

Eastern Spirituality as a Way of Mission

*My reflections are based on my practice and daily work in contact with Eastern Spirituality. I'm a pastoral worker, and since 2007 a member of the team in Holy Cross – Center for Christian Meditation and Spirituality in Frankfurt, Diocese of Limburg.*⁴⁶

Frankfurt

First, some information regarding Frankfurt: the city with its 750.000 inhabitants is an important economic and financial center in Germany and in Europe. Before the pandemic, there were 375.000 commuters daily. In Frankfurt we count 179 nationalities who are living peacefully together; about 54% of the population have a migration background; 19 % are members of the Roman Catholic and 15 % of the Protestant Church; 66 % belong to other denominations or religions. In Frankfurt there are 35 mosques and 10 Buddhist Centers.

Beginnings/Task of the Meditation Center

The Church continues to be in a process of change as a response to the changes in the society. One major aspect is the growing secularism and the declining role of the Church in the society. Within a couple of years, in Frankfurt 52 Roman Catholic parishes were reduced down to 8 big parishes. In 2004, the former Bishop of the Diocese of Limburg, Franz Kamphaus, initiated so-called „Profile Churches“ with priority ministries in order to complement the work of the parishes. Meanwhile, the diocese of Limburg has Profile Churches for Youth, Grieving Pastoral, Art & Culture, Families, as well as an Academy for religious adult-education and a Counselling Center. *Holy Cross – Center for Christian Meditation and Spirituality* is part

of the Missionary Pastoral Concept of the Diocese of Limburg.

In 2007, 15 years ago, Medical Mission Sisters, together with a Franciscan Priest started to build up the Meditation Center. We were tasked to look into two different directions: to people who are well integrated in their parishes and to those who are “searching”.

Holy Cross – Center for Christian Meditation and Spirituality

The Meditation Center is located in a big, nearly 100 years old church and the former house of the Parish Priest. Since the former Holy Cross-parish has merged with another parish, the church Holy Cross is no longer a parish church.

We share the meditation rooms with other groups, for example with a Protestant Contemplation Group, with two Christian Zen groups, two different Buddhist Meditation groups, other ecumenical meditation groups, and with those who do Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training.

Laetitia Vacui – The Joy of Emptiness

In 2008, the benches in the church were replaced by folding chairs which are now used for services and celebrations. During the week, when there are no services, you will enter an empty church, an open space.

This emptiness speaks to people. They feel attracted, at home and save. People experience having space for themselves. There is no one who dictates moral, faith or belief. There is space to search for truth and for a life-giving spirit. In silence, you can start with a beginner's mind.

The room, the space itself attracts people as well as the vacuity, the emptiness, since the

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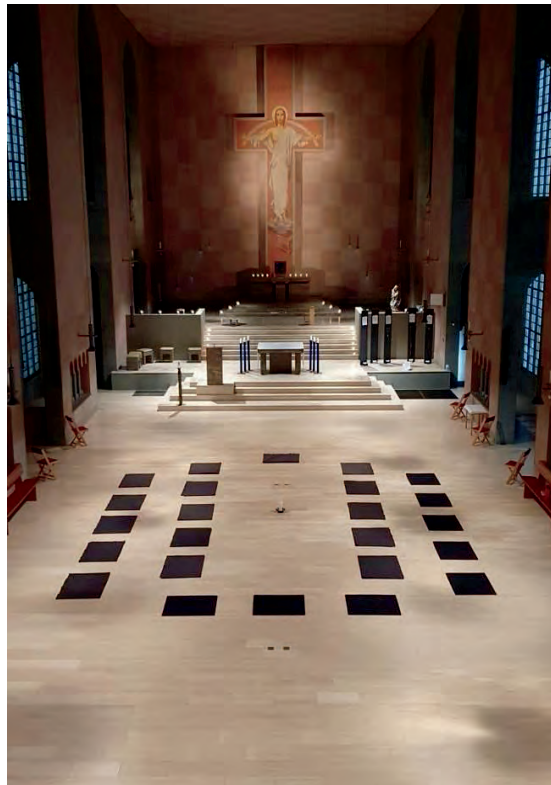
empty space allows for a lot of processing and inner journeys.

Entrance/Come In

Entering the church, you find an installation with God's name "*I am who I am*", projected on a curtain. The invitation is to write the name of someone on a piece of paper and to place it in the space with God's name. Next to this installation you find also an invitation for a breathing meditation, taught by Richard Rohr:

The Hebrew tetragrammaton JHWH is read Elohim (God) or Adonai (Lord). Who God is, remains a mystery and inaccessible for our mind – I am who I am. It is known for a long time that God's name is unspeakable.

Meanwhile we know that the word has not been spoken at all but it has been breathed! The correct pronunciation is the attempt to imitate the sound of breathing in and breathing out. So, breathing every moment of our life – is saying the name of God, if we are aware of this or not.⁴⁷



Invitation to Meditation

Those who are coming are invited to try out how to 'do' meditation. They find short introductions and all that they need for meditation sessions: meditation cushions, mats, Taizé stools, blankets. It is also possible to light a candle or to use incense.

One-Breath Meditation

Next to *Christian Contemplation*, also known as the Jesus Prayer according to Franz Jalics, SJ, we offer groups for *Meditation*.

Participants are coming from different Christian denominations as well as people who are searching but are non-Christians. Some have explicitly practised meditation in Eastern Spirituality, like Buddhism, and after years they want to grow deeper, reconnecting with their Christian roots.

Neither the diocese nor anyone else expects us in the Meditation Center to be missionary in a way of convincing others to become Christians. We keep the space open for the Spirit to guide the persons. We are present to what is developing and evolving. We are

present to the presence (of God) in whatever is coming up.

One meditation, I offer to beginners, is the following:

I invite you to a 'one-breath meditation'. Stop for a moment, close your eyes if you like, place both feet on the ground, feel the ground and the chair that holds you. Bring your attention to your breathing. Just watch it, feel it. Your breath is coming and going, in its own rhythm. Choose one of your next breaths. And now be aware of this one

breath. Exhalation, pause and inhalation. Try to accompany one breath with your full attention, and your full awareness. And then open your eyes again.

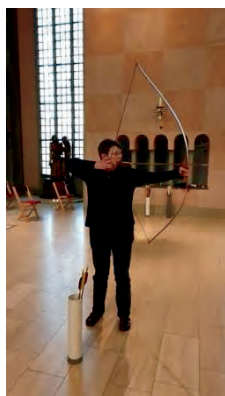
This very short meditation experience helps many on a longer journey of meditation. It is good to always come back to one breath, if you find yourself distracted. Some find it helpful to interrupt thoughts or patterns in daily life by the one-breath meditation, to ground themselves in situations of tension, anxiety or in moments of waiting.

⁴⁷ Richard Rohr, *Pure Präsenz, Sehen Lernen wie die Mystiker* (München: Claudius, 2010),

27 (own translation).

Meditation and Archery

The one-breath meditation is usually part of *Meditation and Archery*, a form of meditation which we started in 2014. This has been taking place now for two years in the church – and since then this way of meditating is expanding. I could offer it every week, and we still would have a waiting list. What are we doing? People come and learn how to use a



bow and arrow. Then we sit down for silent meditation. We keep our awareness with the breathing in sitting, in a walking meditation and in archery. It is a rhythm of being in silence and in movement.

Meditative archery has its own ritual: two participants enter the archway, bow down in the direction of the target, they shoot three arrows, bow down again, lay down their bows, walk to the target, pull their arrows out of the target, take up their bows, and hand over the archway to the next two participants by mutual bowing. All happens in silence. You only hear the sound of the flying and hitting arrows. In the end, all participants come back to their meditation place, and sit and meditate again in silence for some minutes.

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Meditation and Archery are not sports. It is rooted in the Zen tradition. We are aware that bow and arrows are weapons, they can bring death. Recently, the war in the Ukraine in connection to *Meditation and Archery* became a topic in our talks. Finding (inner) peace with weapons? In the Zen tradition, archery is a cultus, a spiritual exercise. It is an existential approach towards self, including the dimension of life and death. Who am I? What is reality?

Meditation and Archery offers an exercise and training of awareness for the reality, the ultimate reality. This ultimate reality, the reality behind or beyond is the presence within all, is the mystery of God.

Participants of *Meditation and Archery* say: I am at home, I find myself; I am in touch with my inner spring; I have come home; I experienced calmness and inner peace; I gained clarity. Nearly every time somebody expresses the wonder that this is possible in a Catholic church.

Being a Missionary – Anna Dengel and the Needs of the Time

In 1925, Dr. Anna Dengel founded Medical Mission Sisters in order to bring medical care and healing especially to women and children, to those who didn't have access to a health system. She was very much aware of the needs of her time and told us to be aware of the needs of our time.

Anna Dengel started medical missions in India, today Pakistan and later on in many places of our world. She proclaimed "not to forget that our main missionary work is to represent Christ." She represented Christ in covering wounds like the good Samaritan in the Gospel.

Healing is still needed as it has always been. Today, we also see the need for healing within the Church. Abuse of power, sexual or spiritual abuse is brought to our awareness. Many people feel hurt in different ways by the Church. In the Meditation Center, they often share their experiences with us.

Experiencing immediacy and presence, without moral or spiritual demands, can lead into the immediate experience of God and it can be a support for the spiritual search. We foster this search and offer to accompany people on their journeys. This can be a contribution to gain spiritual authenticity (some call it: spiritual autonomy) which is an important aspect to prevent abuse of power in the field of spirituality. Entering a space with an atmosphere of width, of being accepted, of compassion and solidarity, of simply being present can be a healing experience: the Church is open.

To represent Christ as a Medical Mission Sister, as a missionary in the secular Europe, can mean just to be present and encourage people to be there as they are.