**Stability**

UF Commitment

RT Benedictine Vows; Change; Conversion; Perseverance; Steadfastness

A disciple approached his master with a question. “I'd like to improve my knowledge. In addition to learning from you, I'd like to study with another master in order to learn another way. What do you think of this idea?” “The hunter who chases two rabbits,” answered the master, “catches neither one.” *Zen Buddhist Monastic Apothegm*

A healthy human life is a combination of fidelity to commitments on the one hand, and growth, change, and development on the other. Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; *Essential Monastic Wisdom*

As the night of sense gradually turns to dust all our previous sources of strength and consolation, the temptation to give up is enormous. “This journey can’t be for me. I have a family to raise, a professional life to lead. I can’t deal with all this painful negativity that keeps rising within me.” When dryness and temptation are prolonged, everything in us wants to call a halt to the spiritual journey and hopes we never have to start again. If we walk away from our commitment to the journey, the false self goes with us. Wherever we go, we will have to face it again under other circumstances. Commitment opposes this regressive instinct, say, “I won’t give up. I resolve for the love of Christ to go through the desert of purification no matter what happens.” This is the determination that enables the night of sense to complete its work. *Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO (1923- ); Invitation to Love*

Benedictine stability is a radical following of Jesus in his life of fidelity to the Father in a very imperfect situation. It means that this is the place for you to serve your Lord, no matter what happens. The result will be similar to what happened when Jesus gave himself up to the will of the Father in a remote village of Galilee and on a small hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem, namely, perfect worship of the Father resulting in salvation for many persons. The secret power of stability lies in divine love, which first purifies the human heart from false motivations, then begins to touch others. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Benedictine stability places us in a situation where sooner or later we arrive at the heart of every human situation, which is a choice between despair and the total gift of self to God. It is an identity crisis at the deepest level of our being. My existence is so precarious and my community is just as fragile as I am! What am I to do? Human nature tried by every possible means to escape this fundamental question. A change of place will not help much and will simply delay the process of inner simplification. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Benedictines are not people afraid of commitment, but we live in a world where many are. Our witness here must be care and balance. We must resolutely walk between the extremes of foolhardy haste and crippling fear. In the world of today, that is no small witness and no easy task. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB;**Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

Contemporary life is characterized more by mobilitythan stability: we have mobile

phones and portable computers; we change residences, jobs, even careers with a frequency that would astound generations that preceded us. Not surprisingly, our spirit too is restless. The antidote Benedict offers us is stability of heart, the commitment to a continuing search for God in a particular way of life, and a readiness to sink one’s personal roots deep into a community, standing firm with its members in the concrete realities of everyday life. *Sr. Verna Holyhead, SGS; The Gift of Benedict*

*Conversatio morum* is inseparable from stability. While some Benedictines still translate this Latin phrase as “conversion,” most of us prefer to keep the Latin words, since there is no satisfactory simple English equivalent. Conversion—especially religious conversion—suggests a major change in direction, even a reversal. *Conversatio morum* promises fidelity to a way of life and behavior in a community that is on the move. *Sr. Verna Holyhead, SGS; Gifts from St. Benedict; www.benedictineoblates.com*

Difficulties arise whenever a committed relationship is succeeding. Love makes you vulnerable. When you feel loved by God or another person, you do not have to be self-protective. Your defenses relax and the dark side of your personality arises, not only into consciousness, but also into your behavior, to the dismay, perhaps of our spouse. *Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO (1923- ); Invitation to Love*

Do not go from one place to another, saying, “I will find God here or I will find God there.” God has said, “I fill the earth, I fill the heavens.” And again He has said, “If you cross over the water, I am with you.” My son, be aware that God is within you, so that you may dwell in his law and commandments. *St.* Pachomius (c. 292-346); *Instructions, 25*

For Benedict, stability, fidelity to the monastic lifestyle and obedience were really just parts of one intention: to be a good monk. . . . We make our promises before God, and it is he whom we offend if we do not hold fast to them. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with St. Benedict*

Forbearance in the face of temptations and sacrifices for the love of one’s brothers are demanded in every place, if you wish your salvation. Vainly, then, do you imagine that there are places where there are no trials and labors for the sake of brotherly love. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

Human beings are fickle and capricious creatures; a breath of air disturbs them. What they want today they are indifferent to tomorrow. When the flame of love burns brightly, they want consecrate themselves to the Lord. But in the day of dryness and testing, in 20 years, who knows? And yet, if their gift of self does not include their whole life, it is not complete. *“A Carthusian;” The Freedom of Obedience: Carthusian Novice Conferences*

If a monk keeps his stability, he will be able to effect the great change which is the only important one, namely, the change within himself, transformation in Christ, full openness to the Holy Spirit. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

If we seek satisfaction elsewhere, we are not going to achieve the good which can be ours here and now. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

If we want to have stability, we can find it only within ourselves, namely, as the stability of our inner direction (toward the center, toward enlightenment). This is not the stability of inertia, but the stability of dynamic movement. Therefore the Buddhist symbol of the “stream” which one enters as soon as one has found that inner direction, and hence the designation of the “stream-winner” for one who has entered the path toward liberation. Whether this movement comes to a standstill when the center is reached, or whether it is transformed into another, higher kind of movement, is of no importance; in either case the individual limitations, the cause of all our problems, would have ceased to exist. At any rate, the inner stability and integrity of one who has found his inner center is infinitely greater than that of a world experienced by unenlightened and spiritually undirected individuals. *Lama* *Anagarika Govinda, German Buddhist Monk (1898-1985); Creative Meditation and Multidimensional Consciousness*

If you find yourself in a monastery, do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or nun grows cold and their faith dies when they go from one place to another. *Amma Syncletica (+c. 350); Apothegmata Patrum*

In our time, models of commitment are few. People move from job to job; marriages do not last; careers end prematurely; religious life and vows of celibacy are not taken as seriously as they use to be. The supports that once helped or forced people to remain in their commitments have diminished through the cultural revolutions of modern times. Whatever good has come from these social developments, the models of commitment available in earlier times have largely disappeared, at least in the Western world. *Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO (1923- ); Invitation to Love*

It is not good for one to change spiritual fathers. Imagine a building that continually changes engineers and builders. It's not likely to turn out right. *Fr. Paisios the Athonite (1924-1994)*

Living under the Rule is supposed to make us face reality and stop thinking about what might have been or what life might be like now in different circumstances. This is what we mean by stability. All of us who follow the Rule of St. Benedict learn to live one day at a time. The Rule of St. Benedict is basically a document of daily routine, a blueprint for people who live together day after day. It teaches us to settle down. *Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB; View from a Monastery*

Monastic stability needs to be balanced with the complementary value that has a firm basis in Scripture and in history – being of pilgrim or wayfarer. Christians form a pilgrim people traveling through the present age to the heavenly Jerusalem and the final stage of the world. We are on a journey to the kingdom of God, traveling in the darkness of faith, aware that our plans, possessions, and institutions are provisional, always reminded that we are in a sense exiles and strangers in the world where we live. *Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO; Monastic Practices*

Moving from monastic community to monastic community and changing one’s place of struggle reveal an unsettled, impatient, and idle soul. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

No animal is so quick to turn and changeable as man. *Rule, Testament and Codicil of Christodoulos for the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos (1091);* In Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, ed. by *John Philip Thomas & Angela Constantinides Hero*

No one can live a life of prayer and recollection while changing monasteries frequently. We cannot concentrate the powers of the mind if we do not let our body and its emotions take root in a fixed place. The remedy for infirmities of the soul is not a change of place but a change of heart. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

No one enters into a commitment, including the religious life or priesthood, with entirely pure motives. Thus, it is not so much the motives we had in entering, but the motives we have for persevering that actually count the most. *Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO (1923- ); Invitation to Love*

Open your arms to change, but don’t let go of your values. *Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama (1935- )*

Paradoxically, stability is a promise to accept change—to listen every day to the new today of God’s voice. *Sr. Verna Holyhead, SGS; Gifts from St. Benedict; www.benedictineoblates.com*

Perseverance in the monastery until death will be the object of the vow of stability. Let us be aware of its positive motivation: the monk likes to live in the monastery so that he can be with the Lord and listen to his teaching without ceasing, Like Mary at Bethany. Together with her he is invited to “choose the better part.” (Lk 10:38-42). Fr. Mayeul De Dreuille, OSB; The Rule of St. Benedict: A Commentary in Light of World Ascetic Traditions

Perseverance is another word for Benedictine stability—an ability to keep on going through the desert stretches of our lives. That includes patiently hanging in there when the going is rough in our relationship with God and with those who are our companions on life’s journey. *Sr. Verna Holyhead, SGS; The Gift of Benedict*

Sooner or later, we are going to find ourselves nailed to the cross, by our promise of stable, obedient fidelity. . . . The cross is an inevitable reality and it will probably be the cross we least wish to carry, but it is precisely this most unwanted cross that leads to our resurrection. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

Spiritual reading, vigils, and prayer bring the straying intellect to stability. *Evagrius* Ponticus (345-399); *Texts on Watchfulness*

Stability centers us in something greater than ourselves. It helps us stay sufficiently still of heart to find God in the midst of our busy lives. It is especially needed in midlife when disillusionment may have set in and we start looking for distraction. It tethers a wandering heart and enables us to remain steadfast through the “winter of our discontent.” *Sr. Verna Holyhead, SGS; Gifts from St. Benedict; www.benedictineoblates.com*

Stability is great growth and moving forward in a fixed spot or vocation. *Br. Jerome Leo Hughes, OSB; Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict, www.stmarysmonastery.org*

### Stability is not a matter of immobility or resistance to change but of maintaining one’s momentum. *Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO; The Value of Stability, Cistercian Studies Quarterly, 1996*

Stability itself is an immense good for the human person, a real necessity for the human person, a real necessity for learning the deepest needs, rhythms, and vocation of the human heart. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

### Stability prevents us from running away from necessary development. *Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO; The Value of Stability, Cistercian Studies Quarterly, 1996*

That which will save us is a change in our way of thought and living, and not changes in location or our monastic community. *Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos and Fili (1935-2013); A Manual for Coenobitic Monks, trans. by Bishop Chrysostomos*

The basic fact is that there is a close relationship between fruitfulness and stability. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The fathers did not leave the place where they were except for one of three reasons: if there was someone there who was angry with them and they were unable to win him over; if they were praised too much; or if they risked falling into temptation. *Apothegmata Patrum*

The general understanding in medieval life [was] that people had to stay put under state of life. If they did not, the civil authority would hunt them down and return them to the monastery. And if necessary, they were deposited in a monastic prison. *Fr. Terrence G Kardong, OSB; The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great*

The ideal, even if it was not always realized, was that monks and nuns, by their practice of stability, bore witness to the interior journey towards God. Monastic theologians interiorized the Christian custom of pilgrimage. Without leaving their abbeys, monks and nuns could leave all selfish ways and go on and interior pilgrimage by the stages of obedience, humility, poverty, and the service of others. Monastic pilgrimage, like monastic stability, routed monks and nuns more deeply in the mystery of Christ. Stability became a broader, richer reality as it incorporated both the essence of pilgrimage in the essence of rootedness monastic life is lived simultaneously at home and on the road. I am on the road toward the Holy in which I am already rooted. I abide in that towards which I constantly journey. *Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO; Monastic Practices*

The monastic vows aim at a subtle combination of stability and openness to change. Innovation on a foundation of stability and firm commitment in the midst of renewal or innovation, are not easy. They seem to be the principal challenge of our time. Hence, we should probably be kinder to those who seem out of tune with the rest of us; they may be in tune with the future. *Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; Essential Monastic Wisdom*

The only way to make any spiritual progress is to stop running around; one must finally confront oneself. *Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB; Day by Day with Saint Benedict*

The reality underlying Saint Benedict’s insistence on stability in commitment is stability of mind and heart—the will fixed enduringly on a single objective. To the extent that this ideal is realized, the person will experience a deep sense of interior peace that is able to survive the severest external challenges to it serenity. *Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO; Road to Eternal Life*

The remedy for infirmities of the soul is not a change of place, but a change of heart. *Abbot William of St. Thierry, OSB (c. 1075-1148);* In *The Meaning of the Vow of Stability, by Augustin Roberts; Cistercian Studies 7*

The spiritual energy unleashed by the monastic way of life would lose much of its force if the monk were constantly wandering from one monastery to another. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

The vow of stability attaches the monk to a single community or monastery. . . . The advantage of this is that the monk has to learn to live with and for the community he has chosen. He cannot just move from place to place as he becomes discouraged with one community and then another. He has to face the situation and learn the truth about himself and the human condition. A disadvantage is that the monk is very deeply defined by his community; any dysfunction in that community will affect him either directly or indirectly. *Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB; Essential Monastic Wisdom*

The vow of stability doesn’t attach one to a place but to a localized community. The community can move to a different place, but because a community usually doesn’t, the monk becomes attached to the place, and should. It is his home, and he should love it, and even become at least mildly acquainted with all its trees. But he must always remember that his vow is to people. I say this because monastics can get like cats and become place-oriented. *Dom Wulstan Mork, OSB; Benedictine Way*

Trees which are continually transplanted do not grow roots. *St. Gregory of Sinai (c. 1260-1346)*

We all share in the stability or instability of the members of our community. The best way to avoid departures is to create an atmosphere of compassionate understanding and authentic love. *Fr. Augustine Roberts, OCSO; Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*

What will save us is a change in our way of thought and of living, and not changes in location or our monastic community. *Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili (1935- )*

When you are feeling strong, do not be complacent, but call to God with the prophet and say, “When my strength fails me, do not abandon me” (Ps 70:9). And in time of temptation be consoled and say with the bride, “Draw me after you, and we shall run in the odor of your ointments” (Ps 33:2). Thus you will not lose hope in bad times, nor will foresight desert you in good times, and amid both the prosperity and adversity of changing times you will retain a certain image of eternity—that is, this inviolable and unshakable constancy of a stable soul—blessing the Lord at every moment. In this way you claim for yourself, even amid the doubtful events and inevitable deficiencies of this changing world, a certain status of lasting unchangeability while you begin to renew and reform yourself according to the ancient pattern of likeness to the eternal God, “in whom there is neither alteration nor the shadow of change” (James 1:17). *St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153); On the Song of Songs*

You will find stability at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere; that you do not need to seek God elsewhere. God is here, and it is useless to seek God elsewhere, because it is not God that is absent from us. It is we who are absent from God. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914-2003)