic mission statement explains that He whom humanity had hitherto expected had finally come. The

Christological titles essentially discuss the Ministry of the Messiah from different angles. All these constitute the tool for Christian missions. While the mission of the Lord was to propagate the message of the Kingdom of God which He said had come at His first advent (cf. Matt. 4:17); and in doing that, He used several methods which included teaching, preaching and miraculous works and brought same to an absolute conclusion through His vicarious death on the cross; that of the disciples across generations and the globe is continuing that which their Master had started (cf. Actsl:1-2). This, the early disciples faithfully carried out in the Acts of the Apostles as recorded St Luke.

Endnotes

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