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# Theological Observer

## IS WORSHIP AN END IN ITSELF?

There are currently two main views in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod about the relationship between liturgy and missionary activity. (Using other terminology, we could say that the issue concerns the relationship between "making disciples" and "worship.") Is liturgy a means to the end of mission, or is mission a means to the end of liturgy? How we answer this question has great practical significance for the ongoing work of the synod. If we answer that liturgy serves mission, then we should encourage the development of "alternative worship styles" which would enable us to reach more people. If we answer that mission serves liturgy, then we should spend time in adult instruction classes helping new members to understand the liturgy.

When two things relate to each other as means to an end, how can we tell which is the means and which is the end? Consider the act of building a house. We build for the sake of having a house—not the other way around. And the house remains when the building is done. It would seem, then, that an end is different from a means in at least these two ways: (1.) the means is pursued for the sake of the end, and (2.) the end endures after the means has passed away.

Given this understanding of means and end, it seems evident from Scripture that mission is a means to the end of liturgy, and not the other way around. Mission is pursued in Scripture for the sake of the worship of the Triune God, and not the other way around. In John's Gospel, for example, when Jesus heals the man born blind (chapter 9), the climax of the text is reached when the man now healed encounters Christ. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Jesus asks. "Who is He, Lord?" the man answers. "You have seen Him, and He is talking to you," Jesus replies. The man responds by saying, "Lord, I believe," and he worships Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, the wise men journey from the east (a mission text if ever there was one) and reach the goal of their journey when they worship the Christ-child.

Even if some would dispute the first test, no one can dispute the second test. Which will remain when the other passes away—mission or liturgy? Mission will last until the return of Christ and then cease: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the nations . . . and then the end will come," Jesus says in Matthew 24. But the liturgy does not stop with the return of Christ. Indeed, liturgy is the activity of the redeemed in heaven! Speaking of the new Jerusalem, John says that ". . . the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him."

Someone might respond, "But you are confusing the heavenly liturgy

with the Sunday morning variety. Of course, the heavenly liturgy is the end to mission, and not the other way around. But not so with the earthly liturgy. It must serve mission." To this I respond that, rightly understood, there is only one liturgy. It is celebrated at many altars, but it itself is only one. It has been celebrated at many times throughout history—in Eden, in the wilderness, in the land of promise, and now—as well as in eternity. But the liturgy is one; even in heaven John sees "the Lamb slain as if from the foundation of the world." (Recall, by the way, God's stated reason for the Israelites' departure from Egypt: "Let My people go so that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness," Exodus 5:1.)

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#### FIRST THINGS: A BIT OF NOSTALGIA, A PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE

*First Things*, edited by Richard John Neuhaus, may well be the most literate religious journal on the right and is championing issues about which Lutherans of the Missouri Synod traditionally have strong feelings. It is strongly anti-abortion, opposed to feministic philosophy, and supports a religiously moored college education. Without being a political journal, *First Things* is clearly compatible with mainline Lutheran thought. *First Things* is not without Missourian roots; editor Father Neuhaus was reared in our synod, as was his working editor James Nuechterlein, on leave from Valparaiso University. Any special treatment that the LCMS receives on its pages is often and unnecessarily negative. For example, Neuhaus includes this quotation from Robert Jenson: "In the seminaries of the ELCA there is now a theological censorship of stringency previously unknown in Lutheranism outside the Missouri Synod" (January 1992, p. 60). For the sake of good manners, Neuhaus ought to stop this kind of thing. The following could serve as a substitute: "ELCA seminaries, who have deliberately censored by caricature such traditional Missouri Synod doctrines as verbal inspiration, are now engaged in an even stronger censorship of views which they now find unacceptable." Those who believe that the seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are open-minded might want to consider Jenson's critique that there "biblical and historical study is for the purpose of liberating language and opinions of the Bible and tradition."

As required by postal regulations, *First Things* (December 1991) claimed 15,315 as its total paid circulation. As the average for the entire year was 11,314, it can be assumed that 1991 began with about 7000.

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The difference is about a one hundred percent increase, an enviable feat for a two-year-old publication.

The articles reflect a common philosophy rather than promoting a denominational platform. Like *National Review*, whose literary style it attempts to emulate, it cannot cover up a Roman Catholic bias. Where the popular and popularized *Christianity Today* fudges on an issue like feminism (e.g., "Breaking the Impasse" [January 13, 1992]), there is no doubt where *First Things* stands. Its philosophy is distilled from an informal alliance among conservative thinking Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, those commonly grouped together as backing what is called Judaeo-Christian ethics. Whether such an ethics or culture exists or is merely a fabrication is debatable, but for now it is a workable hypothesis for Neuhaus.

From my own experience I can roll back the calendar to public school days in Brooklyn where this kind of Judaeo-Christian world which Neuhaus is attempting to recreate may have existed in its declining days. At two weekly assemblies the Jewish principal and a generic Protestant assistant principal read from 1 Corinthians 13 and we sang the first verse of "Come Thou Almighty King." I never made any connection between these religious exercises and anything learned in church, and I am sure that I was not alone. Civil religious activities were probably taken with as much seriousness as music appreciation classes where children sat for one hour sessions listening to records. Probably neither exercise accomplished its purpose of making the children either religious or musical, but it was part of the scenery of youth. I do have a general memory of both and become slightly teary-eyed when I hear the music. At least God was not an unwelcome intruder in "the public square," to use a Neuhaus phrase. During December we expanded our repertoire to include "The First Noel," but "the King of Israel" was left as unidentified as was "the Almighty King." My Jewish classmates were probably thinking of David or Solomon, maybe Herod, especially since the modern State of Israel was taking shape then; it was not Jesus. The whole situation was benign and this was as much its strength as it was its weakness. What was adjustable to all made a claim on no one. *First Things* lives in that world where differences between Jews and Christians can be overlooked for a common religious good.

The December and January issues contain contributions by Rabbi Jacob J. Petuschowski, the late professor at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The first article chastises fellow-Jews for joining secularists in opposing

a publicly sanctioned celebration of Christ's birth, and the second laments the secularization of Reformed Judaism. Without *First Things* these kinds of discussions would be unknown to many of us. Christians can appreciate the rabbi's novel enthusiasm over the birth of another Jew, but I would be less tolerant if I found myself in similar shoes. The legalized celebration of the birth or martyrdom of Joseph Smith would be distasteful to many of us for several reasons. Certainly the claim of Jesus to deity must border on polytheism or blasphemy for a Jew.

Attached to the rabbi's second article is the sad note that he had died. With the title of the Bronstein Professor of Judaeo-Christian Studies, he probably knew more about biblical Christianity than many mainline Protestant seminary professors. This situation is not uncommon with those who become scholars in disciplines which are opposed to their personal beliefs. In writing obituaries in *National Review*, William Buckley, Neuhaus's mentor and a participant as lector at his September ordination into the Roman priesthood, courteously included "R.I.P. ("may he rest peace") even where it was obvious that no heavenly reward was possible for the deceased. Editor Neuhaus has not followed Buckley on this point, even though his peculiar form of universalism would allow this practice at least in the case of the late rabbi.

Neuhaus promised to clarify his (re-)ordination into the Roman priesthood and what appeared to be a form of universalism. There was no way out of his (re-)ordination without tipping over the entire Roman tradition which sees Protestants, including Anglicans in the "apostolic succession", as having a less than fully legitimate clergy. By eliminating another ordination, the ordaining cardinal would have with one stroke removed the stricture of schism against the Lutherans. Instead the cardinal did the unecumenical thing, but softened the blow by emphasizing in his sermon that the Roman church was embracing Neuhaus's Lutheran past by (re-)ordaining him. We hope that the cardinal would not repeat such a generous thought in the ordination of a former Buddhist. Neuhaus's involvement with Evangelicals, who have not disowned him for "popping," to use William F. Buckley's phrase, does bring Roman Catholicism closer to the mainstream American Protestant heritage which traditionally has a deep seated fear of Rome.

The presence and participation of one fellow-Lutheran classmate from seminary days as a lector for the ordination may have been an attempt to take some bitterness out of the pill, but former ELCA brothers remain unhappy. The LCMS ignored the event, but I do regret not taking

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advantage of an invitation to attend, especially since a reception followed his first mass at the Hotel Commodore (though I am not sure my invitation extended beyond the church sidewalk). New York is still my home in a way other places simply cannot be, and another excuse to return is always welcome.

Neuhaus's alleged universalism is a bit more serious than his ordination. On this matter he has expressed himself in writing and with Buckley *On Firing Line*. The October issue of *First Things* (pp. 61-64) sets forth the views concerned, which Neuhaus wants us to see as conforming to Pope John Paul II's eighth encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*. Encyclicals are foreign to the thinking of the LCMS, but resemble documents of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, official but not infallible expressions of church doctrine. For the pope and Neuhaus, missions are seen as a necessary expression of our faith in Christ and His love for us. We might want to take the argument for mission back to the universal atonement itself. These same documents cited by Neuhaus allow for salvation in Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit without knowing the name of Christ. Rome, Zwingli, certain Evangelical segments have held similar views. This is not classical universalism, since a severe judgement is promised for those in the Catholic Church who "fail to respond to [Christ's special] grace in thought, word, and deed." "Not only will [such Catholics] not be saved, [but] they will be judged more severely." Without being frivolous, one might have a better chance of going to heaven (to use uncritical jargon) by staying out of the church than by joining and not being saved.

Still Neuhaus is offering a serious, albeit a wrong opinion. He would not want me to say less. Neuhaus's alliance with non-Christians, particularly Jews, in moral endeavors doubtless brought him to this modified universalism and may have been a chief reason for his going to Rome. Universalism is tolerated in the ELCA and could hardly have been a reason for leaving. If Neuhaus refers to judgment beginning with the house of God, no one can oppose him, but universalism in any form strikes at the exclusivity of Christianity. Still he is not a relativist, because he firmly believes that the church's teaching is absolute and other views are wrong. *First Things* takes a stand. Certainly we would agree that scaring people out of hell is not a good motivation to believe, though some would argue for its effectiveness (the Kennedy method). His views, however, are in line with Rome. Is it only wishful thinking that Rabbi Petushowski, who knew so much about Christianity, secretly embraced it? Neuhaus might know. Here is the contradiction in which he lives and

perhaps we all do: a *religious* alliance with those whose message is unalterably opposed to the church's. The church and the synagogue have diametrically opposing views on Jesus as the Messiah. The amusing remark that, when the Messiah comes, we will ask him whether he was here before (a position even of some Evangelicals), covers over the seriousness of judgement on unbelief.

One suspects that Neuhaus envisages a reconstructed Constantinian era in the American tradition, an updated pre-Reformation Europe, an historical romanticism for which others wish in other forms. His world would involve a public morality based on the Ten Commandments, an acknowledgement of the relative superiority of Christianity but not to the exclusion of other religious expressions, the influence of churches in the public domain, and the election of religiously sympathetic leaders. "Judaco-Christian" describes this world. If all this sounds like the Jerry Falwell platform, it is, but aesthetically more appealing for those uncomfortable with low church forms. An enlightening but not uncritical review article by working editor James Nuechterlein on Ronald Reagan as embodying American religious ideals clarifies this utopia (December 1991). The former president understood his Sunday nature walks at Camp David as substitutes for regular church worship—shades of Washington or Lincoln.

Our intention here is not to be critical of Neuhaus and *First Things*, but supportive. Neuhaus is raising issues for discussion not raised elsewhere. He also takes up issues which are clearly theological and are not merely part of the American religious heritage. The December issue contains an article by the Episcopal minister, Alvin F. Kimmel, Jr., "The Grammar of Baptism," defending the necessity of speaking of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "Can Notre Dame Be Saved?" alerts the reader to the secular forces in this traditional bastion of Roman Catholicism. A previous issue spoke of the evolution of religious colleges into secular institutions. Every LCMS college regent should obtain a copy. Feminism is addressed regularly. "Despising Our Mothers, Despising Ourselves" (January 1992) shows how so called feministic advances have been to the disadvantage of women. This sentence provides an example: "Employers are losing their commitment to providing our husbands with a living wage, reasoning that we, their wives, can always get a job to make up the slack." But if Neuhaus distances himself from feministic philosophy, he has yet to express himself on women's ordination as ministers or priests. His former colleagues at *Lutheran Forum* have been similarly critical of feministic influence in the liturgy, but have shown a continued, and in my view a

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self-contradictory, enthusiasm for women clergy. The pope opposes female ordination, but would Neuhaus burn unnecessary bridges among deserted Protestants, if he followed what seems to be his natural inclination in opposing it? Before leaving for Rome, he remarked that the arguments offered for the ordination of homosexuals caused him to re-evaluate similar ones offered for the ordination of women. Extremely valuable is an editorial entitled "Marburg and Modernity" (January 1992) which criticizes the modern view, associated with Zwingli, separating the symbol from the reality. A call for "a revival of biblical sacramental theology and practice" comes from a writer who, of all things, is identified as the pastor of Reformed Heritage Presbyterian Church in Alabaster, Alabama.

*First Things* is one journal which allows us to participate in serious theological thinking, not only for its own sake, but for the sake of the things we hold as part of our own commitment. There was an issue in 1991 in which Gilbert Meilaender had a few words to say about doctrinal truth and conventions of the LCMS. I made the mistake of giving that issue away.

David P. Scaer

### THE NEW WELS CREED

At a time when theological confusion rules and there is significant social and cultural oppositions to Christian truth, credal clarity is an absolute requirement of ecclesiastical responsibility. It is a salient mark of the present debasement of Christian integrity that within many ecclesiastical jurisdictions the language of the ecumenical creeds—in addition to Bible translations, hymns, liturgies, and lectionaries—has become an object of language-tinkering of which the seminal womb has been cultural forces (often feminist) hostile to traditional, confessional Christianity. The attempt (often successful) to replace or balance even the names of the Trinity with feminine correspondents ("Mother," "Daughter") or with neutral designations ("Child") is well known. Alvin F. Kimmel, Jr., has been especially eloquent in defending the biblical and confessional language of the Trinity in the face of the erosion of orthodoxy within the Episcopal Church. In a recent *Lutheran Forum* (Pentecost 1990) Kimmel exhorts Lutherans to "pay attention to what is now happening in the Episcopal Church. You may well be looking at your future! I pray you will be able to make a more constructive theological response than we, so far, have been able to do."



Any hope that Lutherans are any more prepared to make a constructive theological response to modern egalitarian hostility to gender differences and to the biblical, confessional language which implies them received a blow with the news that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has approved for use in its new worship book a translation of the Nicene Creed which wishes to avoid male-oriented language for human beings, specifically for the person of Christ. With the new worship book, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, worshipers in WELS churches will confess that the eternal Son of the Father "became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made fully human." This will replace the traditional English translation "was made man." According to a report in the *Metro Lutheran* (VI, No. 10, October 1991), a Milwaukee Lutheran publication, the Rev. Victor Prange, chairman of the WELS Joint Hymnal Committee, explains that "man" and "men" are losing their generic "human" meaning and becoming gender-specific. He is also quoted as saying that the change "is not to deny that Jesus was male. The creed means to say that, just as Jesus is 'fully divine,' so also he is 'fully human.'"

This change is no doubt a well-intentioned attempt to up-date the creedal language and to make it correspond more closely to new language usage deemed necessary by the canons of egalitarian orthodoxy. And no doubt there is some room for Christians to accommodate their culture's biases. In the language of the creed, however, the church speaks not the language of culture but the language of faith which is based upon the prophetic and apostolic witness of the Scriptures. And in the change envisaged by WELS the faith witnessed by the Scriptures and given ecumenical confessional expression in the Nicene Creed is being eroded no less than in those instances where the names of the Trinity are emasculated.

The flight to generic abstraction, so characteristic of the gnosticizing ideology of equality of our culture, denies or merely gives lip-service to the reality and significance of the distinctions and particularities which so characterize the biblical understanding. And this failure to do justice to distinctions and particularities in God and in humanity characterizes also the WELS change. It is true, of course, that according to the Nicene Creed Jesus is "fully divine." The actual language of the creed is that Jesus is "true God." And the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), affirming the faith of Nicaea, says that our Lord is "perfect in divinity" (*teleion en theotēti*). But if one intends "fully divine" to mean "generic divinity," then frankly that is modalistic heterodoxy. For foundational to the

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trinitarian doctrine is the belief that the relations between the divine persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) are as elemental and primal as is the divine essence. The divine essence has no existence apart from the persons, but only subsists in them. Or, if we may speak this way, there is no such thing as pure deity, but only fatherly deity, filial deity, and sanctifying deity. It is more traditional, and better, to speak of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But the point is that the creed does *not* say that Jesus was "fully divine" without fully entailing as well his divine personhood, his divine particularity. Jesus is "the Son of God [the Father]." It is this "Son of God," begotten from all eternity, who is "true God from true God" and "of the same substance with the Father," that is, "fully divine."

We must be similarly aware that the creed does not assert that Jesus was "fully human" apart from wholly entailing His human individuality, His human particularity. To be sure, Christ was "fully human." The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), for example, asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ was "perfect in manhood" (*teleion en anthrōpotēti*). The Nicene Creed asserts that the Son of God "became man" (Latin: *homo factus est*; Greek: *enanthrōpēranta*). The words *homo* and *anthrōpos* may refer to humanity in general and, therefore, may be translated "humanity" or "human." But the words of the creed are not mere linguistic ciphers which may receive any dictionary meaning. They express a divine economy of salvation which was accomplished through a particular history and which was given canonical witness in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. And from that perspective it is very clear that the creed does not mean by *homo* or *anthrōpos* merely some generic humanity apart from the constitutive particularity of a concrete human being. We might refer to the words of the rule of faith expressed by Tertullian, which makes clear how little generic realities were meant when speaking of Christ. Tertullian says that Christians believe in the Word of God who was born, "man and God, son of man and Son of God, and named Jesus Christ" (*Adversus Praxeam* 2.1). Here the specific concrete human being, who is son and Son, is the one who is "homo et deus," "man and God." There is no generic human reality apart from an individualized concretion of it. The fathers did assert that Christ united to Himself the entire human race; He became *homo*, *anthrōpos*, or as the Alexandrians always preferred to say with the Gospel of John, He became "flesh." However, this language served especially the soteriological interests of christology. Christ as the Savior of all must bear the humanity of all. Thus, the fathers did not understand the incarnation as meaning that the eternal Son assumed "a

particular man" but rather "the whole human nature."

But the fathers were not oblivious to the dangers of the Platonizing notion that Christ possessed only a generic humanity, and they excluded and rejected this view (most explicitly through the post-Chalcedonian debates of the fifth to seventh centuries). Therefore, as Theodore the Studite (ninth century) put it, the whole human nature of Christ must be contemplated "in an individual manner." And in affirming the foundational reality of individualized humanity, the fathers were faithfully following the biblical understanding according to which a generic humanity also does not exist apart from its particularization in concrete human persons. And these persons are either male or female. The creation account itself indicates that God created not some generic humanity but humanity *in* the consubstantial forms of male and female. There is no human personhood apart from maleness or femaleness. There is no humanity apart from male humanity or female humanity, for maleness or femaleness is a primal and constitutive element of true humanity. Pastor Prange's assurance that the WELS change in the creed "is not to deny that Jesus was male" bears no weight, for it is clear that the offending term "man" is being replaced because it is losing its "generic human meaning." Clearly the words "fully human" are intended to refer to a generic humanity without entailing the gender specificity of Christ. But in view of the biblical understanding, there is no humanity apart from gender specificity, and that specificity is a constitutive element of human personhood. Prange's statement, while maintaining the mere facticity of Jesus' maleness, extracts his gender from the creedal affirmation of his "full humanity." Paradoxically, and worse, while the WELS change intends more clearly to assert the "full humanity" of Christ, it in fact (and as an affirmation of the creed!) refuses to include the gender specificity of Christ which is a constitutive factor of His humanity and without which His humanity does not exist. Christ is not "fully human" by being generically human. He is "fully human" by being a male human being, even as His mother, the Virgin Mary, was "fully human" by being a female human being. The change in the WELS rendering of the creed simply denigrates the importance of Christ as a concrete male human figure and apparently assumes that Christ's gender is confessionally insignificant and without meaning.

However, the WELS creedal revision does more than give entree to gnosticizing tendencies concerning biblical anthropology by failing to credit the constitutive significance of maleness and femaleness for human personhood. This revision also breaks the organic connection between the

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prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and the ecumenical creed as an orthodox summary of the Scriptures. One might say that the Scriptures are the prophetic and apostolic narrative and exposition of the creed and that the creed is the summary of the prophetic and apostolic narrative. The creed is not just some catena of doctrinal truisms but expresses the church's mind concerning the central and determinative "story line" of the biblical witness to the divine economy in creation and redemption. When, therefore, the creed says that Christ "became man," it is not to an isolated doctrinal truth that it refers. It is summarizing the biblical story according to which Christ is the New Adam in whom a new humanity is begun. This is a central feature of Paul's preaching (Romans 5:12-21; Philippians 2:5-11). The incarnation of Christ is the fulfillment and completion of a divine purpose begun in the first Adam and now consummated in the second Adam. It is not just that Christ became "fully human" or that He became "man." Because it is rooted in the Scriptures, is determined by them, and is the creedal summary of them, the creed is cognizant of this man as the New Adam and, as such, the Head of a new humanity which, to be sure, encompasses all human beings, both male and female. Thus, Leo I (in the fifth century) in one of his Christmas sermons (!) says that the "Lord Jesus Christ, being at birth true man, though He never ceased to be true God, made in Himself the beginning of a new creation" (*Sermo* 27). To think of Christ as "fully human" is an abstraction which does credit neither to the personhood of Christ nor to His biblical significance. Indeed, the generic language of the new WELS creed guts the whole range of biblical talk about the person and work of Christ (New Adam, Son of God, son of man, bridegroom, etc.) which are possible only of a male member of the human unity of male and female. It is furthermore a doubtful proposition that there is no inherent relationship between the Bible's use of male imagery for God and the fact of Christ's own personal male gender. We ought not forget that we know God to be Father through the man, Jesus Christ.

As we have said, at a time when confusion rules and there is significant pressure to accommodate Christian language to the language demands of cultural egalitarianism, it is the church's task to safeguard the deposit of faith once entrusted to it and to ensure that the expression of its faith through creed does not merely mirror the demands of culture with the attendant erosion of a clearly articulated faith. Whatever else the new WELS creed may be, it falls seriously short of reasserting the faith of Nicaea and the trinitarian and christological doctrines which the fathers there believed to be necessary to confess and to preach the gospel purely.

Lutherans have to do better than this, or we shall bring to pass the worst fears of Father Kimmel.

William C. Weinrich

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN:  
A BIBLIOGRAPHY

A letter in the *Lutheran Witness Reporter* of May 1992 suggests that discussion of the ordination of women be conducted among the men and women of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. To promote such discussion among the readers of this journal, attention is hereby recalled to those essays dealing with the subject which have appeared in the *Springfielder* and the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* since March of 1970. Readers are free, indeed, to duplicate any of these materials for the purposes of discussion with others. The staff of the *CTQ* is unfortunately unable to provide copies of past issues except in rare cases, but photocopies of any articles published herein are available from the library of Concordia Theological Seminary at the cost of production and postage. Certain contributions, to be sure, may have appeared in other periodicals as well, and the use of these materials may require the permission of those concerned.

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