# Punctuation in Public Worship:
# the Semiotic Language within Our Liturgies

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**Abstract**

Commas can splice our sentences, and shift their connotations. Our mixed modes for hyphens compound our words as well as confuse them—even dash them to pieces. In written language, how can we know we are asking a question unless we use the proper punctuation? Punctuation is vital to how we communicate. Whether in speech or prose, we punctuate our thoughts. In this sense, we may classify punctuation among what John Wesley calls "God's many providences" in the sermon "The One Thing Needful" (1733): "designed either to wean us from what is not, or to unite us to what is worthy of our affection. Are they pleasing? Then they are designed to lift up our hearts to the Parent of all good. Are they painful?" Wesley again answers rhetorically, "Then they are means of rooting out those passions that forcibly withhold us from [God]" (§II.4). Indeed, punctuation espouses varied 'pleasing' and/or 'pleasant' responses. Rather than merely forcing the point that our punctuation carries meaning—either in addition to or against that which we otherwise intend—I want to suggest that the poetry, prose, and other linguistic media/mediums within our liturgies innately possess meaning(s) which we have the opportunity to punctuate (i.e., 'consecrate' or 'sanctify') as faith communities or else surrender to the individualisms of our so-called *(post)modern* preferential interpretations: our proverbial run-on sentence protracting philosophical discussions amid this (in)definite period of change we acutely sense but struggle to describe. We are not God's grammar police. For our part, however, faith communities and their leaders can and must more dutifully approach the task of shaping the nature, meaning, and purpose of our liturgies as truly corporate worship, not as mere collections of thoughts, words, and actions expressed by individuals more or less simultaneously.

# Punctuation in Public Worship: the Semiotic Language within Our Liturgies

*Confession and Invocation: Preparing for Worship*

As a liturgical exercise, which seems only fitting given our conference theme,[1] please allow me to begin with a few confessions. First—and as a young scholar I am prepared to eat these words—I am not a liturgist. At least I do not consider myself one in the scholarly sense that I feel might somehow earn the title of expert. Likewise, I neither specialize as a semiologist nor as a linguist. Rather, my remarks here are rooted in my personal experience as both a participant and professional leader in liturgies and as a classically trained singer, theologian, and philosopher. So, although I do not wish to sublate any of the formal disciplines sewn into my title for this essay, I do have certain affinities for language and meaning—especially wordplay—and, in particular, the interaction among humans and the divine. This essay is my way of synthesizing some of what I have learned in the company of true specialists in order to get closer to the root of a real and present problem when it comes to public worship, namely, *How can we best offer our acts of worship together?*

As one further act of confession before entering this inquiry further, I want to invite us to recognize the following truisms: (a) we are all liturgists in that each of us has a role in the making of liturgies—literally, "the work of the people"; (b) we are all semiologists in that each of us makes meaning; (c) we are all linguists in that each of us contributes to a global lexicon; and (d) we are all philosophers and theologians in that we refer to, and we signify, and we reason, and we ascribe worth through our beliefs. I pray time will witness that I have not used

1. This paper was originally presented at the 14th Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Philosophical Society (WPS), held on March 5, 2015 at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Mount Vernon, OH. The conference theme was "In Spirit and in Truth: Philosophical Reflections on Worship and Liturgy," prompting its key question, *How does philosophical reflection affect our worship and how might worship inform our philosophical reflection?* Given that many WPS members are themselves from Wesleyan traditions, my allusions to John Wesley, therefore, assume relative familiarity with his work. In turn, my use of the first-person plural is rhetorical in that sense.

these confessions merely as a rhetorical device for shoddy scholarship. Instead, I take Elton Trueblood's aphorism that "holy shoddy is still shoddy" as a stark reminder against misusing sincerity to mask any excuses I might otherwise try to make.

As another liturgical exercise, then, I would like to offer an invocation. For it, please consider the following prose from poet Elizabeth Zetlin who both created and cares for what she calls "The Punctuation Field" on her farm in Traverston, Ontario (see figures 1 and 2):

Figure 1. Aerial photograph of Traverston, ON estate in Zetlin, *The Punctuation Field*, 13. Used with permission.

> Like a field, language is constantly changing, a mobile work with its own chronology of creation. Returning the modulators of meaning to the land allows them to flower, self-seed, decay and regenerate. Farmers had quit haying our field. Their machines were too big to plough, seed and harvest just one acre. Once a field is called abandoned, that word inhabits the land. Empty, neglected, forgotten, lonely. I sit inside parentheses. Breathe out through my spine, out through imaginary roots that reach deep into the earth. The fields are waiting, impatient for someone to believe in them.[2]

2. Elizabeth Zetlin, The Punctuation Field (Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss, 2011), 17–18.

Figure 2. Drawing of “The Punctuation Field” in Zetlin, *The Punctuation Field*, 10. Used with permission.

Zetlin’s parentheses both signify and demarcate a metaphor I have in mind: *punctuation is worship*. The punctuation marks we use in our public worship also facilitate a more public act of collectively offering our texts, rituals, symbols, litanies, and so forth, as if forming a part of speech all their own. But the part that punctuation plays in our speech is entirely dependent upon the functional meaning we give the marks we use in conjunction with our thoughts, words, and actions.

I want to pause here, to clarify. My use of the phrase *public worship* should not be confused with any idol we may make out of it—in other words, worshiping that which is public,

or worshiping a so-called *worship gathering* itself, or any other such idol evoked by combining the two terms. No, by *public worship* I mean what we do publicly, or at least *together*, that is rightly called worship—a word which connotes "ascribing worth"—to God. In this sense, worship and those elements of it which I outline here go beyond some banal version of wordsmithing or showing off. I admit that I am taking a fair amount of poetic license in my prose and prosody throughout this essay. It's fun! (More so than using contractions and sentence fragments in academic writing!) But these turns of phrase, however trite or trenchant they may strike the ear, serve collectively as a rhetorically anamnestic device—to remind us that there are real implications behind punctuation and particularly so within our public religious discourses and doxologies. Rather than wishing to dilute or obscure such implications which could otherwise be dismissed as pedantically poetic or oddly odic, I take seriously William Wordsworth's (1770–1850) appeal from his poem "The Tables Turned":

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
> We murder to dissect.[3]

When what we would otherwise call 'worship' is lowered to mere wordplay or else when our philosophical inquiry amounts to little more than meddling, rather than contributing to this inescapably corporate state we call 'life,' then we commit the worst of idolatries, namely, *worshiping ourselves and then lying about it (or trying to justify it) by calling it something else*.

Instead, I want to suggest that poetry, prose, and other linguistic media/mediums within our liturgies innately possess meaning(s) which we have the opportunity to *punctuate* (i.e., 'sanctify') as faith communities or else surrender to the individualisms of our so-called *(post)modern* preferential interpretations: our proverbial run-on sentence protracting

3. William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," ll. 25–29, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned#poem

philosophical discussions amid this (in)definite period of change we acutely sense but struggle to describe.

*Glyphic Punctuation in Public Worship*

Historical accounts reveal that the imprinted characters we call punctuation marks or glyphs today largely had their beginnings, not in publishing, but in public discourse. To paraphrase Quintilian (ca. 35–ca. 100 CE), "correct punctuation may seem to be of trivial merit, but without it all the other merits of oratory are worth nothing."[4] By extension Henry Hitchings, in his book, *The Language Wars: A History of Proper English*, adds that "[p]unctuation can achieve subtle effects, and thinking about the effect of punctuation on one's readers is a far from trivial part of any kind of writing."[5] Although the English language (or the Christian faith for that matter, both of which have developed together) is always and only a case and never a norm in linguistic development, Hitchings nonetheless helps us by recalling three basic historical markers. First, many early English manuscripts had no punctuation marks at all. Second, there have been periods of tremendous experimentation. Third, there are variations in the use of punctuation across many different kinds of writing.

Liturgy, however, is not just 'any kind of writing.' What we do and say as *liturgy* only counts when we do it *together*. Or else we really should start calling it something else. And as punctuation was initially employed, it was meant to provide clarity of purpose and meaning, not to obscure it. In this sense, we can think of liturgy and punctuation as the same thing. Hitchings puts it this way:

> One generally accepted idea about punctuation is that it indicates the flow of speech—or the intonation that should be used in performing text. Before it was called punctuation, it

4. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IX:3:86, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/11C*.html

5. Henry Hitchings, *The Language Wars: A History of Proper English* (London: John Murray, 2011), 262.

> was known as *pointing* [vis-à-vis the editorial glyphs supplied by the Masoretic Rabbis to the biblical Hebrew text], and it has also been referred to by the names *distinction* and *stopping*. Originally, the main purpose was to guide a person who was reading aloud, indicating where there should be pauses and stresses. Punctuation is thus like a musical score. But it renders the music of speech imperfectly and it is limiting to think of it merely as a way of transcribing the features of speech.[6]

Similarly, the pauses and stresses which glyphic punctuation signals can guide a group of people in saying, singing, and otherwise performing an act of liturgy together. Of course, the air-quotes "answer" to the problem of togetherness I am advocating for is not so simple as finding ways to make liturgical exercises more synchronous. But this lack of simplicity should not keep us from trying. And try we have.

The notion of punctuation, which Hitchings alludes to as a scribal tool for rendering speech, was pushed to manualistic limits in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, musicologist Robert Toft observes that conventions for oratory and written punctuation were inseparable.[7] Toft cites several treatises to this effect, even John Wesley's (1703–1791) "Directions Concerning Punctuation and Gesture," which is full of handy advice like, "[t]ake care not to sink your voice too much, at the conclusion of a period: but pronounce the very last words loud and distinct, especially if they have but a weak and dull sound of themselves."[8]

Since then, droves of dissenting authors have modified how we write our thoughts. Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) has changed how dialogues are constructed and read. The bare refrains of T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) have come and gone. Writers from e e cummings (1894–1962) to Hannah Weiner (1928–1997) have challenged nearly every convention of capitalization,

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6. Hitchings, *The Language Wars*, 265.

7. Robert Toft, "The Expressive Pause: Punctuation, Rests, and Breathing in England 1770–1850," in *Classical and Romantic Music*, ed. David Milsom, 367–400 (Farnham, Surrey:Ashgate, 2011).

8. John Wesley, "Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture," (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1749), §III.19, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00000030/00001/9j

punctuation, and delivery heretofore codified for the English tongue. The question of what makes 'proper' English, let alone its punctuation, has become nearly as simultaneously fleeting and self-fulfilling as our own generation's trying to name itself *(post)modern*.

In view of these many encampments, Hitchings notes "[p]urists are possessive: they are tremendously proprietorial not only about the correctness of what they say, but also about the myriad examples they have corralled of other people's gaffes and atrocities."[9] This kind of vanity is not becoming of public worship, and the current (post)modernist debate issues challenges of its own.

For example, Juliette Day, a liturgical theologian at the University of Helsinki and the University of Oxford, cites some contemporary liturgical practices:

> In particular, liturgical texts [today] may employ a rather idiosyncratic system of punctuation with an excessive and non-standard use of commas, semicolons, and colons [offering examples from the Lord's Prayer, the *Te Deum*, and revisions from *The Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship*]. . . . Despite this sort of injury to sentence construction for the benefit of speech, liturgical texts do not reflect normal speech patterns: . . . There is what may be called a 'formality' to what people are expected to say, even when using the contemporary idiom.[10]

Day's observations certainly fit her immediate context within a collect guided by a lectionary and an episcopy. And before any of us who may be proponents of a particular 'style' of worship points fingers at another, consider some other contemporary examples.

In place of an exhaustive list, here are two potentially polarizing factors: (a) the use of digital projections, screens, or print media which are particularly common among Evangelical Christian communities against (b) presumed 'intellectual property' and copyright standards. Many texts used in liturgical settings are reproduced from copyright-protected sources, or if such

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9. Hitchings, *The Language Wars*, 166.

10. Juliette J. Day, *Reading the Liturgy: An Exploration of Texts in Christian Worship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 111–112.

sources happen to be in the public domain then they are at least likely to have been created by someone outside the particular faith community using them in a liturgical fashion. That is, very few congregations nowadays who utilize any technology as modern as the hymnal actually create their own content. Nonetheless, licensing agencies such as Christian Copyright Licensing International® (CCLI®) offer convenience services with certain "terms of agreement" which only thicken the haze surrounding the reproduction of songs and other liturgical texts (§1.1.c–e) through a few "nonexclusive rights." Consider the following:

> c. To make overhead transparencies, slides, or to utilize electronic storage and retrieval methods for the visual projection of Songs.
> d. To print customized vocal and/or instrumental arrangements of the Songs, where no published version is available.
> e. To translate Songs into another language where no published version is available.[11]

None of these rights nor any of the accompanying restrictions speaks to such real concerns as, say, modifying or simply *supplying* punctuation to their products (except perhaps point e., which could be loosely understood as extending permissions to translate poorly written lyrics into a version that more closely resembles English). For example, lead-sheet versions or guitar tabs of a song often contain minimal written punctuation marks, if any. Granted, many of the songs CCLI® hosts are composed of sentence fragments. Nonetheless, just because a song composer or a copyist may not have taken responsibility for incorporating meaningful punctuation marks as part of the lyrics does not leave congregational leaders off the hook.

Beyond correcting comma splices, my concerns accompany other common scenarios warranting the alteration of a text—copyrighted or otherwise—for congregational use, such as verb tense and vocabulary. Many congregations routinely exchange words—particularly arcane

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11. "Rights Granted," in "Terms ofAgreement—CCLI Copyright License® (CCL®)," Christian Copyright Licensing International®, last modifiedApril 23, 2014, http://support.ccli.com/ccl-terms-of-agreement/. Since this paper was first presented, CCLI has significantly updated the terms expressly to prohibit the adaptation of song texts.

uses of words like “man” and “men” and misogynistic pronominal divine nomenclature like “He”—for more inclusive language and, in turn, alter any incurring rhyming words. Similarly, you can often see songs shift their deictic center from “I” to “we” or vice versa. Or instead of using gendered pronouns at all, congregations will switch from singing/speaking about the divine to directly addressing and perceivably singing/speaking to God as “you.”[12] These sorts of practices in changing vocabulary and punctuation can uphold as much ambiguity as it may seek to clarify. And I mention these ambiguities here to probe what I consider to be a more deeply seeded question for punctuation in public worship. That is, *What is the function of ambiguity as it relates to punctuating public worship?*

*Entextualization through Punctuating Public Worship*

On the occasion punctuation is discussed explicitly, as I have up to this point in this essay, discourse tends to fixate upon what I have been calling glyphic punctuation marks—those scribal characters accompanying those other collections of characters which we recognize as words. However, just as we have seen the development of such punctuation marks has its locus in the public forum, so too the public act of corporate worship has special bearing upon punctuation as a verb—the *act of punctuation*. I find the contemporary considerations of Day and others coupled with my brief remarks about the re(-)production of non-original texts to be of importance to the extent that they reveal the complexities implicit in attempts to guide, to punctuate, to collectively consecrate congregational rituals.

Although Zetlin’s poetry focuses on the glyphs themselves, her phrase “modulators of meaning” points to their function as “the small, but important tools to temper the flow of

12. Many of these points deal directly with the question of how one experiences God for oneself. My philo-theological understanding of this has been especially shaped by Kevin W. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (NewYork: Cambridge University, 2011) and Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être* (Paris: LibraireArthème Fayard, 1982).

thought."[13] Flow matters. Punctuation is performative. Again, *punctuation is worship*. As Matt Tomlinson, a Methodist anthropologist and liturgist, explains

> [I]t is crucial to understand that ideas about pattern and motion are part of semiotic ideology more broadly: people's beliefs about what signs are in the first place, how they are thought to function, how they are thought to articulate with the "real" (nonsymbolic) world, and what effects their usage in ritual performance will have.[14]

These clarifications follow Tomlinson's research in Fiji over a fifteen-year period observing what he calls ritual textuality as evidenced through several cases related to the practices of Fijian Pentecostal Christians. Tomlinson frames ritual textuality "in terms of connections people make between an event's semiotic and textual properties and ideologies of how those properties indicate that ritual actions are effective or ineffective."[15] In other words, *ritual textuality* is a way of understanding how connecting with texts helps us better to connect with one another. Chief among the properties of ritual texuality is the process of *entextualization*—or how spoken words relate to texts—as "discourse is made into object-like signs and texts arranged in specific patterns."[16] Tomlinson cites (a) sequence (e.g., repetitive confession); (b) conjunction (e.g., chiasmus and parallelism); (c) contrast (e.g., factors of individual and congregational identity); and (d) substitution (e.g., fasting or translating a passage of scripture anew).

It is from these collective concerns about human history involving punctuation and the texts we make with it that I wish to reread "The One Thing Needful," John Wesley's early expository sermon on sanctification. In it, Wesley considers sanctification to be the culmination of God's work in our lives through God's many *providences*—which we punctuate, and of which

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13. Zetlin, *The Punctuation Field*, 27.

14. Matt Tomlinson, *Ritual Textuality: Pattern and Motion in Performance* (NewYork: Oxford University, 2014), 5.

15. Tomlinson, *Ritual Textuality*, 3.

16. Tomlinson, *Ritual Textuality*, 118. I supply my own generalized typological examples in place of Tomlinson's specific interactions with Fijian Christians.

I claim punctuation is one—all of them "designed either to wean us from what is not, or to unite us to what is worthy of our affection. Are they pleasing? Then they are designed to lift up our hearts to the Parent of all good. Are they painful?" Wesley again answers rhetorically, "Then they are means of rooting out those passions that forcibly withhold us from [God]."[17]

It would not be enough, however, merely to reference Wesley for the convenience of trying to cement my argument within my own confessional tradition or to satisfy my initial audience for this essay. In fact, to do so would be vainly inappropriate. Instead, I wish to distinguish Wesley's understanding of providence with what he elsewhere deems *merit*, as when "a large proportion of those who are called Christians do to this day abuse the means of grace to the destruction of their souls. . . . idly dreaming . . . that they shall be made holy; or that there is a sort of *merit* in using them, which will surely move God to give them holiness or accept them without it."[18] The meaning implicit in the means of grace—those conditions or activities through which God interacts with us, in this case the punctuation of public worship—is provisional and temporal, not concrete or definite, in a word: ambiguous.

The communal nature of public worship encompasses this functional ambiguity to which I have been alluding.[19] Forward/back slashes, parenthetical (pre)fixes, 'scare quotes,' and the like are unlikely to prove useful in guiding a more concerted expression of public worship. (But, again, they're really fun to sprinkle throughout an academic essay.) In a liturgical context, these marks are litter, debris. They are not signs of cleanliness. Still, attention to the use of punctuation

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17. John Wesley, "The One Thing Needful," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater* (Nashville:Abingdon, 1987), §II:4.

18. See Wesley, "The Means of Grace," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, §II.5 (emphasis mine).

19. For a more analytical treatment of benefits of functional ambiguity from a linguistic perspective, see Steven T. Piantadosi, Harry Tily, Edward Gibson "The Communicative Function ofAmbiguity in Language," *Cognition* (2011), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2011.10.004.

marks—the glyphs—can and does serve to (mis)direct the process of corporate ritual entextualization, which is, in fact, a group exercise in the act of punctuation.

Consider again the example around the reproduction of texts for congregational use. Because so many lead sheets and guitar tabs as provided through databases like CCLI® have a general lack of glyphic punctuation, it does not necessarily follow that such texts are any less punctuated. They are simply 'bare'—which makes them poorly punctuated at best. This is because the duty falls to each participant in a public worship gathering to punctuate these texts independently, simultaneously, and yet somehow "together" in the context of performing the liturgy. And it is with this feigned togetherness that I take issue—a tip of the hat to community which actually lauds a mock individuality (even if only indirectly) at the expense of raising a corporate voice of contrition. While perceptions of togetherness in public worship matter, a faithful treatment of them is beyond the scope of this study today. Nonetheless, a more dutiful approach to the task of shaping the nature, meaning, and purpose of our liturgies *as worship* through punctuation is precisely at hand.

Properly punctuated liturgies are *functionally ambiguous*. That is, the resulting ambiguity is actually a good feature. But, with no punctuation marks whatsoever, texts are little more than vague collections of words. Verse proffers a semblance of punctuation, but with a negligible degree of glyphic punctuation, the onus is on individual participants in such liturgies to salvage a preferential interpretation of these collections of words, interpretations which compete and may even be in conflict with fellow worshipers. In a sense (or in essence), individuals participating in poorly punctuated liturgies are subjugated to reenact the (post)modern dilemma inherent in contextual isolation over and over again. "What is true for you is true to none of us." Or "The words I'm saying or singing in this liturgy may be true for all of us, but I'm not willing to own

up to them myself—because I don't have to." But by tending to something as plain as glyphic punctuation, individuals at least get a better shot at experiencing a deeper sense of togetherness in and through their corporate acts of worship. Thus, the ambiguity which remains within properly punctuated liturgies allows a congregation to avoid the vagueness of uncertainty brought on by their asynchronous and individualistic improvisations of texts and instead to offer all the multiple and wonderful meanings of words and phrases within a given text—what we love poetry for—in a more collective voice. This is the difference between speaking is *unison* and *uniformly*. In short, poorly punctuated liturgies are plagued with the distraction of having to try to say them together in the first place. But more attentively punctuated liturgies at least give us a fighting chance of actually acting with a collective voice.

If attention to this functional ambiguity is to be called 'faithful,' however, then it must neither manifest itself merely as 'building a better mousetrap,' nor as some hermetically sealed and "unpolished" or "raw simplicity."[20] To 'standardize' punctuation in public worship (as though to institute some manual of style) could well undermine its utility and, in turn, uplift the (post)modern problem yet again. In other words, attention to the marks and acts of punctuation cannot in and of itself constitute the faithful and just punctuation of public worship. Rather, the reproduction of texts for congregational use represents an opportunity to tailor them for that specific congregation's expression—to re-produce them—or, as Harold Best, former president of

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20. Thus misshaping the phrase borrowed from Jean Calvin's (1509–1564) high view of scripture in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1.8.1, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html:

> Our hearts are still more firmly assured when we reflect that our admiration is elicited more by the dignity of the matter than by the graces of style. For it was not without an admirable arrangement of Providence, that the sublime mysteries of the kingdom of heaven have for the greater part been delivered with a contemptible meanness of words. Had they been adorned with a more splendid eloquence, the wicked might have cavilled, and alleged that this constituted all their force. But now, when an unpolished simplicity, almost bordering on rudeness, [Lat. *rudis simplicitas*; Fr. *simplicite rude*] makes a deeper impression than the loftiest flights of oratory, what does it indicate if not that the Holy Scriptures are too mighty in the power of truth to need the rhetorician's art?

the National Association of Schools of Music, puts it, to "[s]ing to the Lord newly . . . as if for the first time."[21] To attend to the preparation of worship "in spirit and in truth" (cf. John 4:24), liturgies must invest in the main purposes of punctuation to "aid comprehension"[22] and "manage meaning."[23] Liturgist Graham Hughes says this meaning which we manage among ourselves "inhabits an intermediate place; it is neither a nihilistic world of 'innumerable systems of marks' nor a world of contextless ideality."[24] No, even before liturgical texts are performed, they come prepared—prescripted, prescribed, or 'prepunctuated'—in one way or another. Therefore, whether in print or projected on a screen, whenever we prepare or reproduce a text for use by a congregation, *we also have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the marks we want to leave*.

*Benediction: Preparation for Punctuation*

The meanings we make with the marks we use also mark us as well. This means punctuation—both the glyphic indicators and the act itself—exhibit marks of another sort: those left by the texts we recite, sing, preach, pray, meditate upon, partake, and otherwise become through the process of punctuation in public worship. In our (post)modern context, this meaning is functionally ambiguous, and, therefore, functionally freeing when tended to properly for a group of worshipers.

A just amount of attention to these triadic marks, then, may very well allow us to enact the justice we seek (cf. Mic 6:8). Otherwise, how can we expect justice until we flesh it out in

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21. Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 145–146.

22. K. S. Yadurajan, *Structure, Style and Usage* (NewYork: Oxford University, 2005), s.v. "punctuation." Of the numerous reference sources I consulted,Yadurajan's succinctness and simplicity and, in turn, my insistence upon citing the same cannot be overlooked especially given the lengths many authors have gone to achieve such levels of simplicity and succinctness.

23. Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (NewYork: Cambridge University, 2003), 205.

24. Ibid.

our public worship? To put it plainly, until a congregation has confronted the roots of individualism to exclusion of togetherness; and misogyny; and other forms of idolatry which may well be perpetuated within it own liturgical texts, that community is fooling itself if anyone within it believes they can make a positive and lasting difference in the broader community.

We cannot simply think our way into right relationship with the divine anymore than we can sing our way into it. However, paying closer attention to the thoughts we sing and say surely can help us better to posture ourselves to the benefit of our relationships with God and the world around us. Punctuation in public worship represents a continuation—not a termination—and a corporate consecration of thoughts, words, and actions. This semiotic language within our liturgies allows us to entextualize, inscribe, even incarnate our devotional words. These marks help us to make meaning out of the words we share liturgically, and they mark us as well.

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