



The Role of (Cultural) Apologetics during and after Catechetical Instruction

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I. Introduction.

- Why is apologetics so important today?
 - Christian ideas no longer enjoy cultural support.
 - There is a plurality of competing worldviews in the marketplace of idea.
 - Youth often lack discernment to identify these worldviews and distinguish them from Christianity.
 - Christian education should include defending Christian teaching against these rivals (apologetics).
 - Ideally, this should happen during and after catechetical instruction.

A. Applying the trivium to catechetical instruction.

- The trivium of classical education consists of:
 - **grammar** (knowledge);
 - **logic** (thinking through consequences);
 - **rhetoric** (personal application, including the ability to make a persuasive case for what one believes).
- Lutherans are very good at the grammar of Christian doctrines. But in a pluralistic context, we must also use logic and rhetoric to show the superiority of Christianity to competing worldviews.

B. Why worldviews matter.

- Everyone has one or more worldviews:
 - a view of the world encompassing what is real, and how we know.
- Being unaware of worldviews increases our vulnerability to deception:
- “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2: 8)

A calling for the educated.

- Most people are unaware of the ideological assumptions that shape their thinking.
- “To be ignorant and simple now--not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground--would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. **Good**
- **philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”**
--C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 27-28.

A faith that needs no defense is what the world already wanted to hear.

- “when men talk thus about propagating Christianity without defending it, the thing that they are propagating is pretty sure not to be Christianity at all [but]...an anti-intellectualistic, non-doctrinal Modernism; and the reason why it requires no defense is simply that it is so completely in accord with the current of the age” —J Gresham Machen, 1932.

C. What apologetics can and cannot do.

- Apologetics **cannot**:
 - Create faith;
 - Save;
 - Overcome the willful rebellion of the natural man against God.
- Apologetics **can**:
 - Remove obstacles to the faith (2 Cor. 10: 4-5);
 - Prepare for the Gospel;
 - Lead to intellectual repentance;
 - Create an environment in which belief does not appear to be intellectual suicide.

D. Defending an objective faith founded on fact.

- The world believes all faiths are purely subjective.
- Christians must insist that their faith is founded in what God *did* in history (objective):
- “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest...” (1 John 1: 1-2).

A matter of public fact (1 Cor 15).

- ³ “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸
- ...¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... ²⁰ But **in fact** Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Why does this matter?

- The Gospel is what God did in Christ.
- It is *extra nos*: we are saved by God's actions, not by our feelings about them.
 - This is in direct opposition to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and the culture's understanding of "faith."
- Sin is an objective condition we cannot cure; it requires an objective, external savior.

2. The Role of Apologetics *during Catechetical Instruction.*

- A good place to incorporate apologetics: the study of the Apostles' Creed.
- All 3 articles are attacked by rival worldviews:
 - **Creation**—maybe this world an accident, maybe we are accidents and no different than other animals, so is human life pointless or without special value?
 - **Redemption**—is there an objective moral law, are we really sinful, do we need a savior, did Jesus die for our sins, was he raised from the dead?
 - **Sanctification**—isn't belief just a matter of choice and can't I be good without God?

A. Creation.

- In teaching the first article, we should defend Christianity against **materialism** and **scientism**:
 - 1) Defending the world as a creation;
 - 2) Defending the special dignity, worth and stewardship role of human beings (image of God and its consequences).
 - 3) Defending the value of each human being (no-one is worthless for whom Christ died).
 - 4) Defending God's design for family, state and church.

I) The world is not an accident: Defending the world as a creation.

- We believe this in faith (Hebrews 11:3), but can also defend it with philosophy and science.
- **Philosophy:** The Kalam Cosmological Argument; Leibniz's Sufficient Reason Argument.
- **Science:** The Fine-Tuning Argument; The Feasibility of Science Argument.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument.

- (Premise 1) **Anything which begins to exist has a cause.**
- (Premise 2) **The universe began to exist.**
- (Conclusion) **The universe has a cause.**
 - **A simple argument, and both premises are more plausible than their denials.**
 - **All our best scientific evidence is that the universe began a finite time ago:**
 - Background radiation, the expansion of the universe, we have not reached thermodynamic heat-death, etc.

Why think the cause is God?

- (1) The cause of the entire universe (nature) must be supernatural.
- (2) To avoid a regress, this cause must be a necessary being existing from eternity.
 - **The answer to “then who made God?” is “Nobody.”**
 - **God did not “begin to exist” so Premise I does not apply to Him.**

Why a personal God?

- (1) An impersonal cause would have its effect automatically (e.g. a tsunami caused by an earthquake).
 - **So if the cause were eternal, the universe would always have been here (false).**
- (2) A personal cause (one with free will) could choose to create a universe that did not previously exist.

Leibniz's Sufficient Reason Argument.

- “Why does anything exist, rather than nothing at all?”
- (Premise 1) **Any state of affairs has a sufficient reason for its existence, either in its own nature or in something else.**
- (Premise 2) **The universe does not have a sufficient reason for its existence in its own nature (it is contingent).**
- (Conclusion) **The sufficient reason for the universe is something else (outside the universe, hence a supernatural being).**

The Fine-Tuning Argument.

- “[A] change in the (strong) nuclear force strength (the force that binds particles in an atomic nucleus) by more than about half a percent...would yield a universe with either too much carbon compared with oxygen or vice versa, and thus little if any chance for life.” --Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 199.
- If the force were significantly weaker or stronger, “no atoms could exist other than hydrogen,” making life impossible.--Robin Collins, “The Fine-Tuning Design Argument,” 7.

The conclusion of some great scientists:

- “Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say 'supernatural') plan.”

---Arno Penzias (Nobel prize winner in physics). In Margenau, H. and R.A.Varghese, ed., *Cosmos, Bios, and Theos* (La Salle, IL, Open Court, 1992), 83.

A materialist's bad dream:

- “For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

--Robert Jastrow. *God and the Astronomers* (New York, W.W. Norton 1978), p. 116.

The Feasibility of Science Argument.

- Science is a feasible project only if:
 - (1) The world is orderly.
 - (2) We can trust our own reasoning as a guide to the way the world really is.

Naturalism Conflicts with the Rationality of Science.

- The Argument from Reason against Evolutionary Naturalism (a prominent version of materialism).
- See Alvin Plantinga, Victor Reppert:

1. If evolutionary naturalism is true, then our minds are equipped with useful gadgets for survival, but cannot be relied on for truth, especially on theoretical matters.

(Useful behavior does not require true beliefs)

So:

2. If evolutionary naturalism is true, no-one can have a good reason to accept scientific explanations, or evolutionary naturalism itself.

Is the argument fair?

- Steven Pinker: “our brains were shaped for fitness, not for truth.”
- --Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 305.
- Lewis Wolpert: “our brains contain a belief generating machine, an engine that can produce beliefs with little relation to what is actually true.”
- --Lewis Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 140.
- With no sense of irony, Wolpert later claims that:
- “Science provides by far the most reliable method for determining whether one’s beliefs are valid”!
- --Lewis Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast*, 216.

Theism supports the rationality of science.

1. If theism is true, then the *same* divine reason (logos) is reflected both in human minds and in the laws of nature.

So:

2. If theism is true, human minds are attuned to the laws of nature.

So:

3. If theism is true, science is possible.

Theism supported the rise of modern science.

- Many early modern scientists aimed to decode God's "other book."
- **Galileo:** "[Science] is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze.... It is written in the language of mathematics."
- —Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 237f.
- "Whatever we read in that book is the creation of the omnipotent Craftsman."
- —Galileo Galilei, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, trans. Stillman Drake (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 3.

Laws of nature and God's providence.

- Kepler saw the laws of nature as God's providential plan for the cosmos.
- **Kepler** “believed that he had discovered the part of God's providential plan that embodies the pattern of the cosmos, and the divine laws by which God regulated its moving parts.”
--Peter Barker and Bernard Goldstein, “Theological Foundations of Kepler's Astronomy,” *Osiris* 16 (2001), 113.

2) We are not accidents: Defending the image of God.

- The Bible teaches that we are especially made in the image of a triune God (Gen 1:26).
- Fallen man has lost original righteousness, but there are still remnants of that image.
- The image includes those special gifts with which God equips human beings to be stewards of the rest of creation.

Thought.

- “Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp it.” —Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #113.
- “animals have an *environment*, whereas human beings have a *world*. Our ability to think about the cosmos...and *our place within it* is what sets us apart so radically from...animals”
—E. J. Lowe, *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 29 No. 2 (2012), 247.

Morality.

- Human beings are uniquely governed by moral laws:

“A hawk that seizes a fish from the sea *kills* it, but does not *murder* it; and another hawk that seizes the fish from the talons of the first *takes* it, but does not *steal* it—for none of these things is forbidden.”

--Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 14.

Fallen kings: a unique paradox of wretchedness and greatness.

- “Man’s greatness comes from knowing he is wretched: a tree does not know it is wretched.... **It is the wretchedness of a great lord, of a dispossessed king.**”

--Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #114 & #116.

- “[I]f man had never been corrupted, he would, in his innocence, confidently enjoy both truth and felicity, and if man had never been anything but corrupt, he would have no idea of truth or bliss.” --Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #131.

Creativity.

- Man is not a primary creator: he cannot create from nothing.
- But he is a prodigious **sub-creator**: he creates by re-arranging primary materials in imagination and reality.
- E.g.: technology and cultural institutions unparalleled by animals.

3) Each person matters.

- The Bible emphasizes our distinctive gifts and vocations and says we all matter to the body of Christ (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).
- This is supported psychologically and sociologically:
 - Conformist systems (communism, socialism, fascism) lead to unhappy, unproductive people.
 - Neglecting the gifts of individuals is bad stewardship.
 - The church is an image to the world of what it means to say everyone matters (race, class, income, gender, age do not matter before God [Gal. 3: 28]).

4) God's design for marriage and the family.

- Marriage is good for us:
- “Men and women in their first marriages tend to be healthier and happier than their counterparts in every other type of relationships—single, widowed, or divorced.... Married adults are more sexually fulfilled. They're better parents, better workers, and are less likely to be perpetrators or victims of domestic violence” —James Robison and Jay Richards, *Indivisible: Restoring Faith, Family and Freedom Before It's Too Late* (New York: Faith Words, 2012), 106.

Family matters:

- In *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn showed that fatherlessness leads to increased:
 - Youth violence;
 - Domestic Violence;
 - Child Sexual Abuse;
 - Child Poverty and Economic Insecurity;
 - Teen Pregnancy.
- “If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children’s basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent ideal.” —Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 38.

The state's interest in family.

- “The reason marriage exists is that the sexual intercourse of men and women regularly produces children. If it did not produce children, neither society nor the government would have much reason...to regulate people’s emotional unions....The government cannot simply declare itself uninterested in the welfare of children. Nor can it leave it to prearranged contract to determine who will have responsibility for raising children.”

--“The Case for Marriage,” National Review 9/7/2010.

The family and the church.

- Marriage is an image of God's relation to the church (Ephesians 5: 22-33).
- Parents are to be honored. If they are not, it is harder to honor God.
- “to honor is a much higher thing than to love, for honor includes not only love but also respect, humility, and awe, directed...toward a hidden majesty of theirs.... Young people... should look up to their parents as representatives of God...however humble, poor, infirm, or eccentric they may be”

--Martin Luther, *Luther's Large Catechism* (St. Louis, MO; Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 29-30.

A few resources:

- Gene Veith, “Vocation in Education: Preparing for our Callings in the Three Estates,” --Eds. Menuge and Heck, *Learning at the Foot of the Cross* (Austin, TX: Concordia University Press, 2011).
- Gene Veith and Mary Hoerber, *Family Vocation: God’s Calling in Marriage, Parenting and Childhood*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012).
- Angus Menuge, “C. S. Lewis on Domesticated Living,” *CUW Theology Journal*, available at: <http://blog.cuw.edu/tj/2011/12/28/c-s-lewis-on-domesticated-living/>

B. Redemption.

- We believe Christ is our redeemer.
- To defend this we need to defend:
- 1) **The documents:** the New Testament records are historically reliable.
- 2) **The Gospel:** crucifixion and resurrection are historical events.
- 3) **The way:** Jesus is the only path to salvation.

I) The documents.

- “In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts as short as in that of the **New Testament**,” —Sir Frederic Kenyon, director and principal librarian of the British Museum, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 4.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Plato	427-347BC	900 AD	1300 Years	210	-----
Demosthenes	300 BC	1100 AD	1400 Years	340	-----
Herodotus	480-425 BC	900 AD	1300 Years	109	-----
Suetonius	75-160 AD	950 AD	800 Years	8	-----
Thucydides	460-400 BC	3 rd C BC	200 Years	96	-----
Aristophanes	450-385 BC	900 AD	1300 Years	10	-----
Caesar	100-44 BC	900 AD	1000 Years	251	-----
Tacitus	c. 100 AD	850 AD	750 Years	31	-----
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1100 AD	1400 Years	49	-----
Sophocles	496-406 BC	3 rd C BC	100-200 Years	193	-----
Homer	800 BC	400 BC	400 Years	1757	95%
New Testament	50-100 AD	2 nd Cent. AD	40 years	5795 (Greek) + 19000 (translation)	99.5% 40

A single standard of reliability.

- “if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond doubt” —F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p. 15.
- “to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity”—John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, 29.

Not legend.

- “I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage [accounts of historical fact].... Or else, some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative.”

---C. S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism.”

Internal evidence test.

- Written by eyewitnesses (Matthew, John) or their associates (Mark, Luke).
- Includes realistic, embarrassing material (doubt, denial, confusion).
- No sane person would proclaim a lie knowing it to be a lie when they knew death was the likely result.

External evidence test.

- **Papias** (69-155 AD), bishop of Hierapolis and **Irenaeus** (2nd century disciple of Papias) **confirm authorship of the Gospels** (*Against Heretics*).
- **Tacitus** says “Christius” was “put to death by Pontious Pilate, Procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.”
- **Seutonius** talks of disturbances over “Chrestus.”
- **Josephus** confirms the life and death of Jesus and says he was a “**doer of wonderful works.**”

A reliable source.

- **Eusebius quotes Papias as saying:**

"But if I met with any one who had been a follower of the elders anywhere, I made it a point to inquire what were the declarations of the elders. What was said by Andrew, Peter or Philip. What by Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other of the disciples of the Lord."

---Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966, Book 3, Chapter 39, p. 125.

2) The Gospel.

- Here rival worldviews include:
 - **materialism** (which excludes miracles);
 - **postmodern relativism**, which assumes faith is a personal construction and cannot be founded on objective fact;
 - **Islam**, which denies the crucifixion and resurrection.
- It is important to defend the death and resurrection of Christ as historical facts.

The death of Jesus:

- A) The unanimous testimony of the Gospels:
 - Matt 27: 26-56, Mark 15: 20-47; Luke 23: 26-56; John 19: 16-42
- B) Confirmed in confessions which predate the NT documents in which they appear:
 - I Cor 11: 26 & 15:3, Luke 24:34, Rom 4: 25, Phil 2: 8; I Tim 2: 6.
- C) Confirmed in non-Christian histories
 - E.g. Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, Josephus, Lucian.
- D) Confirmed by other Christian accounts
 - E.g. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr.
- E) Medical studies:
 - confirm crucifixion causes asphyxiation.

The resurrection:

- Also confirmed in confessions predating the NT.
- Also confirmed by all the Gospels and in the pre-Pauline text I Cor 15: 3-8.
- Non-Christian sources grant that Jesus was worshipped as risen Lord after his death.
- James the brother of Jesus and Paul only became Christians after the resurrection.
- Who would proclaim the resurrection if they knew it was false and knew they would most likely die for doing so (as 11 of the 12 did)?

Some excellent resources:

- Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels As Eyewitness Testimony* (Eerdmans, 2008).
- Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (IVP Academic, 2008).
- Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996).
- Gary Habermas, “The Core Resurrection Data” in *Tough-Minded Christianity* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008).
- N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress, 2003).
- *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan And N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Fortress, 2006).

3) The Way.

- Postmodern relativism finds exclusive texts like John 14: 6 and Acts 4: 12 unacceptable.
- It is supposed we can construct many equally valid ways of approaching God, and it is arrogant imperialism to say there is only one.
- It is vital to argue for three facts:
 - 1) Sin is our actual condition;
 - 2) We cannot remedy that condition;
 - 3) Christ alone can remedy that condition.

I) Sin is our actual condition.

- Pascal and C. S. Lewis help here:
 - We know we fall short of standards that apply to us.
 - They are not mere instincts as instincts conflict and we can act against instinct (e.g. altruism for strangers).
 - They are not merely subjective or cultural, because we recognize human rights abuses.
 - Moral arguments and excuses show we recognize a moral law we would like to avoid.
 - Relativists are never consistent: when their own interests are affected they say the other party is wrong, expecting them to understand.

2) We cannot remedy that condition.

- There is not a single example of a utopian scheme leading to a perfect society or a self-help program yielding a perfect person.
- There is a “moral gap” between what the moral law requires and our actual performance, but we cannot bridge it.
- The imperfect cannot reach up to perfection.
- If there is any hope for us, *God* must bridge the gap and save us.

3) Christ alone can remedy our condition.

- For a holy God to save us, he must fulfill the Law for us and give us his righteousness.
- This requires a being who is perfectly righteous under the Law, and who takes the full punishment due to our unrighteousness.
 - (1) Only God can keep the Law perfectly, but only a man can live under the Law: God must become man to save us.
 - (2) For this man's sacrifice to count for *all* mankind, he must be God (Chemnitz).
 - (3) Only the God-man, Jesus Christ can do this.

C. Sanctification.

- We need to defend sanctification as God's work and defend the idea of vocation.
- This idea is attacked by postmodern ideas which claim we design our own life, and simple careerism.
- Yet if we cannot make ourselves righteous, it is clear that sanctification is God's work.
- We are declared righteous on behalf of Christ's work but do good works only if the old self dies and the the new man in Christ arises.

Postmodern constructivism does not work.

- Early contestants for *American Idol*!
- Choosing to make oneself Queen for the Day does not make it so.
- If we can choose anything, no choice is meaningful.
- We all, in fact, regret some choices and celebrate others. On what basis?
- We all *find* meaning we did not choose (people and circumstances we had no control over) and even in what we thought were “mistakes.”

Vocation.

- Where does this dying and rising take place?
 - Vocation. In serving our neighbor through vocation, the old selfish man is crucified and the new man in Christ appears (see Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*).
- To restore the sense of vocation, it helps to work on the imagination.
 - Veith's *God at Work* shows what the world looks like if we see it as defined by callings.
 - Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* brings the ideas of vocation and providence alive.

Vocation does work.

- Those who lose themselves in vocation find happiness in self-forgetful happiness.
- When it is not “all about us,” we are free from self-preoccupation.
- Relationships are dignified and strengthened when seen as callings for God.
- Civil society and the body of Christ are stronger when there is mutual service and cooperation.

3. The Role of Apologetics *after* Catechetical Instruction.

- We've all heard it:
 - “graduated from confirmation”!
 - “If you want never to see the bats in the belfry again confirm them.”
- The Youth need post-confirmation education.
 - Not just shopping trips and fun parks.
 - Education in discernment of rival Christian worldviews they will encounter in a post-Christian culture and in college.
 - Otherwise the faith comes to seem either false or irrelevant (the greying of congregations).

Some goals of training youth in apologetics:

- 1) Help them to identify rival worldviews so they are not deceived by them;
- 2) Train them in analyzing the assumptions and claims of rival worldviews to discern their compatibility with the Christian faith;
- 3) Help them to keep their faith;
- 4) Help them to respond effectively to rival worldviews;
- 5) Strengthen their ability to defend the faith in their various vocations.

Resources for youth.

- 1) *Salvo Magazine* (<http://www.salvomag.com/>).
- 2) *Christian Research Journal* (<http://www.equip.org/>).
- 3) The Evangelical Philosophical Society apologetics podcasts (<http://www.epsapologetics.com/>).
- 4) Athanatos Christian Ministries Apologetics Conference (<http://onlineapologeticsconference.com/>).
- 5) Apologetics 315 (<http://www.apologetics315.com/>).
- 6) The International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism and Human Rights (<http://www.apologeticsacademy.eu/>).
- 7) Reasonable Faith (<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/PageServer>).
- 8) Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (<http://www.rzim.org/>).
- 9) Be Thinking (<http://www.bethinking.org/>).
- 10) Access Research Network (<http://www.arn.org/>).

