Contemplation: 
The Practice of Wisdom Christianity

The contemplative practices of Wisdom Christianity are a gift from Wisdom herself, but they are also complex and many dimensioned. In this article we will explore these dimensions through images and metaphors that include the symbol of the Temple, alchemy, integration, embodiment and more. We will also survey its spiritual roots in Jesus (Yeshua) and outline the practices of Wisdom Christianity in the contemporary world.

At the heart of the wisdom traditions is a spiritual practice known as contemplation. Wisdom Christianity is based upon this experience. Though it is sometimes difficult to describe it in words, the practice of contemplation is absolutely essential if we are to know Wisdom Christianity not simply as a belief system, but as a way of life different from our ordinary thinking and believing.

Wisdom is about integral knowing. It requires that we practice through integration and embodiment. The contemplative wisdom of Christianity is not simply about a belief in our heads, but a form of practice that is more like learning to ride a bicycle than anything else. You cannot learn bicycle riding by reading about it in books, or going to hear a lecture on bicycle riding. You must climb on and ride the bike to experience it for yourself. You must practice it in order to embody it. Contemplative wisdom in the Christian tradition is the same. You must embody contemplative practice in your being as a form of wisdom.

Living contemplatively, therefore, is a life-long process that teaches us how to integrate our inner experiences with the details of our outer life. It is, therefore, dynamic and ever-changing and deepens our understanding as it strengthens our practice. In order to understand the contemplative practices of wisdom Christianity, we need to appreciate the root meaning of the word contemplation and understand it through its ancient Temple symbolism and how it is experienced as a form of divine alchemy.

Con-Templing

Etymologically the term contemplation means “with the temple” (con + temple). Templum is the Latin word for temple—a sacred space dedicated to the divine Presence. As soon as we speak about contemplation in this way we are immediately propelled into the symbolism of the ancient, biblical temple. The first and second Jewish Temples described something that was not only historically real but also inwardly significant. In Judaism the Temple referred of course to its ancient precincts in Jerusalem. In later wisdom teaching, however, this symbol came to stand not only for a sacred outer structure built on the hills of Judea, but also for something that exists deep within each individual. A person was understood to be a sacred Temple in whom the divine Presence was said to dwell.
Using the image of the historic Temple in Jerusalem as our pattern, we can illustrate almost perfectly what the structure of the inner human Temple is and how contemplation (con-templing) is its unique purpose. Imagine that the sacred space of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem had boundaries that touched the natural world of Palestine, the City of Jerusalem with its living and business districts. All of this was joined to its “outer court.” Inside of outer space was the inner court which enclosed the Holy Sanctuary itself. More interior still, the Sanctuary contained the most holy space—the Holy of Holies. Envisioned it this way, the natural world extending out into the cosmos holds the Temple space and the city of human habitation, Jerusalem, where it physically existed. The city was where normal living and commerce went on day after day in the world of human affairs. This outer perimeter contained the sacred precincts where the secular mingled with the religious and spiritual worlds of the Temple in its most external (or exoteric) form.

This outer court surrounded the inner precincts of the Temple, where the religious community of Jewish practitioners gathered to perform their duties and obligations including cleansing outer impurities in preparation for sacrifice. An individual who was prepared might then enter the holy place itself containing the table of unleavened bread, the Menorah Lamp of the seven lights and the altar of incense which was kept continuously burning. But behind a veil was the most sacred inner chamber (a perfect cube)—the holiest and most sacred space of all. It was said that this was the habitat of the divine Presence which resided there continuously, at the heart of everything in the Holy of Holies.

Now imagine that this external structure reflects the human Temple—one’s own sacred being—body, soul, and spirit. The body is symbolized by the outer court which is webbed to the whole universe. The soul is the inner court and the holy place of the Sanctuary. The spirit is the Holy of Holies. To enter and experience God at any level in this Temple is to en-temple. To encounter and unite with the divine Presence in the Holy of Holies is to con-temple. These are the two fundamental acts of contemplation.

**Direct Mystical Experience**

Contemplation takes place as we intentionally move deeper into the heart of our own inner Temple in the inner chamber of Spirit. Our own personal consciousness directly encounters the divine Presence. Where the inner heart of God meets with the human heart, these two presences become one sacred Temple—they con-temple in direct mystical experience. We can describe this experience in words perhaps, we can even believe that the divine Presence inhabits the precincts of our own inner Temple, but like bicycle riding there is no substitute for having this direct encounter. We must ourselves go there and enter deeply into that temple of our own being, lift the veil between soul and spirit, and move into the precinct of Holy of Holies that brings us into the direct, face-to-face encounter with the divine Presence.

Direct experience through contemplation has traditionally been called “gnosis,” which is not knowledge *about* something, but an experience *of* something. In the end, this alone is
transformative because it allows the divine Life-Force access to us as personal Presence and as love. It is no longer simply a belief about it, it is the “thing itself” personally encountered which causes the soul to grow and mature, and the human spirit to awaken and evolve along the vertical axis toward its full transformative potential. As the heart is stirred and the soul awakened, consciousness moves to the level of the heart. We become kardially aware through a “direct mystical experience” of the divine. Nothing can replace this direct, personal encounter with the divine Mystery at these deeper levels of contemplation.

The question is, of course, how can we experience this? How can we experience “direct encounter” in contemplative prayer? Wisdom teaching says that our unique soul is a gift from the Divine and from its beginning it has already been “tuned” to the Holy One. We awaken in time perhaps unaware of this inner connection, but it is there and it is real. Our life-long tasks, then, is to awaken to and strengthen this tie through the practice of contemplative prayer. Perennial Wisdom gives us a wealth of images about the many ways this can be done. It talks about human growth and transformation through a catalytic process known as divine alchemy.

**Transformation as Divine Alchemy**

Like any kind of growth, the transformative process through con-templing is developmental, occurring in stages, and involves many dynamic changes as we mature. In tradition, it is said to be a spiraling process *helikos tropon*, and informed by elements and forces that are both inside and outside our own personal control. Divine alchemy is a traditional term used to describe this complex process. Growth and transformation are inner “alchemical” changes. Spiritual awakening and transformation only occur when we participate in a praxis that is more like alchemy than anything else. If we use this image to describe these changes, many things become clear.

Real elements and substances must be brought into our lives in the form of new knowledge, information, and energy. These must be integrated with new values (sometimes called virtues). These are catalyzed by life-changing experiences that happen living in time which are essential if everything is to be integrated and synthesized. Natural, human, and divine powers are applied in this laboratory of life-experience so that integration and synthesis can occur within the crucible of the soul. This heat, light, and pressure coming both from the external and internal worlds, as well as from the states and conditions of the body, mind and spirit, provide catalytic and energetic effects to bring about change.

**The Worlds of Praxis**

The daily praxis of Wisdom Christianity is, then, both a life-long learning experience in the inner chambers of the heart and an alchemical experiment taking place at the nexus of two worlds: the inner world and the outer world. It is aligned along two axes: the horizontal and the vertical. It uses natural, human and divine energies to catalyze the work of transformation, and it takes the unknown serendipities of life itself—the events
and occurrences, the successes and the failures, the joys and the sorrows—to provide the necessary means for the alchemical process of transformation to occur.

Participation as an intentional practitioner of divine Alchemy also requires that we engage multiple centers of inner cognition (the head and the heart, for example) allowing these centers to open and operate through processes of volition, awakening, attention, and surrender that are only partially under our control. As we respond, however, we are assisted and guided along our spiritual path by three great powers: Grace (Divine Intelligence assisting us), the higher Self (the Angel of one’s own being), and the teachings of the Master within. This energetic complexity which is a con-templing of the human and the Divine describes an Alchemy which is active within the soul’s inner Temple and which is necessary if there is to be a transformation of human being and consciousness.

In the end, these processes and their outcome are mysterious because they require (and lead to) a condition that transcends the normal limitations of human understanding or control. Every practitioner (every person on the Wisdom path), however, must learn and experience this for themselves—they must find out directly what is true and what is not—what works and what becomes a barrier to progress. In the outer world, such experimentation and learning centers on practical wisdom—wisdom grasped and applied to life as experiential learning. The individual on wisdom’s path takes the sacred teachings and learns how to use them in the laboratory of everyday life.

In the inner world, the practice is focused primarily on the heart and how to work with its energies and those coming into it from the vertical axis. The practitioner learns how to use these in the soul’s crucible. They then can be applied through the mind, language, and by truthful action in the outer world. All of these principles constitute what is called contemplative wisdom.

Practical wisdom and contemplative wisdom are integral, however. They cannot remain separate domains. They must be integrated into a unitive whole within an individual who is learning through trial and error to practice throughout life. Clearly this is not an easy process, but it is worth every intention and effort that we make regardless of what we judge our success to be. We are given assistance, and guided along this path throughout life by the grace of Wisdom herself and by her teachers.

**Abrahamic Tradition and the Halakah of Yeshua**

At the roots of the Christian wisdom tradition and its practice is, of course, the visionary life and unitive wisdom of Yeshua, its Master. Early Christians were Jewish and their primary practices expressed the Semitic wisdom of the Abrahamic tradition reflected in the Oriental worlds and cultures of the Middle East. The foundational methodologies of Wisdom Christianity were rooted, therefore, in something that we might call “the Halakah of Yeshua,” meaning his own unique spirituality and unitive practice. The subsequent transmission of his teaching and practice became known throughout Oriental Christianity and were also expressed in the later Middle Eastern traditions.
Fundamental to Yeshua’s *Halakah* (and to the Abrahamic tradition itself), was the practice of “remembrance” (or divine invocation). From the observances reflected in the ancient Hebrew psalms into the current spiritualities of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this has been fundamental to all Semitic praxis. This can be called its “invocatory methodology” which is the invocation of the divine Names as the premier method of remembering and entering the divine Presence. This method, which becomes the heart’s continuous prayer, has both inner and outer implications. These are the bedrock for the practice of wisdom’s path in both the inner and the outer worlds.

The following outline helps us to see something of the scope of Yeshua’s *Halakah* as they have been passed down through the generations from the Master into the present world.

**The Halakah (Praxis) of Yeshua**

**Part One**

**Inner Practice**

**Inner Awakening and Reorientation**
- Awakening from sleep to the continuous remembrance of the divine Presence at the level of the heart.
- Reorienting consciousness from the horizontal to the vertical axis through invocation.
- Remaining wakeful, mindful and watchful at the kardial intersection between heaven and earth.

**Self-Surrender and Liberation**
- Liberation from the human *kosmos* through the release of it letting go.
- Surrendering the self-centered soul to its Higher Authority.
- Allowing the Image of the divine face to appear as Presence.

**Interior Prayer and Union**
- Centering in stillness in the heart’s inner chamber.
- Knowing oneness and rest in the listening heart.
- Invocation and Communion with the divine Presence in the intimacy of the heart’s Bridal Chamber.

**Singleness and Transformation**
- Discernment of the Real from the false.
- Overcoming fragmentation through singleness of heart (the single pointed awareness of the heart).
- Standing up and becoming whole through metamorphosis of being.
Outer Practices

Compassionate Action
- Taking compassionate action in a troubled world for the good of all.
- Helping the poor and needy, the sick and the suffering.
- Distributing one’s wealth to those in need.

Love Extended in Every Direction
- Loving-kindness extended in every direction even to one’s enemies.
- Loving the stranger and every sentient being.
- Treating the “other” as the “self” of one’s being.

Peaceful Non-Violence and Non-Retaliation
- The creation of the sovereignty of Heaven on earth through peace.
- Replacing violence and anger with the wisdom of non-violent action.
- The practice of non-retaliation and forgiveness.

Blessing and Restoration
- The practice of blessing rather than cursing.
- Prayer for all sentient beings.
- The restoration of all things to undivided wholeness through return to the Source.

The Oriental Practices of Wisdom Christianity in the Contemporary World
Part Two

The ancient Greek word *theurgia* describes praxis as “God working.” It is not that humans do not fully participate, but that the methods and means provided human beings are a gift of God, and the energy that activates them is from a divine Source that assists humankind. One early modern practitioner wrote, “There is yet another art, which is called *Theurgic*; wherein they work by good angels” (Reginald Scot). It is important to note that the origin and base of all “orthopraxis” (right practice) is not sourced in the human world, but in the divine Reality itself. Knowing that, we can then understand that its energies flow through the human instruments and crucibles, shaped also by skilful human means as a form of con-templing. These specific practices are traditionally rooted in historical and cultural traditions which are passed down or transmitted through generations of practitioners. Many of these streams of transmission originate in the early Oriental world, but we also inherit from wisdom manifesting in the Occidental world.

Life As Spiritual Practice

Life As Teacher (*Use first section from Wisdom study*)
- Openness to the Present Moment
- God in the universe
- Life as a school of wisdom
- Pain one of its teachers
- Paying attention/ attentiveness/ listening
- Staying awake and staying balanced

Life-style Issues
- Life is given to us so that we can be transformed.
- Those who wish to be transformed, gain a new relationship and attitude to life, society, the world around us and the self, a new orientation.
- We are here as guests of all things, and this universe is our teacher and our school. We are pilgrim-students.
- The practice of letting go, opening up, simplicity, and right-relationship to all things—all sentient beings—that establishes a sacred bond to all things around and within us.

The Language of Contemplative Prayer

The Bi-Axial Rhythm and Syntax of Contemplative Prayer
Invocation
- Practice of the Presence
- Dialogical Exchange
- Transformative Silence and Listening
- Plunge into the Divine Abyss and Mystical Ascent into the Celestial Heights
- Cosmic Renewal and Restoration

The Vocabulary of Contemplative Prayer
- Human Language and the Anthologies of Prayer
- Mantra, Music and Chant
- The Analogical Imagination and the Use of Symbols, Metaphors, Mandalic and Iconic Images as the Language of the Soul
- Centering in the Heart and Kardial Exchange: Techniques of Expansion and Dilation, Focus and Contraction
- The Prayer of Quiet as the Source-Language of Spirit
- Contemplative Experiences
- Encountering with the Unspeakable One

Cardinal Spiritual Exercises which strengthen and transform – specific practices that are tied to the development of transformation

Basic Spiritual Principles and Practices
- Basic sapiential principles grounded in the Canonical and Luminous Gospels: the Sermon on the Mount and Gospel of Thomas in particular.
- An understanding and practice of Alpha Christianity, Torah observance from the sapiential and Halakic perspectives of Yeshua and Ya’akov.
Rule of Life
- Periods of seclusion, fasting, silence, retreat.
- Balancing Outer and Inner Life
- Practicing integration and balance
- The Language of Contemplative Prayer
- Developing skills of knowing and awareness
- Awakening
- Watchfulness
- Self-observation

Development of Wisdom, Virtue and Freedom
- Wisdom that is based on direct experience beginning with Yeshua and held in the treasury of the canonical Gospels, the Luminous Gospels and the spiritual treasury of the Abrahamic traditions.
- Virtues are divine qualities that come into human beings as quality of beauty. They are sometimes difficult to define or even describe, but they not difficult to recognize.
- Freedom from the small self and the kosmic disorder and liberation into the Higher Self and participation in full cosmic citizenship.

Understanding the Principles of Spiritual Journey
- Processive and Developmental
- Periodicity and flux, dynamic rhythm
- Spiraling principles: cycles, linear progress, developmental levels

Advanced Practices
- Living with Paradox
- Learning to discern between the self and the Self
- Dialogue with Angels
- Supersensible Awareness and Practice of Multiple Levels of Being
- Full Kardial Awareness: Analogical Imagination, Intuitive Cognition, Consilience
- Living from another Center – Kingdom center
- The Path of “Blame” and the Warrior’s Restraint

**Compassionate practice** – the practice of practical compassion in a suffering world.
- Learning the Art of Yeshua/Becoming the Body of Christ
  
  Acts of care for others
  Healing, blessing, being “medicine and gift”
  Random acts of loving-kindness
  Mediation
  Triangle of Blessing through word, wealth, and the empowering presence of love
• Reconciling the World through the Seven Acts of Love
  
  Coinherence  
  Exchange  
  Substitution  
  Forgiveness  
  Burden Bearing  
  Transmutation of Energies  
  Reconciliation of All Things

• Reconciliation of Opposites in the Universe and Sharing in the Wisdom of the Earth

  Extending and strengthening unity and reconciliation  
  Healing what is broken  
  Burden Bearing in the suffering of the world  
  Care and Adult Responsibility for All  
  The practices of earth-spirituality and attention to Gaia-Consciousness

  Lynn C. Bauman
  2015