



Fœderatio Internationalis *Una Voce*

***Positio* N. 14, PART II**

THE HOLY WEEK REFORM OF 1955:
THE LITURGIES

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From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

The Holy Week Reform of 1955: The Liturgies: Abstract

Positio 14, Part I, dealt with some general aspects of the 1955 Holy Week reform; Part II offers a brief examination of the reforms service by service. The most important changes were made to the Easter Vigil, notably the complete remodelling of the blessing of the Easter Candle and the reduction in the number of readings. Important changes were also made to Palm Sunday (notably, cutting the number of blessings of the palms), and Good Friday (the ‘Mass of the Presanctified’ was heavily cut down). In conclusion, the 1570 form of the liturgies have value and importance, and it is difficult to see why they should not be allowed to continue to be used in the Church’s living liturgy. An appendix lists some changes made in 1955 which appear to have anticipated changes to the rest of the Missal, which did not always happen; this creates a tension in the 1962 Missal.

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POSITIO 14: THE HOLY WEEK REFORM OF 1955. PART II: THE LITURGIES

1. The history of the Holy Week ceremonies is extremely complex, and is characterized by the mutual influence of Roman and Gallican customs, and indeed Oriental liturgies. The Missal of 1570, however, ushered in a period of stability which ended only in the 1950s, and thus deserves to be regarded as ‘classical’, in the sense of a natural point of reference in the history of the ceremonies. It was experienced by the saints and doctors of this long period of time, and to a greater or lesser extent at earlier periods, and fed their understanding of the mysteries of Holy Week. Having addressed the general principles of the 1955 reform in Part I, Part II will examine in a little more detail some notable features of the 1570 ceremonies, which were suppressed or changed in 1955.
2. **Palm Sunday:** The blessing of the palms in the 1570 rite was preceded by a *missa sicca*, the only surviving example in the Roman Missal of a rite commonly celebrated in the Middle Ages;¹ this was suppressed in 1955. The eight lengthy prayers of blessing, one of them in the form of a Preface, complete with *Sanctus*, which are of great beauty and create a deeply impressive whole, were greatly reduced in 1955. The palms are blessed in the 1955 service on a temporary free-standing table to increase the visibility of the ceremony; this reflects the priorities of the time, of visibility over solemnity.² The popular late-medieval ritual, at the solemn entrance of the procession into the church, of banging the door with the foot of the processional cross, was also abolished in 1955.³
3. The reading of St. Matthew’s Passion at Mass was shortened by omitting the accounts of the supper in the house of Simon the Leper and of the Last Supper, a change which was also applied to the readings of St. Mark’s and St. Luke’s Passion on the Tuesday and Wednesday (respectively) of Holy Week. This had the effect of depriving the Holy Week liturgy—and indeed the 1962 Missal as a whole—of all the synoptic accounts of the Last Supper. This was widely acknowledged to have been a mistake, and was partially reversed in the 1970 reform.
4. **Maundy Thursday:** although it does not affect parish celebrations, it should be noted that the creation of a separate service for the blessing of oils in 1955 was an ‘archaeological’ attempt to recreate a service which had not been celebrated for many centuries. To accomplish this, a number of new liturgical texts had to be composed.⁴
5. The *Mandatum* (washing of feet), had taken place after the end of the Mass, after the Stripping of the Altars, since the earliest time of its incorporation into the Maundy Thursday Mass;⁵ its recommended transfer in 1955 to after the sermon has no

¹ Philip Goddard *Festa Paschalia: A history of the Holy Week liturgy in the Roman Rite* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2011) p266

² See Positio 4: Liturgical Orientation

³ Goddard *op. cit.* p268

⁴ The surviving texts were found in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary, dating from the 8th century.

⁵ In the 12th century Pontifical: see Goddard *op. cit.* p153.

precedent.⁶ The specification of the choir as the location of the ceremony raises a problem for the use of lay men.⁷

6. **Good Friday:** The impressive, late medieval ceremonial surrounding the procession from the Altar of Repose to the main altar and the Mass of the Presanctified,⁸ was suppressed in 1955; following the reform the procession takes place in silence, and the Communion Rite itself comprises little more than the recital of the *Pater Noster* and its embolism. The recitation of the *Pater Noster* with the Faithful has no precedent, and becomes an anomaly in relation to the way it is said the rest of the year (see the Appendix).

7. Part of the motivation for the suppression of many prayers in the Mass of the Presanctified was that their references to ‘sacrifice’ seemed, to the reformers, to be inappropriate, since there was no Eucharistic Sacrifice. However, Blessed Ildefonso Schuster notes, in his discussion of the Mass of the Presanctified:

Today, as a sign of mourning, the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice is omitted. Instead we offer to God the merit of the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, with which we associate ourselves through humiliation and contrition of heart. Turning towards the people [the priest] says: “Brethren, pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty.”⁹

This is, indeed, a kind of sacrifice present in every Mass. We may speak of a distinct sacrifice offered by the Faithful in the *Orate fratres*,¹⁰ and also the ‘sacrifice of praise’ referred to in the *Memento* of the Roman Canon.¹¹

8. The reformers’ suspicion of this feature of the Mass of the Presanctified raises a general problem with their methodology. While it is true that the *Orate fratres* and similar prayers from the Mass were not in the oldest versions of the Good Friday liturgy, dating instead from the 12th century,¹² it seems remarkable that the reformers should say that public prayers of the Church, said continuously for eight centuries (even if not universally), and included in the Missal published following the Council of Trent, should be theologically defective, particularly since, as Schuster illustrates, they are

⁶ In its origins in the setting of monastic or cathedral communities, it took place in another building, such as the chapter house.

⁷ Before 1955 the Missal did not specify the location, and the use of the nave would be appropriate when the feet of lay men are washed, necessitating the removal and replacement of shoes and socks. It is interesting to note that the putting on and taking off of liturgical slippers by bishops in the sanctuary was forbidden by the Sacred Congregation for Rites, in a decree of 4th December 1952: they were to be put on only in the sacristy.

⁸ The elaboration of the ceremony took place largely in the 12th century: see Goddard *op. cit.* pp184-9

⁹ Schuster, Volume II, p221

¹⁰ ‘Orate fratres, ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem.’ (‘Pray brethren, that my Sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.’)

¹¹ The Commemoration of the Living: ‘qui tibi offerunt hoc sacrificium laudis’ (‘who offer up to thee this sacrifice of praise’). As with many liturgical texts, other interpretations may be possible, and need not be mutually exclusive.

¹² To be exact, the prayer *In spiritu humilitatis*, with its reference to sacrifice, appeared in the Good Friday liturgy in the 12th century, and the *Orate fratres* and *Dirigatur Domine* in the 13th: see Goddard *op. cit.* pp186-7.

patient of a perfectly reasonable interpretation. Such an attitude seems incompatible with Pope Pius XII's words in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*:

Clearly no sincere Catholic can refuse to accept the formulation of Christian doctrine more recently elaborated and proclaimed as dogmas by the Church, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit with abundant fruit for souls, because it pleases him to hark back to the old formulas. No more can any Catholic in his right senses repudiate existing legislation of the Church to revert to prescriptions based on the earliest sources of canon law. Just as obviously unwise and mistaken is the zeal of one who in matters liturgical would go back to the rites and usage of antiquity, discarding the new patterns introduced by disposition of divine Providence to meet the changes of circumstances and situation.¹³

9. The value of restricting the reception of Holy Communion to the clergy on Good Friday, as a sign of mourning, and of solidarity with those unable to receive, a restriction abolished by the reform, has been strongly reaffirmed by Pope Benedict XVI.¹⁴
10. **The Easter Vigil:** The three prayers of blessing of the new fire were replaced by a single blessing, and the ceremonies surrounding the Paschal Candle were entirely remodelled, using freshly composed texts and ceremonies. Neither the claim by the reformers that the carrying of the Paschal Candle only ceased because of the increase in its size, nor that the triple reed (the *trikirion*) originated in the threefold *Lumen Christi*, is historically correct.¹⁵ The disappearance of the reed itself is regrettable, since it is a striking example of the influence of Oriental liturgies.¹⁶

¹³ Pope Pius XII Encyclical *Mediator Dei* 63: 'Quemadmodum enim e catholicis cordatus nemo, eo consilio ductus ut ad veteres revertat formulas, a prioribus Conciliis adhibitae, illas respuere potest de christiana doctrina sententias quas Ecclesia, adspirante moderanteque divino Spiritu, recentiore aetate, ubere cum fructu, composuit retinendasque decrevi itemque quemadmodum e catholicis cordatus nemo vigent leges repudiare potest, ut ad praescripta regrediatur, quae antiquissimis hauriantur canonici iuris fontibus; ita pari modo, cum de sacra Liturgia agitur, qui ad antiquos redire ritus consuetudinesque velit, novas repudiando normas, quae ex providentis Dei consilio ob mutatas rerum condiciones fuere inducte non is procul dubio, ut facile cernere est, sapienti rectoque movetur studio.'

¹⁴ Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986) pp97-98: 'This renunciation of communion on one of the most sacred days of the Church's year was a particularly profound way of sharing in the Lord's Passion; it was the Bride's mourning for the lost Bridegroom (cf. Mk 2:20). Today too, I think, fasting from the Eucharist, really taken seriously and entered into, could be most meaningful on carefully considered occasions, such as days of penance—and why not reintroduce the practice on Good Friday? It would be particularly appropriate at Masses where there is a vast congregation, making it impossible to provide for a dignified distribution of the sacrament; in such cases the renunciation of the sacrament could in fact express more reverence and love than a reception which does not do justice to the immense significance of what is taking place. A fasting of this kind—and of course it would have to be open to the Church's guidance and not arbitrary—could lead to a deepening of personal relationship with the Lord in the sacrament. It could also be an act of solidarity with all those who yearn for the sacrament but cannot receive it. It seems to me as well that the problem of the divorced and remarried, as well as that of intercommunion (e.g., in mixed marriages), would be far less acute against the background of voluntary spiritual fasting, which would visibly express the fact that we all need that 'healing of love' which the Lord performed in the ultimate loneliness of the Cross.' On the history of the practice of Communion on Good Friday, see Goddard *op. cit.* pp188-9.

¹⁵ There are historical precedents for the carrying of the candle, but in no case was it both lit and blessed before being placed in the sanctuary; more usually it was in the sanctuary from the start: see Goddard *op.*

11. The 1955 revision rendered impossible the *Exsultet*'s historical role of blessing of the candle. Instead, the prayer *Veniat ergo quaesumus*, which for many centuries had functioned as a blessing of the grains of incense, was made a blessing of the candle by inserting the word 'cereum' ('wax').¹⁷ The *Exsultet*'s reference to the 'sacrifice of incense' had been linked to the insertion of the grains of incense since the 12th century;¹⁸ the similar association of the following words, with the lighting of the candle itself and the lighting of the other lamps, was also lost.¹⁹
12. The extremely ancient set of twelve Old Testament readings in the older liturgy was replaced with a set of four,²⁰ changing the balance of elements in the service considerably: they no longer function as a vigil in the strict sense, a time of watching and waiting. The reformers themselves expressed some regret about the change; as Adrian Fortescue says, the full twelve readings 'form a wonderful account of God's dealings with his people before Christ came'.²¹ The 1970 Missal restored a much fuller set of readings, at least as an option.
13. The Blessing of the Font was moved, in 1955, from the Baptistry to the Sanctuary,²² where it could be seen by the people, though this has often necessitated the use of a common bucket for the holy water. The 1970 Missal restored the blessing to the font.
14. **Paschal Matins and Lauds**, which was celebrated on the evening of Holy Saturday after Compline (the Vigil having been celebrated in the morning), a service dating from the 8th century and having considerable historical importance,²³ was abolished in 1955. These were significant as the first services of Easter Sunday, marking the end of Lent.

cit. pp221-223, p281; in more detail see A. J. MacGregor *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum* (Alcuin Club Collection, 1992), pp327-338 and 390-396.

¹⁶ On the origin of the reed see Goddard *op. cit.* p221, and MacGregor *op. cit.* pp266-276.

¹⁷ As an alternative to the *Exsultet*, the Old Gelasian Sacramentary (c.740) contains a prayer of blessing for the Paschal Candle beginning *Deus mundi conditor*. The final paragraph of this prayer, *Veniat ergo quaesumus*, survived in later Roman Pontificals as a blessing of the incense alone; the *Exsultet* being included under the heading 'Benedictio cerei'. See also László Dobszay 'The Restoration and Organic Development of the Roman Rite' (London: T&T Clark, 2010) p255 and note 54.

¹⁸ In Rome, from the 12th century until the reform of 1955, the incense was embedded in the candle during the singing of the *Exsultet*, at the words 'Suscipe sancte pater incensi huius sacrificium' ('receive, O holy Father, the evening sacrifice of this incense'): see Goddard *ibid.* p219. This break in the singing of the *Exsultet* was also useful for the deacon singing what is otherwise an exceptionally demanding piece.

¹⁹ The words 'quam in honorem Dei rutilans ignis accendit' ('[the candle] which the bright fire lights for the Glory of God') were linked to the lighting of the candle; the words 'Qui licet sit divisus in partes' ('Which [light] though now divided') to the lighting of the other lamps.

²⁰ The origins and development of rival, but mutually influential, systems of readings for the Easter Vigil is a complex one. The twelve reading arrangement was adopted in Rome around the year 1000, from the 8th century Gallican 'Gelasian Sacramentary', which itself corresponds to the system used in 5th century Jerusalem, half of the readings being in fact the same passages of Scripture. This Gelasian system was used in Gaul, but had originated as the presbyteral rite of Rome. By contrast, the 'Gregorian' system, which originated as the Papal rite used at the Lateran in Rome, had only four readings. See Goddard *op. cit.* pp224-231. It is worth noting that the equivalent service in the Byzantine liturgy has fifteen prophecies, with a large overlap in content with the 1570 Easter Vigil.

²¹ Adrian Fortescue 'Holy Week' (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne: 1951) p. xxviii

²² Except for churches which had a separate Baptistry.

²³ They contain the exchange between the Angels and the Women, 'Quem quaeritis' ('Whom do you seek?') which formed the basis of the great tradition of Medieval Easter plays.

Much of the contents of these services have been re-used for Matins of Easter Monday in the 1970 *Liturgy of the Hours*, and Easter Sunday Lauds in the 2005 *Antiphonale Monasticum*.

15. **The Vigil of Pentecost:** the parallel of this day with the Easter Vigil was abolished. This seems an important loss of liturgical richness with no clear compensating good.

Conclusion

16. With the perspective of more than half a century, the nature of the reform as conditioned by the concerns of the day is very striking. These concerns had already, to a large extent, been overtaken by others only a decade later, when the 1970 Missal began to be prepared, and far from standing the test of time, the 1955 Holy Week was, for the most part, swept away. Indeed, as noted above, in some cases the 1970 Missal made concessions to criticisms levelled against the 1955 reform. It is not surprising that many attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition do not wish to view it through the lens of the first half of the 1950s: while every era may have a legitimate influence on the organic development of the liturgy, the 1955 reform of Holy Week includes a series of radical changes of what had been unchanged for four centuries.
17. Given the historical importance of the ceremonies of the 1570 Missal, it is hard to see, in the context of the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, why they should not be permitted for the edification of the Faithful, in continuity with so many generations of their predecessors.

What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behoves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place.²⁴

²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI: Letter to Bishops accompanying the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*.

Appendix: The 1955 Reforms and the 1962 Missal

Although in many ways the liturgies of Holy Week are *sui generis*, they nevertheless conform to certain general liturgical principles found in the rest of the Missal. One of the effects of the 1955 Reform was to make services in Holy Week an exception to a number of these principles; in a number of cases it appears that there was an expectation that the rest of the Missal would be brought into line with these. Thus, the Confiteor and Absolution immediately before Communion was abolished on Maundy Thursday in 1955, and throughout the year in 1961. In other cases, however, corresponding adjustments to the rest of the Missal had not been made by 1962, but were made in the later 1960s, or are found in the 1970 Missal. Accordingly, the 1962 Missal contains tensions and inconsistencies which were not intended by the Reform, but derive from the contingencies of liturgical history.

It is also worth noting that, even when consistency was achieved in certain respects under the reforms of the later 1960s, this state of affairs was never intended as permanent. As *Abhinc tres annos* (1967) explains, it promulgated changes when

pastoral considerations commend them and they seem to offer no hindrance to the definitive reform of the liturgy yet to come. Further, they seem advantageous for the gradual introduction of that reform and are feasible simply by altering rubrics, not the existing liturgical books.²⁵

Some such changes are as follows.

Palm Sunday:

Maniples are abolished for the Blessing of the Palms and procession, as they are for the Good Friday Liturgical Action. This was applied to the whole liturgical year after 1962.²⁶

The *Asperges* is suppressed; it is made an option in the 1970 Missal (when used it replaces the Penitential Rite).

The palms are blessed in the hands of the Faithful, or on a table away from the Altar, and *versus populum*. While this is part of a consistent attempt to make liturgical actions more visible, it contrasts with the blessings of Candles on the Feast of the Purification (Candlemas), and on the Feast of St Blaise, and the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday.

²⁵ Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Abhinc tres annos* (1967)

²⁶ The maniple was made optional by the Instruction *Tres hinc annos* (1967) 25, and is not listed as among the vestments in the 1970 Missal.

The Faithful's kissing of the blessed palm, and the hand of the celebrant, is abolished; this is part of a consistent deprecation of osculations in the Holy Week reform, but it contrasts with the norms at the blessing of candles on the Feast of the Purification.²⁷

The Preparatory Prayers, at Mass, are suppressed, as they are at the Easter Vigil. The principle that the Preparatory Prayers are omitted when Mass is preceded by another ceremony is extended to some other cases in the 1962 Missal, such as Ash Wednesday, but not to others, such as a Nuptial Mass following the Rite of Marriage, or indeed to Sunday Mass preceded by the Asperges. Since at Sung Masses the Introit and Kyrie still have to be sung, abolishing the Preparatory Prayers simply lengthens the time the celebrant must sit on the sedilia waiting for the chants to finish before intoning the Gloria, contrary to the principles of Pope St Pius X's Instruction on sacred music, *Tra le sollicitudine*.²⁸ Later reforms, in any case, followed a different principle, shortening the Preparatory Prayers by the omission of the Psalm *Iudica*.²⁹

The *Orate Fratres* is to be said in a loud voice, and the Faithful are to respond; this happens again at the Easter Vigil. This is clearly related to the spread of the practice of the Dialogue Mass at the time, but it is not consistent with the norms for this laid down in *De musica sacra* (1958), which speaks only about Low Mass, where it assumes that the Faithful will make all of the servers' responses.

The repetition of texts by the celebrant, when they are sung by other ministers or the schola, is abolished throughout Holy Week. The general principle that texts should not be duplicated was not applied consistently to the rest of the Missal by 1962.³⁰

The Last Gospel is suppressed, unless the blessing of palms does not take place it is suppressed also on Maundy Thursday and at the Easter Vigil. Again, a general argument against the Last Gospel was made by some advocates of reform, but it was not applied to the Missal as whole by 1962.³¹

²⁷ The kissing of the hand of the priest and the object to be given to or taken from him was suppressed throughout the year by the Instruction of the Consilium, *Inter Oecumenici* (1964) 36 (d). The provisions of this Instruction took effect in 1965.

²⁸ Chant renditions of the Introit and Kyrie, begun at or just before the start of the Preparatory Prayers, will sometimes conclude in time for the Gloria (or, where this is no Gloria, the Collect) to be started by the celebrant without his having to pause. Longer settings, including most polyphonic Kyries, make it necessary for the priest to sit on the sedilia until it finishes. Such a wait will be created or lengthened by the abolition of the Preparatory Prayers. Pope St Pius X, in his Motu Proprio *Tra le sollicitudini* (1903) 22-23, wrote: 'It is not lawful to keep the priest at the altar waiting on account of the chant or the music for a length of time not allowed by the liturgy. ... In general it must be considered a very grave abuse when the liturgy in ecclesiastical functions is made to appear secondary to and in a manner at the service of the music, for the music is merely a part of the liturgy and its humble handmaid.' The general issue is discussed in *Positio 9: Silence and Inaudibility in the Extraordinary Form*, 4.

²⁹ This was done by *Inter Oecumenici* (1964) 48 (c).

³⁰ The principle was applied to the whole Missal by *Inter Oecumenici* (1964) 48 (a). This creates the same problem as discussed in note 27 with the Preparatory Prayers, reducing the time available for singing, or increasing the time spent by the priest sitting on the sedilia or waiting at the Altar.

³¹ It was abolished throughout the year by *Inter Oecumenici* 48 (j).

Maundy Thursday

Psalm 21, recited during the Stripping of the Altars, is taken from the revised Pian Psalter. This was used for newly composed liturgical texts, following the publication of this Psalter in 1945, but it never replaced existing texts. This means that the chants and other texts using the Psalms found in the reformed liturgy of Maundy Thursday still use the ancient Latin Psalters, while the ceremony of the Stripping of the Altars switches to the Pian Psalter. In later reforms the liturgical use of the Pian Psalter was discontinued in favour of the Neo Vulgate Psalter, published in 1969. The difficulties represented by the use of Pian Psalter and Canticles are discussed in *Positio 5: the Use of the Vulgate and the Ancient Latin Psalters*.

The placing of the *Mandatum* after the Gospel anticipates the use of this time for additional ceremonies, previously done either before or after Mass, in later reforms: examples include the Rite of Marriage, in a Nuptial Mass, and the blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday.³²

The Blessing at the end of Mass is omitted, on the basis that further ceremonies followed. This principle is not consistently applied in the 1962 Missal, however; a notable exception being Corpus Christi.

Good Friday

The Faithful are to say the Pater Noster with the celebrant. As with other changes noted under Palm Sunday, this is related to practice in the Dialogue Mass, but again its use at a Sung Mass is anomalous.

Maniples are not worn, as for the Blessing Palms on Palm Sunday: see above.

Easter Vigil:

Water is blessed in the sight of the people, as are the palms on Palm Sunday: see above.

The vernacular is used, and the Faithful are involved in a dialogue with the celebrant, in the 'Renewal of Baptismal Promises'. To the anomaly of switching between sung and spoken dialogue noted above, it adds the innovation of the use of the vernacular, which was generalised throughout the year after 1962.³³

³² Both the Rite of Marriage and the blessing and distribution of ashes takes place before the start of Mass in the 1962 Missal, but after the Gospel (and homily) in the 1970 Missal. The former was moved after the Gospel by *Inter Oecumenici* 70. The same document places a 'renewal of baptismal promises' by confirmands after the Gospel, when confirmations take place at Mass (65).

³³ The use of the vernacular for 'dialogue formularies' and many other parts of the Mass, was made possible throughout the year by *Inter Oecumenici* 57 (c).

In the Lauds which follows the Vigil, the *Benedictus* is the revised version published with the Pian Psalter, just as the Pian Psalter is used on Maundy Thursday (see above).