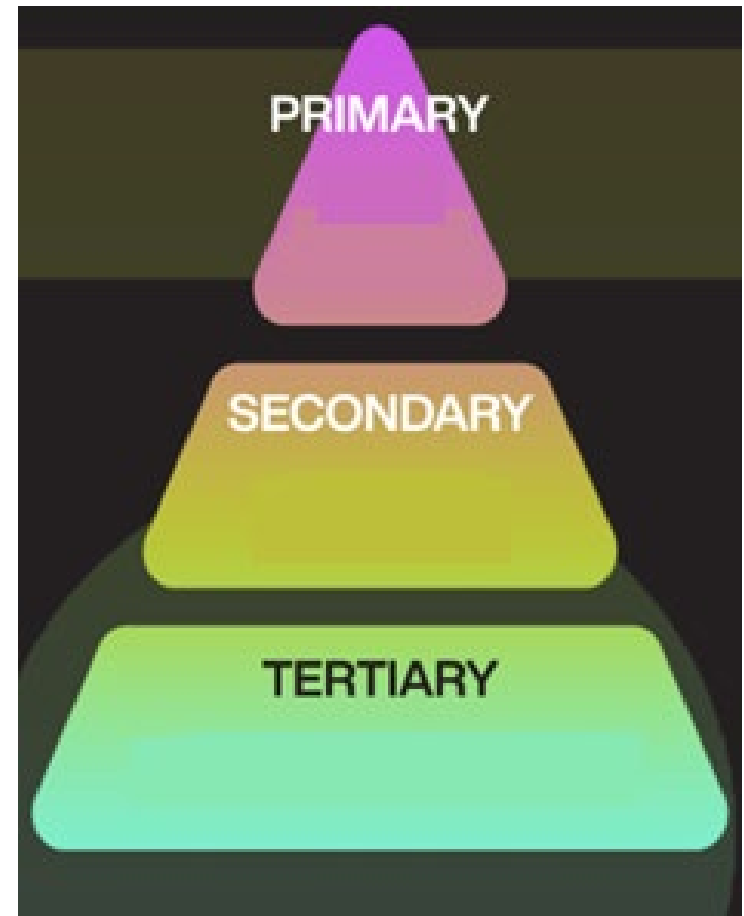


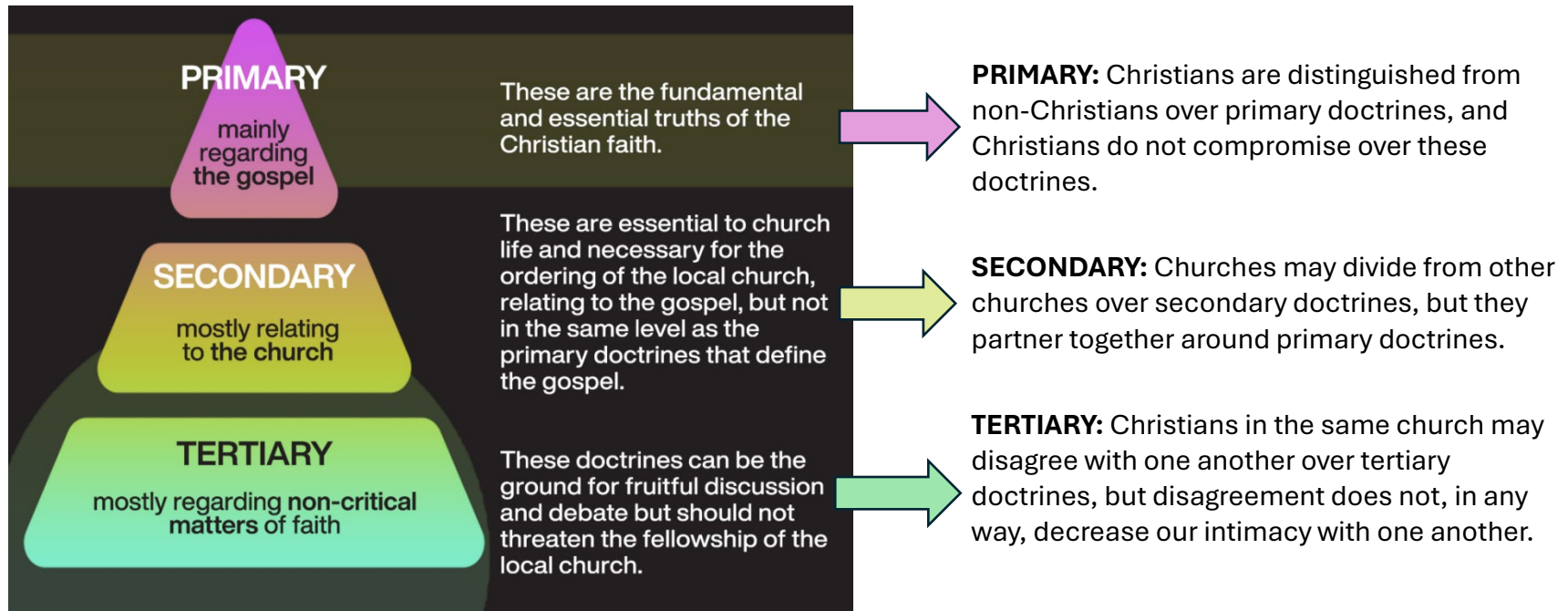
Theological Triage

Goals: By the end of this seminar, you will be able to:

1. **Define theological triage** and explain the purpose of distinguishing between primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines.
2. **Differentiate between primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines** using real examples from Scripture and church practice.
3. **Evaluate doctrinal disagreements** using a biblical and relational framework that prioritizes unity, humility, and discernment.
4. **Apply theological triage principles** to determine *if/when/how* correction, division, or charitable disagreement is appropriate within the church.



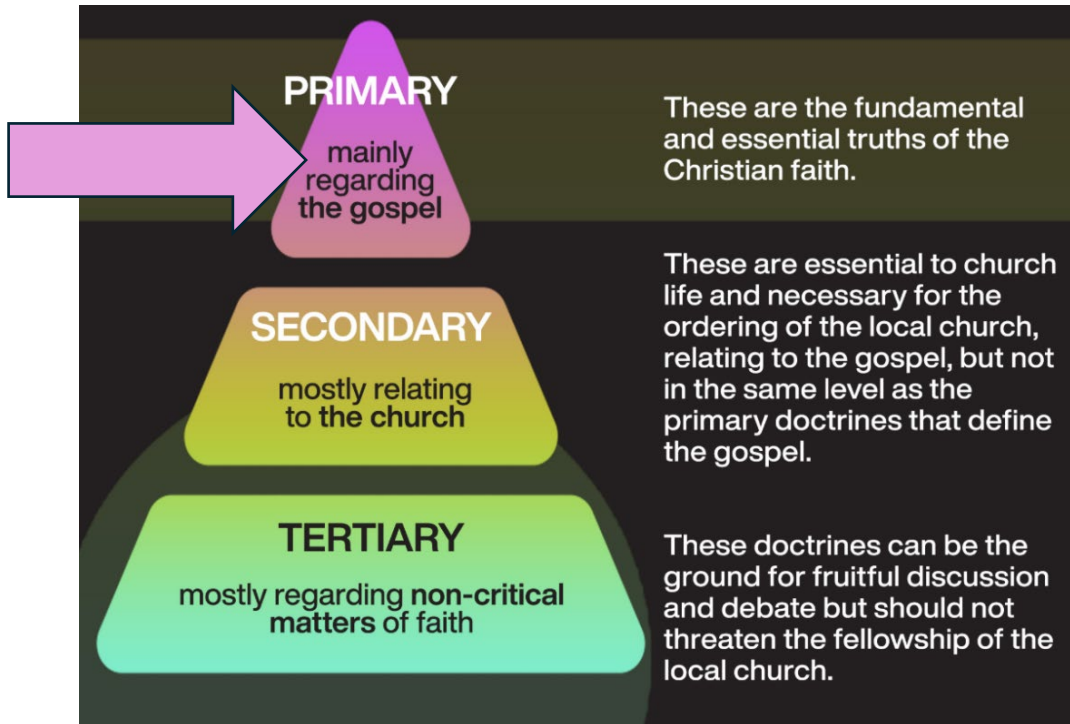
Theological Triage



*All Scripture is breathed out by God and **profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)*

*Now I would **remind** you, brothers, of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you **received**, in which you **stand**, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)*

Theological Triage Primary Doctrines



Galatians 1:6-10: Perversion of the Gospel

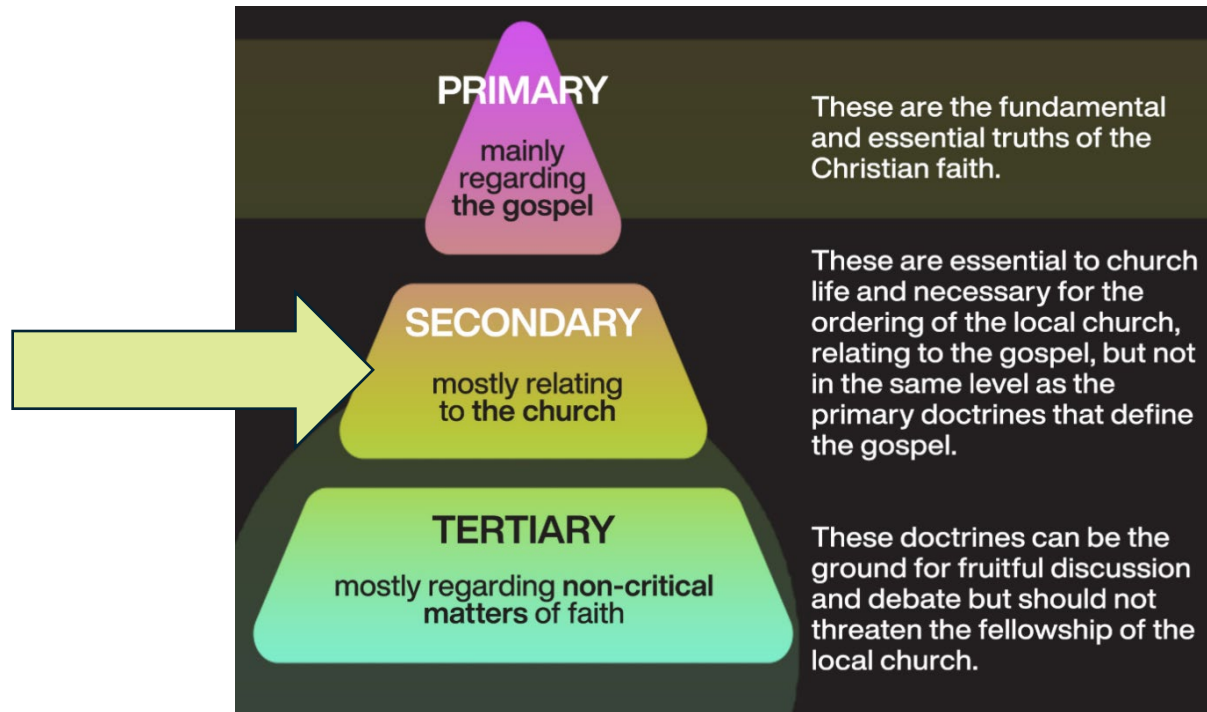
- 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
- 7 which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
- 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!
- 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!
- 10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Examples of Primary Doctrines

These are the truths that every Christian should unequivocally affirm and stand upon.

- The divine and human nature of Christ (John 1:1; 1:14; 1 John 1:1; 4:2-3)
- Man as sinners in need of God's mercy (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:6-10)
- The death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- Man's justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9)
- God as Trinity-Father, Son & Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
- The authority of the Scriptures, the inerrant & infallible Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)
- Others? _____

Theological Triage Secondary Doctrines



Examples of Secondary Doctrines

Differing in these doctrines may warrant the existence of different local fellowships without breaking the Gospel unity of the Church.

- Ecclesiology (doctrine of the church): the individual Christian's role within a church, church ordinances, leadership structure, spiritual gifts, and practices (i.e. in worship, discipleship, & missions)
- Understanding the nature of baptism & the Lord's Supper
- The role of women within the church
- Calvinism vs. Arminianism
- Dispensationalism vs. Covenantalism
- Others? _____

Theological Triage Scriptural Example

Romans 14:1-23: Principles of Conscience

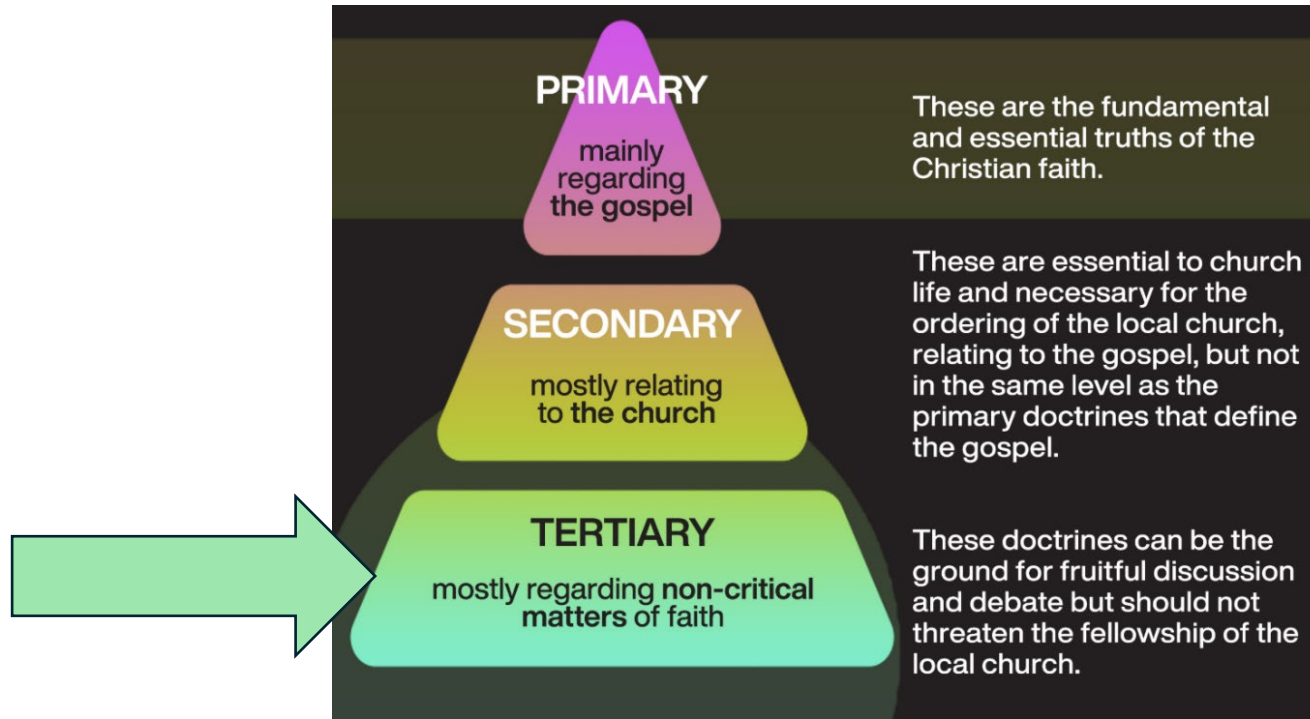
- 14:1** Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions.
- 2** One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*.
- 3** The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.
- 4** Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
- 5** One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.
- 6** He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.
- 7** For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;
- 8** for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.
- 9** For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.
- 10** But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.
- 11** For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."
- 12** So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.
- 13** Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.
- 14** I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.
- 15** For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.
- 16** Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;
- 17** for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- 18** For he who in this *way* serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.
- 19** So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
- 20** Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.
- 21** It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles.
- 22** The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.
- 23** But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Theological Triage Scriptural Example

1 Corinthians 8:1-13: Take Care with Your Liberty

- 8:1** Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.
- 2** If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;
- 3** but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.
- 4** Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.
- 5** For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,
- 6** yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.
- 7** However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.
- 8** But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.
- 9** But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.
- 10** For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?
- 11** For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.
- 12** And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.
- 13** Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

Theological Triage Tertiary Doctrines



Examples of Tertiary Doctrines

Differing in these doctrines may warrant friendly disagreements but should not be cause for breaking local fellowship.

- Views on the Creation Narrative
- Views on the Millennium / the Millennial Reign of Christ
- Eschatological views
- Understanding of some difficult Biblical texts
- Identifying Bible translations
- Authorship of texts (e.g., Hebrews); date of Christ's birth
- Others? _____

Theological Triage Conclusion/Application

The **secret** things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are **revealed** belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror **dimly**, but then face to face. Now I know **in part**; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:11-13)

Beloved, although I was very **eager** to write to you about our **common salvation**, I found it **necessary** to write **appealing** to you to **contend** for **the faith** that was **once for all** delivered to the **saints**. (Jude 3)

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you **esteem them very highly in love** because of their work. **Live in peace** with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (1 Thess. 5:12-15)

“In essentials, **unity**; in nonessentials, **liberty**; and in all things, **charity**.”

— Rupertus Meldenius
Lutheran theologian and German educator, 1582-1651

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

➤ **Application Idea and Commitment:** _____

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Theological Triage

Homework: Fictional Scenarios

Read these scenarios and use Theological Triage to inform your answers.

1. You are relatively new on the pastoral staff at a local church. In a particular song the congregation is accustomed to singing, you have a reservation about some of the lyrics. You wonder whether it's a big enough deal to address and, if so, how soon in your time at the church you should tackle this, and what the process and communication should be like.
2. You have been working at a parachurch ministry for several years. As part of your contract, you have to annually reaffirm your commitment to the statement of faith of the denomination with which the ministry is associated. The statement of faith affirms a particular view of the end times that you had not studied much when you took the job, and you were happy at that time to affirm it. Over the years, however, you've grown unsettled about this view, and at this point you lean away from it, though you are not fully decided. You hesitate to keep studying it, for fear of landing in a place that threatens your job. In your conscience, you wonder at what point you need to communicate your reservations about this doctrine. Is it only when you have fully decided? If so, what does this process look like, and how do you go about it?
3. A group of churches in your community is putting on a joint service of worship and outreach. You have significant theological differences with some of the other churches participating, and you wonder whether you can take part with a good conscience. How do you decide what to do? And what does it look like to approach this situation with graciousness and humility without compromising your convictions?
4. You love listening to a particular Bible preacher on the radio. His sermons are both convicting and uplifting. But one day you learn that he speaks at conferences that have a "health and wealth" emphasis, and you start to notice aspects of his teaching that can be interpreted in this way. How should your perception of his preaching be altered (if at all) by his broader ministry associations? How clearly must his own teaching veer into a "health and wealth" gospel before you stop listening?
5. You are dating seriously and thinking about marriage. However, you and your companion hold different views on the proper expression of gender roles within a marriage. You have talked through the issues with other trusted Christians and studied the question with your prospective spouse, but the two of you have not reached a resolution.

Ortlund, Gavin. *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (The Gospel Coalition) (pp. 19-20). Crossway. Kindle Edition.