

## **MIND THE GAP!**

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Travellers on the London tube are frequently exhorted to ‘mind the gap’ lest they slip and fall and in so doing fail to reach their destination. Metaphorically, I wish that people would also ‘mind the gap’ in worship. Not only would services be shorter and crisper, but it might also ensure that people were less distracted so that they too might reach more easily worship’s destination, namely engagement with God.

If the above seems abstruse, then let me spell out what I have in mind. I wish people involved in leading worship were to miss out the ‘gaps’ and get on with the business in hand. As it is, time is often wasted, the service takes longer than necessary, and, most important of all, the flow of worship can be disturbed.

Let me be specific. Guitar-playing worship leaders can often preface their songs with lengthy musical introductions, and then finish them with equally lengthy musical ‘fade-outs’. In case anybody thinks I am having a go at contemporary worship, let me say that traditional organists can be equally at fault with wonderful introductions which bear no relevance to the actual tune we are about to sing. Fair enough if the introduction picks out the melody of the song or hymn – but all too often, the congregation is treated to a musical ‘tour-de-force’ which obscures the tune and therefore fails to lead into the hymn or song, so that the congregation has to engage in an act of faith as it seeks to sing the opening lines.

The gap takes a different form when it comes to reading the Scriptures or leading the prayers of intercession. The worship-leader announces the readings or the prayers, and then we have to wait for readers or pray-ers to come forward. The wait can take several minutes as the people concerned make their way to the front. What annoys me is that it is not as if they don’t know when they should come forward – they will have received an order of ‘play’ prior to the service, and have been told to come forward (e.g. in the singing of an immediately preceding hymn or song) and to be standing up by the pulpit or lectern as the Scriptures or the prayers are announced. I understand that people don’t want to be seen to be ‘pushing’ their way forward – but frankly, the apparent humility involved in waiting to be asked pushes the spot-light even more upon them.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not wanting to rush the service through with all possible speed. There is a place for allowing people to have ‘space’ within the service. I know of some churches, for instance, where the reading of the Scriptures is always followed by a few moments silence, before the service continues. But what I am against is wasted and unhelpful space. This is the gap which we need to mind!

Goodness, have I just had a fit of the grumps? Surely I am not the only person not to like gaps?

Paul Beasley-Murray

Not against silence.