

Growing in Worship

A Reflective Learning Journal on
Participating in Worship



Theological Journal

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Introduction

Worship goes beyond mere ritual or routine; it truly represents the heartbeat of the Christian life. As I progressed through various modules—from Christology to the early explorations of the Philosophy of Theology, which we tackled back in October, and into the history of Christianity, along with different forms of worship—my understanding of what it means to engage in worship has been profoundly reshaped.

Through my theological studies, the spiritual practices shared at the London campus, and reflection on my personal experiences, I've come to see worship not simply as an action, but as something that fundamentally shapes our identity before God, rooted in self-love. This reflective journal will delve into the moments of worship I have experienced during and after the St. Melitus courses, examining how these experiences have influenced my responses to God and how my theological and spiritual awareness has evolved. Each section includes a recounting of a worship experience, my initial reactions, and a thoughtful theological reflection—embracing the idea of "Simul Iustus et Peccator."¹

1. Encountering Silence: Discovering God in the Stillness

Event:

During our second week of teaching in London, from April 7th to 11th, 2025, we delved deeper into our module. We participated in a contemplative worship session centred on silence and stillness, which also introduced us to various Christian brotherhoods, including the Carmelites, Benedictines, and the Franciscans, my personal favourite. In one of these sessions, we were invited to simply sit quietly in the presence of God, embracing the pure silence without any spoken liturgy or music. This experience drew from the rich spiritual traditions of the Carmelites and Benedictines, emphasising the significance of community and discipline. I found myself reflecting on this practice during my personal prayer time at home as well.

¹ The Latin phrase "simul iustus et peccator" translates to "at the same time righteous and sinner." This concept is significant in Christian theology, especially in connection with Martin Luther and the Reformation. It captures the idea of a Christian's dual identity: justified through faith in Christ's righteousness while simultaneously grappling with sin in their everyday lives.

As we explored the spiritual traditions of Carmelite spirituality in a lecture titled "Discipleship in the Dark Night," we were encouraged to compose our own prayers. Here's what I wrote:

14:16 Mon 7th April 2025 from my notebok:

I am, Lord; I am

In silence I wait before Thee.
My hands are still, my soul is quiet—
Lead me in Thy mercy.
Though I am made ready,
I confess: my heart is burdened still,
clinging to what was,
though Thou hast called me to leave all behind.

Am I not, as the wife of Lot,
drawn to look back,
though I know Thy command leads forward?
I love Thee, Lord; I am —
yet I falter amid the ruins of my memory.
This, O Lord, is not only a prayer,
but a cry from the depths of my being:
Wilt Thou leave me as a pillar of salt,
or in Thy lovingkindness,
draw me into grace?

Is there merit in the struggle,
in the wrestling of my soul with I AM will?
If I stretch forth my hand,
will I AM take it?
Teach me to forsake all that hinders, oh Christ.
Teach me to follow Thee, I AM, with one heart.
Through the Son, The God, The Word

Here am I, O Lord.
Send me.
I am, Lord; I am.

— D24141

Immediate Response:

Initially, I found the silence uncomfortable. I am used to worship that involves music, movement, and verbal prayers. But as I sat in stillness, I gradually became aware of my breath, my heartbeat, and the subtle presence of God in the quiet.

Theological Reflection:

This experience reminded me of 1 Kings 19:12, where Elijah meets God not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in the "sound of sheer silence". I realised that in my pursuit of a 'feeling' of God's presence, I often equated emotional intensity with divine proximity. This moment of silent worship challenged me to understand God's presence in new ways. Drawing on Henri Nouwen's writing on silence and solitude, I learned that silence is not emptiness, but a fullness—an invitation to listen deeply to the voice of God. My spiritual discipline of silent prayer has since become a regular rhythm, shaping how I attend to God both in corporate and personal worship.

2. Participatory Liturgy: Worship as a Communal Act and Freedom of Worship.**Event:**

Every Tuesday started for us with a unique worship experience, each week bringing a fresh perspective. I was truly impressed by the active involvement of the congregation, especially the Ordinand students. It was evident that everyone had their part to play—whether as readers, intercessors, servers, or the priest, with each member of the congregation contributing through responses, singing, and communal prayers.

During our teaching week in London, I was particularly touched by a lecture called "Order and Freedom in Worship," presented by Matthias Grebe. He highlighted a crucial point: while our leaders are flawed and imperfect, our God is without fault. Matthias emphasised, "Rules are vital; after all, every game needs them, and these rules are intended to safeguard us. A rule is helpful as long as it doesn't become burdensome; that's when it turns into an issue. We are called to trust and obey, but only within frameworks that aren't harmful. The terms 'obey' and 'trust' can be twisted, leading to real harm."

He illustrated his point effectively with the example of the Deutsche Bank logo, which symbolises risk yet operates within boundaries/



framework. The logo—a blue square with an upward-sloping slash—represents stability and growth. The square stands for security and a carefully controlled environment.

Immediate Response:

I experienced a deep sense of unity and belonging, even with people I didn't know personally. The ritual actions—the sign of peace, the Eucharist, and the kneeling and standing—linked us across time and space. On the other hand, during lectures, I felt a clarity that left a strong impression on me, particularly through clever examples that reminded me of Jesus, who always captivated his listeners with thought-provoking hyperboles.

Theological Reflection:

This experience highlighted the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:9), showing that worship is a collective activity. James K.A. Smith's idea of “liturgical formation” made me realise how our worship habits shape our hearts over time. Every gesture and silence helps form us into Christ-like beings, reflecting the communal nature of the Triune God. Matthia's lecture, which contrasted my past experiences of authority with abuse, offered healing and a broader perspective on love, truth, and freedom. If God embodies love, then true love must allow for freedom within boundaries; a blue square with an upward-sloping slash.

3. Emotional Worship: Encountering God through Song

Event:

During a student-led worship morning, I took part in a charismatic-style gathering that featured extended musical worship. The atmosphere allowed for spontaneous singing, prophetic prayers, and expressive worship, with participants raising their hands and moving freely. This theme seamlessly transitioned into our next module titled “Contemporary Charismatic and Evangelical Approaches to Spirituality,” led by Rev. Jitesh Patel. The lecturer guided us through modern forms of worship that, for some, might resemble a concert more than a traditional worship experience.

Immediate Response:

I felt uncomfortable, as if I were part of a show titled “Look at Me and My Relationship with God.” In some ways, this took away from my true purpose for being there—worshipping God. I felt restricted; I couldn't envision raising my hands or singing along to join in the energy. I remained quiet, with my hands clasped down, participating in worship but in a limited way.

Theological Reflection:

This encounter reminded me of the Psalms, where worship is raw, emotional, and

deeply felt. Just as David danced before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14), the Psalms are filled with expressions of joy, pain, and trust. It made me reflect on how worship invites us to bring our whole selves to God. While we should never force or pretend to express emotion, it undeniably holds a significant place in our worship experience. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, describes worship as “the human response to the divine initiative.”² That day, I felt God initiating yet another lesson in my life, along with an emotional response of my resistance and, in some ways, judgment. This experience encouraged me to be more open to engaging my emotions in worship, something I had often held back from, now understanding that it was due to how I was raised and how my faith developed. Rev. Jitesh’s message that week emphasised that this movement isn’t based on an individual but rather represents a growing passion within the church that motivates people to take action.

4. Worship, Times and Seasons and Sacred Space - Generous Orthodoxy and the Theology.

Event:

One of Matthies’ lectures during April Teaching Week, we delved into the Orthodox nature of our theological worship, focusing on the importance of time and sacred space. This discussion beautifully connected with the lectures on Orthodox spirituality from last December. During this lesson, we gained valuable insights into the story of the first sin in Genesis and the visible presence of Christ within it.

Immediate Response:

I’ve come to appreciate the unity in God’s plan for His people, recognising that it revolves around us and His sovereignty. I’ve had the pleasure of engaging in some deeply enriching theological discussions that I’ve



² Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 1998.

truly enjoyed. This beautifully leads me to my next point about seeing "God" in one another during collective worship, as part of one church of Christ. As Matthew points out: *"Time for Christians doesn't really exist; Christ is the beginning and the end."*

We live with Christ, the Alpha and Omega. Our timeline is very much here and now. I felt the heaviness of the news weighing on my spirit. In worship, I was given permission to grieve publicly, alongside others. There was a collective sigh in the prayers, and a sacredness in naming suffering, and that there is not just one way of worship, but that for each secret space means different things.

Theological Reflection:

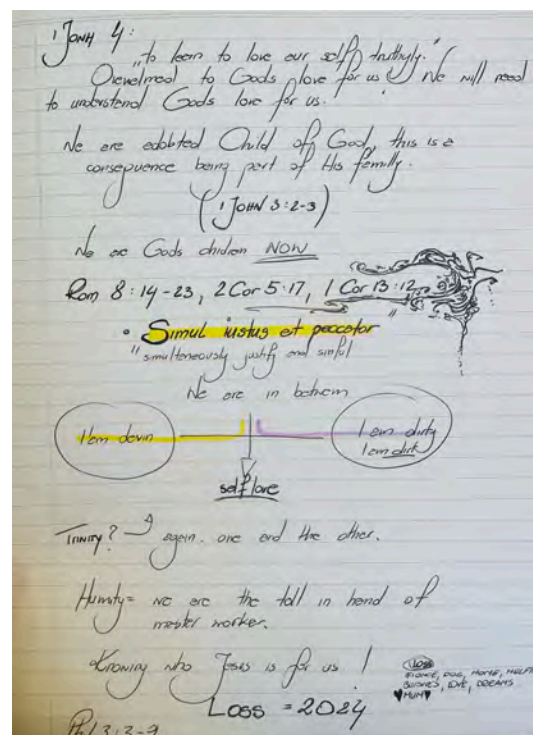
The lecture delved into a profound theological insight that I've come back to time and time again after our lectures and can't imagine leaving out of my journal: *What we refer to as 'tomorrow' is as clear to Him (God) as what we call 'today.' For Him, all days are simply 'Now.' He doesn't recall you doing things yesterday; He merely sees you doing them, because while you've lost yesterday, He hasn't. He doesn't 'foresee' your actions for tomorrow; He sees you doing them right now. Though tomorrow may not have arrived for you, it is already present for Him. He knows what you will do tomorrow because He is already there, observing you; the moment you've completed an action is already 'Now' in His view.*

This ties nicely with a passage mentioned earlier from John 4:21: *"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."* The spirit and truth exist here and now, reflected in the diversity of yesterday's mistakes and today's commitment to Christ.

5. Worship Through Service: Encountering Christ in Others - *Simul Iustus et Peccator*.

Event:

As we approach the beginning of the academic year on October 22, 2024, it's a time for reflection on self-care. This year's focus has been on the infinite love of God for His creation. We've touched on various perspectives already discussed, emphasising that we are all children of God, simultaneously justified and sinful (Latin: *"Simul iustus et peccator."*), living in this paradox. Self-love is intertwined with self-respect and the "holiness" we strive for



before God. It's a moment for us to reflect and choose a word that encapsulates our experiences over the past year. This was the moment we shared our experiences, a moment I've seen Christ in others.

Immediate Response:

For me, 2024 was a year marked by loss, which is why I chose the word "LOSS" to reflect my experience. However, I've framed this feeling within the context of worship, discovering peace in the phrase "*Simul justus et peccator*." This reminds me not to take God for granted but to accept that if we stand before Him with true repentance, He is eager to forgive.

Theological Reflection:

When I chose "loss" to name my year, it wasn't just about grief or absence—it was about being stripped. In 2024, I have seen how easily things fall away: roles, certainties, even parts of myself. And in that emptiness, lectures remind us of the old truth: *simul justus et peccator*—simultaneously righteous and a sinner.

In worship with others, I come not as someone who has it all together, but as someone who is always being held together by grace. The people around me are not perfect either, but somehow Christ appears in their faces. In our shared brokenness, He becomes visible. To see Christ in others, even as I mourn, is to know that I am not alone. My sin, my sorrow, my losses—they don't disqualify me. They make space for mercy. In Christ, I am both fallen and forgiven. I lose, and yet I receive.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on my journey throughout this module, I feel a profound sense of gratitude for how my understanding of worship has transformed. I've moved from merely seeing evangelical worship as a set of practices to recognising it as a rich, multi-faceted way of life. Worship includes moments of silence, songs, acts of service, expressions of lament, and structured liturgy. It encompasses both individual and communal experiences, striking a balance between emotional responses and reflective contemplation, while blending traditional elements with spontaneous expressions.

Theologically, I've been challenged to understand worship not merely as something we initiate, but as our response to the continuous presence and work of God. Spiritually, practices like silence, the observance of Seasons and Sacred Space, and cultivating corporate self-love have proven grounding and

transformative for me. On a personal level, I've come to realize that my entire life—when offered to God in faith and love—serves as an act of worship.

Moving forward, I hope to deepen this understanding by exploring various spiritual practices, maintaining a rhythm of both personal and communal worship, and serving others as a form of devotion. Worship has transcended being just an activity; it has become a posture of the heart, and in that state, I aspire to remain.

In summary, while the Bible doesn't provide a detailed manual for worship, it speaks of songs and sacrifices, temples and tears—yet rarely lays out a strict formula. There is no one-size-fits-all structure for worship services, no ideal song list, nor perfect stage lighting. What Scripture emphasises is that worship stems from the heart: “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” — Isaiah 29:13 / Matthew 15:8.

Worship in the Bible is often messy, embodied, costly, and sometimes silent. It can be found in broken alabaster jars, midnight prison songs, trembling hands lifted high, and even in quiet acts of obedience. Worship is not always about music; sometimes it's about mourning or simply showing up. The Bible may say little about worship as performance or preference, because it speaks volumes about worship as surrender.

- This is precisely what I have witnessed.



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Bibliography:

1. Smith, James K.A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Baker Academic, 2009.
2. Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 1998.