# HUMAN VALUES IN THE ACTIVITY OF MICHAEL BELINA CZECHOWSKI

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### ABSTRACT: Human Values in the Activity of Michael Belina Czechowski.

The most valuable resource in any organization is human capital. The emphasis on the education and continuous development of man is the solution for the growth of the organization and finally of the society. Education is not only about information of a technical nature that helps to train good professionals, but especially at moral, ethical values that make the individual a true professional. The transmission of these values through the family and the church is essential today. The role of religion should not be neglected at all and despised because it is aimed at changing deficient characters. Thus, missionaries, evangelists and priests or pastors have a mission to contribute to this change. The article exemplifies this aspect through the biography of the first Adventist missionary in Europe.

Keywords: human values, character, human character, Czechowski, religious freedom.

The value of a man, an organization or a society is given neither by the financial resources nor by the material resources at his disposal, but by the human values. The phrase "mansanctifies the place" best defines the notion of value. Human capital thus becomes the most valuable in any organization and society. Financial and material resources are ultimately created with and by the individuals of that organization or society. Thus, education acquires new valences, being the one through which the human, moral, ethical values that any society needs to progress can be transmitted.

Values such as responsibility, freedom, truth, inner harmony, joy, loyalty, honor, order, peace, friendship, respect or sincerity give the necessary balance that not only every individual need but any organization or society. That is why the family, the church and the school become the key factors through which these virtues, so necessary, can be transmitted to the individual and society. Also, these values can not only form the human character, but are the basis of its change. Thus, the role that religion plays in forming or changing character through the family or church should not be neglected or despised.

This article aims to exemplify the role that religion plays in the transmission of human values, in the formation and transformation of the character of individuals so necessary for the development of a society, through the biography of Michael Belina Czechowski, the first Adventist missionary in Europe.

## Czechowski on the Old Continent

Michael Belina Czechowski (1818–1876) was born in Poland on September 21, 1818, in a town near Kraków, Sieciechowice. On his original name, Michal, he was born into a Catholic family, Andrea (father) and Franciska (mother). At the age of 16, impressed by the sermon of a Franciscan priest about the life of Francis d'Assisi, he decided to become a priest, despite the opposition of his parents. He entered the Franciscan order, where he led a monastic life under the names of Cyprian (1835, at Stopnica) and Mathias (1838, at Przyrow). In 1836, while at the monastery of Pinczow, he began courses in Latin, rhetoric, moral and mystical theology, etc. In 1839, he took courses in philosophy at Piotrkow University. After completing the courses, he was ordained as a priest, receiving all the necessary credentials. The ceremony took place at the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw on June 25, 1843. At his request, he returned to the monastery of Przyrow, where he became a professor of catechesis.<sup>1</sup>

Struck by the iniquities that were taking place in the Polish monasteries, he decided to go to Rome to inform the pope and to propose a reform plan. The trip to Rome takes over a year, being forced to return several times from the road. In mid-October 1844 he arrived in Rome, and in November he obtained a papal indulgence. He presented his proposal for reform to Pope Gregory XVI, but he did not seem at all interested, but rather was in a hurry to end the meeting, because the arrival of the legate of Belgium had been announced.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Michael B. Czechowski, Thrilling and Instructive Developments: An Experience of Fifteen Years as Roman Catholic Clergyman and Priest (Boston, 1862), 13-34.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred F. Vaucher, *M.-B. Czechowski* (Collonge-sous-Salève: Imprimerie Fides, 1976), 6-7.

Czechowski is disappointed with the way he was treated by the pope, twice refusing the offer to become a Polish confessor in Jerusalem, over a period of six years, with the prospect of becoming a bishop. Finally, in January 1845, he left Rome heading for Paris. Because even here he does not find purity and piety among the Catholic clerics, in June 1845 he returned to Poland. He takes over the parish of the Reichtal where he organizes a society for the recovery of Christian alcoholics. A year later he was arrested for political reasons. After being released he traveled to Hamburg, London and returned to Paris in January 1848. Here he organized an army of 500 Poles and 200 French for the liberation of Poland, an army he accompanied as a priest. Being defeated, he returned to Paris where, due to his political activity, he was accused by the Jesuits of disturbing the public peace and was expelled on 13 July 1849.<sup>3</sup>

Arriving in Switzerland, after working for a short time for a small community of Poles in Lancy (near Geneva), the atmosphere here leads him to give up the priesthood and learns the profession of binder. On 5 October 1850 he married Marie-Virginie Delavouet and went together to Brussels to work as a binder. He is being watched by the Jesuits here too, who denounce him to the authorities, being forced to go to London, with the thought of reaching the US. Here he is expelled from the hotel also because of the Jesuits, and his wife becomes ill. He is encouraged by Baptist pastor Nunn of zion church, after which Lord Dudley Stuart buys them tickets to New York, where he arrives in 1851.<sup>4</sup>

# Czechowski in the New World

In September he disembarks in America and takes a job at a brick factory. He does not resist and gets sick, and his co-workers advise him to go to Canada, supporting him financially. In October 1851, he arrives in Montreal, but a fire leaves him homeless and remains without work. He was employed by the Baptist Mission as a missionary among french-speaking Canadians in Clinton, New York, and in 1854 he was ordained a Baptist pastor. As a result of his work, the local community gives up vices and turns to morality. He even baptized a former Catholic priest, who in Czechowski's absence, switched the whole community to Catholicism. Disappointed and

<sup>3</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 190.

<sup>4</sup> Michael B. Czechowski, Thrilling and Instructive Developments: An Experience of Fifteen Years as Roman Catholic Clergyman and Priest, 223-225.

disheartened, Czechowski gives up pastoration and takes a job as a binder.<sup>5</sup> In 1856, he heard for the first time the Adventist message, preached by James White. He studies the Bible, comparing verse to verse, convinced of the Advent message.<sup>6</sup>

In 1857, Merrit E. Cornell, a millrite evangelist, gave a series of lectures in Findlay, Ohio. As a result of these lectures, 27 people are baptized, including Czechowski.<sup>7</sup>

After his baptism, he was called to work as a binder at the Adventist printing house in Battle Creek, Michigan. Given that by then he had accumulated \$100 in debt, he accepts without murmuring. A year later, on May 21, 1858, he was offered to return to the area where he had worked for the Baptist Mission. Czechowski is extremely pleased to resume the ministry and together with Daniel T. Bourdeau they return to the French-speaking Canadians.<sup>8</sup> Since the plan of systematic giving (1859) had not yet been proposed, nor had the system of tithing (1878) been discovered, pastors and workers were paid by the benevolence of the faithful. James White calls on the faithful to support Czechowski financially, with the Whites being the first to join the list for \$5 each.<sup>9</sup> Although he was appreciated for his zeal and morality, Czechowski shows signs of weakness in managing his own finances, distinguishing himself by accumulating debts.

Involved in the work with the French population on August 29, 1858, Czechowski wrote a letter to Ellen White, published by James White in the September 23, issue of the Review and Herald. He expresses his joy for the Advent message he received, accepted, and wanted to pass on. Then he talks about the fact that his work is moving forward hard, due to the ignorance and superstitions of workers of French origin. The letter, however, is important for what Czechowski expresses further, namely his desire to return to his native land to proclaim the truth of the three angels' message (Revelation 14:6-12).<sup>10</sup> From then on, the thought of returning to Europe creeps into his mind.

<sup>5</sup> James White, "To the Benevolent", *Review and Herald*, 11(22), April 15, 1858, 176.

<sup>6</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred F. Vaucher, *M.-B. Czechowski*, 11. Vezi și Merrit E. Cornell, "Visit to Green Spring, Ohio", *Review and Herald*, 10(15), August 13, 1858, 120.

<sup>8</sup> J.H. Waggoner, "The Conference", Review and Herald, 12(2), May 27, 1858, 13.

<sup>9</sup> James White, "To the Benevolent", Review and Herald, 11(22), 176.

<sup>10</sup> James White, "The French Mission", Review and Herald, 12(18), Spetember 23, 1858, 144.

In addition to his penchant for accumulating debt, Czechowski had another weakness: he liked to be complimented. Thus, one of his friends, a follower of the first-day Advent movement, urged him to work in New York and not to waste any more time in an obscure locality. Although advised not to do so, Czechowski moved with his entire family to New York city on May 7, 1860. Here begins a work among Poles, French, Italians, Germans, Swedes, and English speakers.<sup>11</sup> Despite his efforts, he again accumulated debts and did not want to collaborate with anyone, although it was suggested that he could benefit from the help. Relying on his own judgment, he endured many hardships, but with insignificant results. In addition to all this, he also suffered in terms of organization. As a result, believers became discouraged, and the cause was discredited. His stubbornness and lack of collaboration led to an end to the church's support.<sup>12</sup> His energy and intellectual talents were not enough for the Work in New York to be successful. Engulfed in debt, the lack of organization and collaboration led to the failure of the mission here. As a result, in 1962, he left New York and settled in Middle Grove, Saratoga (New York State).<sup>13</sup>

Czechowski leaves his pastorate ministry and focuses on his own publications. So in 1862 he published his autobiography.<sup>14</sup> For the commercialization of the book, he asks for the support of the publication of the first-day advent movement, which publishes an announcement about the book, although it is confessed in the ad that not much is known about the author.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Czechowski invited some of their representatives to get to know him better and to develop relations with them.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, two years later, one of her children, Leon Oxa, who is only five months old, dies of diphtheria.<sup>17</sup> He later asked the church to

- 14 Michael B. Czechowski, *Thrilling and Instructive Developments: An Experience of Fifteen Years as Roman Catholic Clergyman and Priest.*
- 15 Silvester Bliss, "Book notice", Advent Herald, 23(18), May 3, 1862, 140.
- 16 Silvester Bliss, "My Journal. Boston The Cause Here", *Advent Herald*, 23(38), September 20, 1862, 302.
- 17 Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, *Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania*, 193. See also James White, "Report from Brother Loughborough", *Review and Herald*, 23(11), Febrruary 9, 1864, 84 and 87.

<sup>11</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "The New York Mission", *Review and Herald*, 16(16), September 4, 1860, 124.

<sup>12</sup> James White, "Eastern Tour", *Review and Herald*, 18(14), September 3, 1861, 108.

<sup>13</sup> James White, "From Brother Czechowski", *Review and Herald*, 20(13), August 26, 1862, 103.

send him a missionary to Europe, but his request was rejected due to his problems in managing finances. As such, the church advised him to wait. However, Czechowski was too determined and always in a hurry to make decisions, so he went to the first-day Advent movement, with which he had already developed relationships, to ask for help, and this was given to him.<sup>18</sup> He promised to justify every penny he would receive, his purpose being to preach Christ's return to Italy.<sup>19</sup>

Also, in the same publication is promoted one of Czechowski's books for commercialization, as support for his mission in Italy.<sup>20</sup> The announcement produced the expected effect, with the publication announcing shortly after the donation of \$43 for the mission in Italy.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter probably received in 1864, Czechowski was warned of the following. First, the move to New York was a mistake, showing that he is following his own judgment and not accepting other points of view. Secondly, they do not accept to work in a team. Thirdly, it makes too many plans that it does not carry out. Fourth, he blamed those who did not support him in his approach. Finally, he was tempted to listen to those who flattered him about his talents and urged him to renounce the Advent faith. On the other hand, his strengths were recognized: he wanted the progress of the work, he was conscientious and honest before God. It is not known whether he responded and what Czechowski's response was, but historical facts have shown that he did exactly the opposite of what was recommended to him in the letter. On May 14, 1864, he left for Europe with his family and the governess of his children, Anne Butler, sister of the future president of the General Conference, George Butler.<sup>22</sup>

## Czechowski the missionary

The work in Europe did not bring any major change of attitude, following the same pattern of its strengths and weaknesses. The first stop was Italy, the target for which he had pleaded in America, more precisely the valleys

<sup>18</sup> John N. Andrews, "The Case of Elder M. B. Czechowski", *Review and Herald*, 42(4), July 8, 1873, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Litch, "Mission in Italy", Advent Herald, 25(21), May 24, 1864, 82.

<sup>20</sup> Joshua Litch, "Our Book Shelves", Advent Herald, 25(21), May 24 1864, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua Litch, "Money Received. Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 25(23), June 7, 1864, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 193-194.

of the Waldenses. The work of evangelization begins among the Waldenses of Piedmont and the city of Torre Pellice. It seems that he had a real success, arousing the envy of the present pastor, the latter recommending him to focus his work with the English and the Slavs.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning in January 1865, he began to submit reports on the state of his work. In this first report, he conveys his thanks for the money received in November that helped pay off the debts and keep a good name. He also spoke of the interest in the message of Jesus' return manifested by the Waldenses, but also of the opposition he is beginning to feel from their pastors. It also mentions the weight that people encounter when trying to utter his name, calling him then "the American pastor."<sup>24</sup> In the following reports it shows that two young men,<sup>25</sup> after which their number rises to four,<sup>26</sup> were studying the Bible to get involved in the ministry.

On September 5, 1865, Czechowski and his family left Italy to finally settle in Grandson, near Yverdon, on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel. Realizing that his U.S. sponsors might be asking questions about leaving the mission in Italy, Czechowski justifies his departure by making three arguments. The first was related to the fact that both Protestants and Catholics in Italy were very bigoted, and Christianity was in name only. Also, the Italians were not at all kind and hospitable to strangers, and their friendship was not trustworthy. The second argument was that the mission in Europe should have been self-sustaining, but this was impossible in Italy, given that it was a poor country. Third, the one that weighed the most for Czechowski was the fact that Switzerland had a much more central position for the mission than Piedmont. Also, here he had found a rich field of work, among the people who were much more open to light and truth than those in Italy. At the conclusion of his speech, Czechowski gave assurances that the work in Italy had not abadoned it, leaving dedicated people to continue it.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that Czechowski continued to refer to his reports as the 'Mission in Italy', probably in order not to harm his donors.

As in Italy, at first, he found great openness to the message he preached, even among intellectuals.<sup>28</sup> In time he encountered difficulties

<sup>23</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 196.

<sup>24</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 26(1), January 3, 1865, 1.

<sup>25</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 26(6), February 7, 1865, 21.

<sup>26</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 26(9), February 28, 1865, 34.

<sup>27</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 26(43), October 24, 1865, 169.

<sup>28</sup> M. B. Czechowski, "Italian Mission", Advent Herald, 26(52), December 26, 1865, 205.

here as well, given that American millennials were despised by the local clergy. When asked what his sect was called, he replied that they were called Adventist Christians for their faith in jesus' impending return and that some of them were called Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>29</sup>

The year 1866 brings other events in his work. In February, the first baptism on Swiss soil and the first ordinationas pastor of Jean David Hanhardt takes place, on behalf of "The mission isvanghelice europene and universale of the second coming of the Savior", asociety founded by Czechowski in Europe. In September hemoved to Tramelan, where there were already twenty Adventists, possibly due to his publications and/or themotivation of his collaborators. Here they form the first Adventist church in Europe.

An incident in 1867 would radically change the situation. Czechowski was a subscriber to church magazines, although he had broken off all ties. Counting on the fact that the Swiss did not master english, he said nothing to the Swiss community about the existence of the other brothers in the USA and the church organized there. Albert Vuilleumier, the elder of the church in Tramelan, found a copy of the Review and Herald magazine, dated July 16, 1867. His level of English allowed him to understand that in the U.S. there are other believers who have the same faith, Adventists who keep the Sabbath. Without thinking too much, he wrote a letter in French to Uriah Smith,<sup>30</sup> the then editor of the magazine, informing him that there are about 50 Sabbath guards in Switzerland and Italy.<sup>31</sup> The letter produced surprise and joy to the church, sadness, and discouragement to Czechowski. The Church realized that although the former Catholic priest had been sponsored by the First-Day Advent movement, he remained faithful to the biblical Sabbath, although he was believed to have lost his faith. He also realized that mutual misunderstandings led to the withdrawal of the church's support.<sup>32</sup>

The letter entailed consequences that were not to Czechowski's lik-

enberger", Review and Herald, 34(12), November 30, 1869, 183.

<sup>29</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, The Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 198.

<sup>31</sup> John N. Andrews, "The Seventh-day Adventist of Europe", *Review and Herald*, 34(12), November 30, 1869, 181. See also John N. Andrews, "Letter from Brothe Ertz-

<sup>32</sup> John N. Andrews, "The Seventh-day Adventist of Europe", *Review and Herald*, 34(12), November 30, 1869, 181.

ing. First, it has also reached the ears of its sponsors, entailing the loss of financial support. Secondly, the bankruptcy of the bank where the members of the church in Tramelan kept their savings, led them to ask the missionary for the money they borrowed. This was the equivalent of a new financial bankruptcy for Czechowski. Third, relations with Vuilleumier deteriorated, with the missionary accusing the elder of not trusting his pastoral capabilities. For his part, the elder reproached him for his secrecy. All this caused him to leave and for a while it was believed that he had abandoned the mission.<sup>33</sup>

Viulleumier continued his correspondence with the church and asked for help in order for the mission to continue. He also asked for financial help to save the house and the publishing house that were about to be lost due to mortgages. It should be noted that the elder, a watchmaker by trade, did not want any donation, but only financial aid to be returned later.<sup>34</sup> The church's response was positive, the only condition being that all properties belonged to all Adventist believers in Switzerland, not to a single individual. Czechowski disagreed, so both the house and the press were lost.

All the misunderstandings and conflicts in which he entered, the debt issue, to which was added the death of his advisor, Annie Butler, led Czechowski to leave Switzerland, along with his new secretary, Wilhelmina Schirmer. Also, leaving meant leaving his family. After a while, he marries the new secretary, with whom he will have two more children.

Although she passed on reports to the First-day Adventist movement, she dissented from Czechowski, emphasizing three aspects. First, it was denied that he had ever been considered their missionary, even though he was helped financially. Secondly, they did not have confidence in his financial management capabilities to lead to the projects he was presenting, which led them to disregard his requests for large sums of money. Lastly, it was pointed out that Czechowski set up groups of Sabbath watchmen, with the money of those who kept Sunday, putting donors on guard.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 199.

<sup>34</sup> John N. Andrews, "The Seventh-day Adventist of Europe", *Review and Herald*, 34(12), November 30, 1869, 181. John N. Andrews, "Letter from Switzerland", *Review and Herald*, 35(5), January 25, 1870, 37. John N. Andrews, "The Case of Elder M. B. Czechowski", *Review and Herald*, 42(4), July 8, 1873, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 200.

Disappointed, in the autumn of 1869, Czechowski arrives in the Romanian space, more precisely in Transylvania. Without money and without any other financial support, he took a job at a brick factory, occupying the position of director, but it went bankrupt. He visited and preached in Bucovina, Cernăuți, Turda, Gherla, Cluj or Bistrița. The financial difficulties determined him to leave Transylvania and cross the Carpathian Mountains, to stop in Pitesti, in the summer or autumn of 1870.

The purpose for which he had come to Pitesti was to set up a brick factory together with the boyar Tomescu Fotache, but the project was not carried out. As a result, Czechowski tried to make a living by teaching French. As he walked through the city, his attention was drawn to the window of an Armenian cloth shop. He talked to the one at the counter, Toma Aslan, an engineer by profession, speaking French. Czechowski presented himself, confessing that although he had come for business, the main goal was to preach the return of Christ. Impressed, Thomas Aslan invites him to preach in the salon of the family home, offering to be his translator.<sup>36</sup>

Following his lectures in front of a select audience, by interested people, Czechowski found the fulfillment of all the years of torment and misery. His wish was to set up a church in Pitesti, after which he would return to Switzerland to repair all things: the family and the redemption of lost property. <sup>37</sup> With the necessary peace of mind and without any hindrance from the authorities, the number of listeners increased. Although it seems that he had lost his sight in one eye and partially his hearing,<sup>38</sup> because of his activity for five years, he formed the church in Pitesti.

When the time of departure arrived, Czechowski left behind a group in Pitesti, where he found the setting, he had been looking for all his life as a missionary and pastor. Happy and for the money he had earned, he left Romania in the autumn of 1875, for Switzerland. Unfortunately, between Budapest and Vienna he was robbed and found unconscious on the viennese streets. He was admitted to the hospital, where he died on February 25, 1876, at the age of 57.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Dumitru Popa, *Biographies of the Pioneers of the Adventist Church in Romania*, Vol. I (Bucharest: Grafix Print, 1995), 115.

<sup>37</sup> Gunter Gehan, *The Threefold Message in Austria-Hungary and Romania* 1869-1938 (Graphe, 2008), 41-42.

<sup>38</sup> John N. Andrews, "Editorial Correspondence. Switzerland", *Review and Herald*, 46(12), September 23, 1875, 92.

<sup>39</sup> Corneliu-Ghiocel Fitzai, Seventh-day Adventist Movement in Romania, 202-205.

#### Instead of conclusions

Czechowski's image was and will remain a rather controversial one. John Andrews, who took over Czechowski's work in Switzerland, becoming the church's first official missionary, in his editorials on the state of the work in the Land of cantons, also made references to Czechowski. In 1875, he painted the missionary in contrasting images: a very unhappy, stubborn man who brought much pain and sadness to the church no matter how many good things he did.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of Czechowski's controversial image, one thing remains certain: his passion and devotion to god's cause cannot be denied. Nathan Gordon Thomas, confessed, in an article in *Adventist World*, that although he was a rebel and a non-conformist, he still does not know any pastors like Michael Belina Czechowski. He was not spiritually unstable, did not deviate into doctrinal heresies, and despite his flaws he did not leave the church nor the proclamation of the Advent message.<sup>41</sup>

Czechowski's controversial image is understandable given his strengths and weaknesses. His reluctance for closer cooperation with the church can also be understood. Let us not forget that, at first, the Advent movement was against any form of organization, which it considered ecclesiastical despotism or Babylon. It was also claimed that he who believed and was baptized was sufficient to be written in the lamb's book of life, not in the records of any church. <sup>42</sup> As a result, Czechowski, a former Catholic priest disappointed with Babylonia in the Roman Catholic Church, embraced these beliefs. It is true that beginning in 1861 (the establishment of local conferences) and 1863 (the establishment of the General Conference) they caught Czechowski in America, but the beginnings are always difficult. Even church leaders testified that they could do more about Czechowski. Although not many of his decisions can be excused, it should also be pointed out that no one had anything to reproach him about his passion for taking the Advent message to people. Despite his weakness-

<sup>40</sup> John N. Andrews, "Editorial Correspondence. Switzerland", *Review and Herald*, 46(12), September 23, 1875, 92.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan Gordon Thomas, "Michael Belina Czechowski, Seventh-day Adventist Hero or Rebel?", Part II, *Adventist World*, October 2012, 35.

<sup>42</sup> M. Ellsworth Olsen, A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-Day Adventists (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1925), 245-246.

es, his work led to a change in the character of the people for the better, Czechowski exemplifying the role of missionaries in the transmission of moral, ethical, and human values.

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