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The Church After the National Convulsion, a Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Maine

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DIOCESE OF MAINE.

SIXTH CHARGE

OF

THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE BURGESS, D. D.

JULY 12, 1865.

THE CHURCH AFTER THE NATIONAL CONVULSION.

A CHARGE

DELIVERED TO THE

Clergy of the Diocese of Maine,

IN ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, PORTLAND,

AT THE

ANNUAL CONVENTION,

July 12, 1865,

BY THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE BURGESS, D. D.

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

PUBLISHED BY VOTE OF THE CONVENTION.

PORTLAND:
STEPHEN BERRY, PRINTER.

1865.

CHARGE.

BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY :

We have survived a tremendous struggle. We have seen one of those mightiest convulsions, which change or settle for ages the face and currents of history. We stand now at the close ; and we can neither bury and forget the past, nor avoid the uncertainties of the approaching future.

The voice of God must be heard, though not chiefly, in the whirlwind and the storm. He not only takes notes of the destinies of nations, but orders and overrules them, and the history of these is the manifestation of His government. The interests of the Kingdom of Heaven are either bound up or intertwined with them at so many points, that the Church can never stand apart in silence. We, my dear brethren, as ministers, or as true and earnest members of the flock of Christ, have need to pause, and consult on the meaning of these events for the Ark of God, around which we are gathered. How does religion emerge from all this noise of the warriors, and this stern and confused pomp of garments rolled in blood ? What is the attitude of the Church of God in times when the life of the empire which encloses its members is attacked by internal conspiracy and war ; by the cannon of revolt, and the knife of assassination ? What special duties are now imposed on the clergy and laity of our communion by the return of national peace ?

I. The effects of the struggle on the religious character of the American people are in part already wrought ; but must be far more developed hereafter. In judging those which are even now manifest, as well as in anticipating such as are yet to come, we must not be misled by maxims of ordinary and superficial application. War is a field in which every eye detects the seeds

and beholds the manifest processes of much moral evil. It is itself and of necessity a suppression of many elements of human improvement, and it removes many of the wholesome restraints and softening influences through which the passions of men are subdued or confined. The very power, right, and duty of wounding or slaying a fellow-man, no one knows how often; the necessity of destroying or desolating the possessions on which many depend for enjoyment, comfort or even bread; the vehement excitement of all the emotions or passions in scenes where life or death are in suspense; the outburst, after such scenes are over, into boisterous mirth; the seasons of long inactivity, beyond an enforced routine; the frequent sight of so much which must wound all the sensibilities till they are deadened; the unavoidable collection of many of the most reckless men; the suppression of common, peaceful and orderly habits and occupations; the absence from the constant, kindly influences of home; and the necessary withdrawal from so many of the means of grace; all these things concur to surround any soldiery, in time of actual and severe hostilities, with mighty perils for the soul. Some of these men will return, crippled in character, demoralized and hardened, possibly even into ruffians. It would never be a marvel should these injurious issues extend themselves into distant years.

But, while these ills are inseparable from all wars, the nature of the war may be such as to reduce them to their smallest dimensions and their least malignity. That war which is on one side a necessity cannot on that side be attended with inevitable and irresistible temptations. Duty cannot lead by necessity into the regions of sin. When the citizens of a free country, at the call of their rulers, come together for its defence against the plots and violence of assailants, whether invaders from abroad or conspirators at home, who would rend it asunder, alienate its territory, enslave its inhabitants, overthrow its government, and throw all society into anarchy and bloody confusion, then war is a sacred duty; and though a terrific calamity, it need not make the soldier less pure in morals or less faithful to God. That is no common warfare, which brings a whole nation of freemen to arms, for no other cause but that they must obey their conscience. When they are sure that they would sin if they did not carry on

war, they need not fear greater moral ills from war than from peace.

Some of those ills cannot be escaped ; but they are counteracted by real and vast benefits, and may be far overbalanced. The unselfish might which a common, patriotic feeling, aroused to its utmost energy, can display to mankind, is a spectacle which reacts upon the people, and lifts them above meaner motives. They become conscious of a higher tone ; they can make sacrifices ; they are bold, brave, enduring. They believe that there are worthier ends than a life of ease, or the possession of wealth. They have offered themselves in the field to danger, and to probable death, for the defence of their brethren, their country, the laws and the common safety. No one can do this without becoming better than he was, unless in some other way he should be tempted to become worse. War, too, is discipline ; and the individual learns obedience, order, subjection to the law, and harmonious co-operation with his associates. The torpid are aroused, the timid become heroic, and the veins of a whole nation are warmed with an inextinguishable glow. Recollections of such great struggles and battles of freedom remain as the very strength and bulwark of nations. War, patriotic war, establishes principles ; is the foundation of institutions ; diffuses intelligence ; and generates or cherishes a love of energetic administration and of well regulated subordination. It is not all evil, not even though it were unsuccessful ; but when, through the blessing of God, it issues in the triumph of justice and liberty, it is but the sad, yet willing payment of a precious price, for benefits by which it is repaid, and it must elevate rather than demoralize. Such a war, with all its griefs, will call out all which is noblest in men ; courage, patience, self-sacrifice ; the love of country, of kindred, of home ; sympathy for suffering, beneficence in its behalf ; justice and mercy. We all well know that many of these results have already been manifest among our countrymen. Those who have come from the field have not generally brought with them either ferocity or profligacy. Often have they come back manlier, wiser, more energetic perhaps sadder men ; not seldom, it is believed, more devout more thoughtful, more ready to take up arms for Christ. And surely, the hearts of the people of the land have not bled without

feeling the need of God's protection, love and peace. They have been lifted to Him, as never before, in importunate prayer and in loud thanksgiving. Hands have been stretched forth to works of mercy, with an almost unparalleled kindness and liberality, and not gifts alone, but the long, hard, perilous toil of men and women has been dedicated, cheerfully, eagerly, abundantly. We cannot say that all these have been the fruits of Christian faith and charity : would that they were ! But surely, amongst them there has been much of this ; and all was of a region which borders close on the Kingdom of God. Let us hope, therefore, and believe, till a painful experience shall disappoint us, that the religion of our nation will emerge from the trial of this terrible shock, purified and strengthened, and with a wider dominion over hearts that have so much wept and bled. Has there not been in smitten dwellings all the sanctifying influence which God is accustomed to send when He sends the tenderest bereavements ? Has there not been a mighty flood of prayer, poured out before God throughout all these dark and troubled days ? Has there not been the profoundest and most widespread feeling of dependence on His might, and of human insufficiency ? Were we not astonished at the apparent earnestness of religious sentiment which was so often seen in those who had been persuaded, if not compelled, to take up arms in a most wicked cause ? Have we not seen and heard the evidently sincere and deep confidence in the righteous God, which has been the strength of our departed, murdered President, and of so many of our rulers, and of such multitudes in our armies, and so largely of the nation itself ? It cannot be that, called to such a struggle, we have been left to find in it a mere scene of resistless temptations, a mere process for hardening the heart. The hearts of men are really more tender ; the soil is readier for the seed of heaven than before, unless all probabilities have been reversed, and every sign deceives.

Still, it has been a heavy, sorrowful, bloody interruption in the calmer and more common business of society, of general progress and of religion. The thoughts of all have been much engrossed by the agitating tidings of every day. Young men have been hurried into the field, who would else have been in schools, colleges, or seminaries ; while some of them might already have

been preachers of the Gospel. The resources on which beneficence relies have been taxed to the utmost, to meet the urgent appeals of immediate suffering or danger. A large part of the land has been devastated; the whole is under the burden of an immense debt. All the outward work of the Gospel must be done at some disadvantage, for some time to come. Like the noble soldiers who have so often been returned to us, broken and maimed, so we, as a Christian people, have been wounded and have suffered, and may not yet be equal to former exertions. But as these very soldiers have turned to their future task, chastened, saddened, yet ennobled and filled with a higher sentiment of duty to their country, and of personal honor, so may we all come to our Christian labors with a deeper consciousness of their dignity and necessity, of the vanity of all besides, and of the nearness of eternity.

With no discouragement, then, at heart, but with a more intense seriousness of purpose, let us, in peace as in war, gather to the sanctuary of our God, and "cast all our care upon Him who careth for us."

"Thou mak'st the sleeping billows roll,
Thou mak'st the rolling billows sleep."

II. It is a proper time to review the necessary and due attitude of the Church of Christ; at periods of great civil commotion; and amidst the attendant crimes, horrors, distresses, and heroic deeds.

The Church of Christ in any nation cannot be altogether distinguished from that nation. It is composed of the very same individuals who form a large part of the national body; and, whether through the universal and general profession of one faith and baptism, or whether through the despotism which forbids more than one form of worship, and requires that one, it may be, as in some lands of Europe, that the visible Church in a country and the people of that country shall be almost identical in numbers. In the idea, they would be different bodies, and each would have its own constitution, organization and history. The rulers of the nation, though members of the Church, possess not necessarily any ecclesiastical authority or prominence. The ministers of the Church are citizens of the nation, and no more than any other citizens. But, notwithstanding the diversity of design and or-

ganization, there must not only be a very close sympathy, but so far as the members of the Church and the citizens of the State are the same persons, a perfect identity of feeling and interest. If one and all have in one of these departments a certain character, embracing the actual sentiments of the heart, they cannot, when they act in the other department, leave this character behind. A faithful Christian is a righteous citizen; he who fears God and does justly in public affairs, cannot be in the Church a false hypocrite. If, therefore, all which belongs to the action of men as a state be classed under the general name of political affairs, and all which belongs to duty towards God and man under the designation of moral and religious principles, political affairs must be subject to the laws of morality, and of religion, which includes morals.

It is the business and duty of a nation, as of an individual, to do right. Upon the Christian Church and upon its ministers rests the sacred responsibility of teaching, warning and persuading all men to do right. Whenever a national question rises into that position, that it is no longer one of means to an end, of methods of legislation, or of the preponderance of one or another historical or commercial principle, but simply offers to view, on the one side justice and on the other iniquity, I do not see how, in a free land, the pulpit can fail to throw its influence on the righteous side. The mere fact that a party is found which is willing to lend itself to a wickedness, can never remove that wickedness from the tribunal of the public and the private conscience, nor put those to silence to whom that conscience looks for instruction out of the word of God.

I am not blind to the terrible mischiefs of any state of things in which the clergy shall attempt to be arbiters of public affairs. Most heartily do I deprecate that confusion of the boundaries between different spheres which makes the pastor a leading politician, and gives up the Sabbath rest of the Lord's day to the same discussions which have filled the journals of the week. Preachers who can stimulate a multitude by their burning words are, almost from necessity, very ill prepared to form sober opinions on agitating questions of statesmanship. The feelings of the

clergy are generally right ; but the clergy themselves are, and I hope always will be, miserable conductors of parties. Their studies and pursuits lead them elsewhere and they are too honest to foil the stratagems which they do not understand. Most shocking of all it is when they are drawn so far, even in the most just of causes, as to incite to bloodshed ; to instigate hostilities in which they cannot share the perils, unless by abandonment of their own high and peaceful calling ; or to demand the utmost execution of penalties which are in the hands of magistrates ordained by God to bear the sword. Whether these things impair or increase the influence of the clergy, is not the question ; but whether they are in harmony or at variance with the design of their Lord in the appointment of their ministry. He said that His kingdom was not of this world, else would His servants fight ; and His ministers are emphatically the ambassadors of His kingdom. He left to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's ; and so must they. He would not be a judge or a divider amongst men, although His judgment would have been so just, and His authority was supreme. Surely they who hold His commission must follow Him in this and let the magistrate do his own hard duty. There are enough for all the tasks and offices of public life ; men qualified and willing ; and to them, in this republic, the people delegate the administration of the common interests ; it is for us to respect and obey them, rendering to every one his due, whether it be tribute, custom, fear or honor.

Within the limits of Christian doctrine, however, and under the restraints of ecclesiastical discipline, the pulpit, the ministry and the Church must be free to condemn all evil. Deprived of this right by their own consent, I know not where they could find a standing place on earth ; for, what other business have they but to testify to the truth ? They must do it certainly at their peril ; and in doing it, they must seek to unite the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. But iniquity, whether it be found in prince or ruler, or in the majority or the minority of a people, must never be allowed to claim unchallenged the right to overawe the Christian pulpit. Persecution has it in its power to close the lips or even to take the life of him who speaks boldly against

sin ; so John the Baptist died. Dependent as are many ministers of Christ on the direct contributions of those amongst whom they labor, they may be always liable to privation and virtual displacement if they offend : this is a part of their warfare. It is as much their duty also, to be prudent as to be bold ; and many of them have much more to fear from their own rash ardor, kindled up by popular excitement, than from natural timidity or the suggestions of interest. But the conscience of the preacher must decide. There can be no rule, prescribing his topics and his words, under penalties. He must speak and accept the results.

The collective Church, for the very reason that its action is attended with so much more authority, must act with more of the slowness of deliberation and the caution of magisterial self-control united with parental tenderness. It must be patriotic, if in every one of its members patriotism be a christian virtue. It must sustain the powers that be, the actual laws and rulers, unless these be so iniquitous that conscience shall demand every effort for their removal. It must, either openly or silently, protest against all national oppression, injustice, or irreligion ; while it may well hesitate to characterize single acts and measures. It must maintain the widest charity, for this is its very vocation. It cannot range itself, on general principles, in the support of any political party, but must embrace freely men of all opinions which are possible to a christian man. It has no call to the enunciation of any principle in doctrine or morals, as binding on the conscience, except such as, being plainly contained in the word of God, have ever been received with the general consent of believers. It cannot place inferences from these on the same authoritative level with the principles themselves, nor bind a people to carry them into practice by special acts and institutions. It must reserve those utterances which proceed from its identity, as far as its numbers extend, with the nation, for seasons, few, great, memorable and decisive. To determine these, and then to do and speak that and that only which beseems the body of Christ, and which shall unite inseparably the national sentiment and the religious duty in the one inward and outward life of a christian people, is something over which the Holy Ghost must preside. No eager haste to give the sanction of the Church to every good cause which warms the

popular heart, must there have place; nor on the other side any idle dream of an abstracted religion which shall not concern itself with the broadest and most lasting of all social interests. The Church must rise to the sense of its most exalted functions; and so pronounce the common judgment that every conscience will respond, and all the people, sooner or later, will say amen.

It is easy to speak of a Church which shall be like a tabernacle apart from all the roar of revolution and the march of armies; to speak of a ministry who shall be so occupied with prayer and preaching the word, and with pastoral cares and with consoling the afflicted, that they shall not need to notice the crash which lays a government in the dust, or the prolonged struggle on fields of blood, by which it is saved from destruction. But all this is vain. The Church and the ministry are men; not the less men, if they are saints. They have hearts, they have friends, they have rights, they have families and homes. Their country is themselves and their neighbors; they must love both, and the one as the other. They must feel, sympathize, speak, act, pray, give, and must do and bear all which law and necessity require from every citizen, or especially from them. The clergy certainly, in deference to the peaceful message which they bring from the Prince of peace, should be excused from the actual violence of bloodshed, but not from peril, not from toil, not from taxation, not from the common burdens and sacrifices of their countrymen. The peculiar work which appropriately devolves on them is symbolical of the whole relation of the church, as such, to patriotic war. For, the Church is to aid it by purifying it and by softening it; by bringing it the services, the sanctions and the consolations of divine worship, sacred instruction and holy and heavenly beneficence. If it can do but half its work, or much less, in the midst of the storm, yet, this must not be left undone. Oh, if the Church had nothing to say or do at such a time, except to pursue the calm round of her distant devotion; and if the ministry had no sympathy to give to their brethren, but were only to be impartial while others were dying in their defence; what a mere rush of brute force, what a scene of slaughter without sanctifying motive or result, would they seem to pronounce the noblest struggle for safety, justice or freedom! It cannot be; in times like these through which we

have passed, if ever, the voice of the Christian Church and its ministers ought to be clear and steadfast, inspiring and sustaining; uttering nothing but the undoubted will of the Lord, and therefore able to give strength to him that heareth. It should plead with God throughout, for unity, peace and concord; and should persuade men against all other war save that which *must* be if we would not let iniquity triumph, and be ourselves destroyed. It must cheer and bless the youths who, in behalf of their countrymen, expose themselves to all which man can suffer. It must pour forth its prayer that God would send to the righteous cause help from His sanctuary, and give fortitude in distress, and victory at last. It must give thanks for His interposition, and own Him in every deliverance and success. It must lament the desolations of the land, and the tears of the bereaved, and the groans of the captive, wherever and whosoever the sorrows may be; and exhort to all forbearance, equity and mercy. It must welcome the counsels and the deeds, through which order is restored, wickedness suppressed, the bondmen released, and an oppressed race lifted up to light, liberty and equality with their fellow men. It must watch, warn and protest against all the excesses and the cruelties, which, but for the voice of religion, would redouble the miseries of war. In the day of disaster and even of final defeat, it must bring the consoling assurance, that the Lord reigneth, and will call light out of darkness for those who trust Him and abide in righteousness. When the cause is triumphant, it belongs to the Church to lift up the song of praise; to give to the sovereign Lord of Hosts His glory; and to admonish in that time of need, against the intrusion of selfishness and pride. It is not for the Church to interpose with any attempt to guide or influence the administration of the State. It is not the province of the Church to suggest laws or regulations or punishments or even pardons. But it is for the Church to cherish in all its members those principles of righteousness and those sentiments of good will, which, when these same persons act as citizens, as members of the State, whether in war or in peace, will prompt them everywhere to do the will of God, which is whatsoever is just and true, in nations as in private men.

Thus must the Church abide, through all the shock and horrors

of war or revolution. The duty of its ministers in such times must often be difficult ; but when all suffer they cannot wish that their lot should be the easiest. If, in these momentous days, our communion, as an ecclesiastical body, has rather been marked by its habitual steadfastness in all loyalty than by the eagerness of its zeal in assailing wrong, it may well claim, on the other hand, that it has not placed in peril by imprudence and excess, either the cause of religion, the integrity of the nation, or the claim of all citizens of every race to the fullest and most fraternal recognition.

III. We turn, then, to the future. What special duties brings the happy return of peace ?

I do not dwell upon the first duty of unbounded thankfulness. The hand of God has been too manifest in our sorrows and in our deliverance, to be mistaken by any but those whom iniquity shall blind. Of the history of the American people much has been spoken, no doubt, which might well, by its irreligious and tasteless arrogance, displease many thoughtful minds, and abash them into habitual silence. But it is now no time to repress the utterance of feelings which it were impiety not to feel. The discovery of this continent, late in time ; the settlement of its Atlantic coasts by various nations ; the absorption of these colonies under one dominion ; the disappearance of the aborigines ; the issue of the contest between two great nations of Europe for the possession of the interior ; the establishment of the independence of these United States ; the settlement of the principles of their government ; the extension of their territory to its Southern and Western boundaries ; the unparalleled immigration of citizens from other lands ; and the national maintenance of freedom of conscience, of political equality, and of the universal diffusion of intelligence and education ; these formed a chain of events which marked this land to every devout eye, as by the finger of a divine intent. The same Providence has now led us to the tremendous crisis of a war which was to end in disruption and the lasting enthronement of human slavery, or in union stronger than ever, and the universal acknowledgment of human brotherhood, on these shores. It has ended, and we must thankfully say with the Israel

ites and Moses, when they had passed through the Red Sea, "the Lord shall reign for ever and ever." He is amongst us ; He has brought us thus far ; He will sustain us in the time to come.

But the restoration of peace and union certainly brings with it the task of repairing, as soon as may be, the spiritual desolations of war and discord. I will not speak of kindly and charitable feelings, to be cherished or revived. It is better not to suppose that they have ever ceased ; and inconsiderate and awkward attempts to soothe or conciliate may easily aggravate any real wound. We must aim only to do right, believing that such is also the desire of our brethren ; avoiding all intrusion, but ready for every office of mutual love and every united effort in the common cause. Whatever else may be required or may be safely absent, there will be need of increased zeal, charity and self-denial. The ranks of the sacred ministry must be replenished, and with vigorous, thoughtful, and unworldly men. A large liberality in the opulent, and such cheerful giving by all as frugality and industry can well sustain, must succor the impoverished, and build up the waste places. The cruel prejudices which consigned a whole race to degradation, scorn and perpetual ignorance and bondage, must be succeeded by a philanthropy of peculiar magnanimity towards their necessities and their claims. If a new spirit of enterprise is to pour itself into new channels, and overspread the less occupied portions of the land, it must be followed or preceded with no tardy step, by missionary activity. A hurricane has swept over us, but we indeed who here speak and listen have been only on the outskirts of its path. The ruins are not yet cleared away. Much is to be repaired, much to be rebuilt. The exertions of all are needful ; and under such a calamity, operating so unequally, we ought to bear one another's burdens ; not officiously, not with intrusive eagerness, but with wise and generous sympathy. Let us not think to walk at once in the old ways, as if nothing had befallen us, and men might buy and sell and get gain, only now and then reminded that the fields which they plough are filled with the dust of their slain brothers. A better task must be ours ; to be what we were not before, or these troubles had not befallen us. Had we done justly towards all men, there had never been a slavery

to be assailed or defended. Had we even loved mercy as we ought, it had long since disappeared. Had we, as an entire people, walked humbly with our God, no attempt had been made to prevent, by constitutions or by wars, the accomplishment of His purpose and our duty, that the oppressed should go free. All this is past; but a people and a Church, chastised as we have been, cannot forget, and be safe. Let not the Church, at least, enter, into any more compromises of truth and justice; or purchase quietness at the price of a guilty silence. Whatever lessons the supreme wisdom of God has taught us through suffering, let them henceforth be kept sacred, in all godliness and in all honesty; and let us make haste to repair, with kind and careful hands, every breach, and to heal up every wound with impartial good will.

Then, starting as we are upon a new career, which shall issue we trust, in yet happier prosperity than all the past, but which must begin under the discipline of much self-denial and of many sorrowful recollections, it becomes our own Church to see that it be fitted to be more than the home of a small though intelligent portion amongst this great people. It is very evident that a certain character is now imposed upon this people, more deeply than ever; a character determined, practical, hostile to abuses, and ready to appreciate the truth held with firmness and spoken in love. It would not be surprising, should the stern realities of war have made their prejudices sterner, but they will also have tended to make their allegiance to the cause of righteousness more real. If our Church is to be their Church, it must be deeply in earnest. Never can it become the nurse of popular excitement, or attempt to minister, half to the amusement and half to the improvement of those whom it desires to attract and control. If it is to win them it must be by the word of truth and by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. I believe this to be possible, because the Church of Christ must have exactly this office by His appointment, and must be able to discharge it amongst such a people, through His gracious blessing. That power is essential to our commission. If we cannot till the field, we must welcome those who can. But if our doctrine is manifestly that of the word of God; if our position is that of the apostolic churches;

if our ministry is indisputably drawn thence in orderly succession ; if our services are marked, beyond all others, by their grave, exalted, and yet most pleasing majesty and tenderness ; and if our zeal and diligence, our purity and blamelessness, accord with all the rest ; it cannot fail that, with the return of peace, the establishment of universal freedom, and the impulse given to the whole life of this nation, both by sorrow and by victory, this Church also should have before it a broader and brighter sphere for all its energy, and for the triumphs of its Lord.

This is all the more sure, my dear brethren, if others should have yielded to the danger of being borne away by the mighty excitement of temporal events, so that their very religion has become "of the earth, earthy." The Kingdom of Heaven is within you ; and of that kingdom we preach, and testify, and are. It is for the Church of Christ to hold up continually the standard of an everlasting Law, to appeal to a judgment to come, and to promise an inheritance which fadeth not away. Amidst all shocks and changes of the world, the pillar and ground of the truth must abide. The Church must say to men, that beyond all their contests and their immediate interests, eternity wraps them round. It must take them aside, as if into the wilderness or into the temple. It must shew them the things which are invisible, except to faith. It must present before them continually the cross of Christ and the ways of holy self-denial for the sake of the Lord and of all souls. If for the time it has been unavoidably drawn within the pressure of the crowd, it must withdraw again, and hold its own loftier and purer way. The Lord was often in the multitude ; but He loved to go apart ; and it was when he went up into a mountain, that He was transfigured. After all which has passed, within the last four years, turn we now with renewed consecration towards the everlasting city, striving to lead with us the thoughts, the hearts, and the steps of all who will but follow ; that so we and they may rejoice together where the sounds of battles come not, nor the sorrows of the grave.