

+CENOBITIC STABILITY: Augustine Roberts points out that Stability as various aspects to look at: 1-Commitment to Stability, 2-Special Situations, 3-The Spirit of Stability, 4-Person and Community, 5-Love of the Order. It would be fascinating to hear from each of you what you think this vow involves for your own life. As I have pointed out earlier, on making profession in our Order, we really make only two vows that include all the others, that of Conversion of Manners and then that of Stability.

As we read through this chapter, we see how key this vow becomes for it calls us to a continual interior conversion, helps us to truly look into our own hearts and to face all that is there that may not be in keeping with Divine Love, the inner transformation that we seek in entering a monastery and joining a monastic community. We live in a very diversified world, where all kinds of opportunities are provided for us and yet, unless we send down roots, unless we have some stability in our lives, we all too easily become superficial in our outlook on things and how we live. Only if we let ourselves really experience what the desert is like, do we come to know the great love God has for us and let it permeate the whole of our lives.

The eternal Word of God taking on our human flesh is in a true sense, God's own exploration of the desert, of God's emptying Himself and taking on our human flesh. Making a vow of stability, it seems to me, is following in the footsteps of God's very own love. It is a humbling of oneself, becoming a slave out of love but coming to truly know and experience that perfect freedom that is the result of becoming the very children of God.

Stability and Conversion of Manners go together as is pointed out in the 2nd paragraph on p. 203 and the 2nd paragraph on p. 204 so let's read them. This paragraph contains a whole list of why stability is important for our lives. It is said to be original in Benedict's Rule, it is in imitation of Christ for as the text reminds us: "Cenobitic stability is basically perseverance in *conversatio* and obedience." Through perseverance God is able to work on our lives, to purify our hearts, break through all our defenses so that we may surrender ourselves totally to the working of divine grace. And as the 2nd paragraph on p. 204 indicates, Benedict's emphasis on stability was because of what he saw happen in the lives of some monks becoming "slaves of their own will and

given up to the pleasures of gluttony.” There is always the danger of getting caught in a self-centered love rather than a God-centered one.

Roberts then tells us what our obligation to stability involves. “By professing stability according to the Rule of St Benedict, we commit ourselves to remain with the community of profession all our life, until death.” This stability was lived in different ways throughout monastic history. 1) Stability in the cell, 2) Stability under an abbot, 3) Stability ‘on the pillar’, 4) Stability of a traveler, 5) Stability in the community. Let’s read the description of this last on the top of p. 206 since this is the stability that we are called to live. The last verse of the Prologue of the Rule nicely sums this up. Read the 3rd paragraph on p. 206.

Stability is different than just living in an enclosure as pointed on in the 2nd paragraph on p. 207 that is worth reading. Stability is something more personal, a “conversion from self-will to the love of Christ that constitutes the heart of the monastic community.” There are events in one’s personal life or in the life of a community that lead to the change of place or community to which one remains committed as is clear from paragraph 2 on p. 209.

The real purpose of Stability is beautifully described in the last paragraph on pp. 211-12. There can also be a transfer to another house as happened in my own life when moving from Holy Cross Abbey in Virginia to Gethsemani. Let me tell you a little about this. I witnessed here at Gethsemani instances of monks moving into a more eremitical life after years in this community as in the cases of Fr Flavian, Fr Louis, Fr Hilarion and some others.

Roberts then gets into part 3, **THE SPIRIT OF STABILITY**. He asks some good questions about this in the 3rd paragraph on p. 215 so let’s read this. The struggle with Stability is described in the last paragraph on p. 216 over through the top of p. 217 so let’s read this. The struggle and transformation that take place are described in the 3rd paragraph on p. 217 with the quote from the Desert Fathers. The great role that obedience plays in this transformation is wonderfully described in the 3rd paragraph on p. 218, well worth reading. This mutual obedience is to go on all day long.

In viewing Stability among the early Cistercians, Roberts touches on the emotional aspect and the importance of spiritual guidance in the last paragraph on p. 219 so let’s take a look at this. On p. 221 Guerric of Igny also is

seen as a person of deep insight into the psychological aspect of Stability. The 2nd and 3rd paragraphs get into the value of discovery one inner core of our identity. The value of stability is right there in the gospels themselves as is clear from the quotes from them starting at the bottom of p. 222—top of 223.

We are in the last weeks of Lent when we are called to recognize the role of Christ's sufferings in our lives. Some fresh perspective may be had from the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs on p. 225. We should not be surprised if we run into suffering in our following of Christ for we are all being called to enter into God's plan for the salvation of our world.

Roberts then gets into 4) **PERSON AND COMMUNITY** and the interplay between our personal lives and that of the community we are a part of is not as easily defined as he seems to make it. Let's read the 2nd paragraph on p. 227. His quote from Venite Seorsum on p. 28 and then the 2nd paragraph on p. 229 give us the full picture so let's read them.

On p. 230 under the title of **Spirituality of Communion** we have a very fine description of what God is seeking to bring about in our personal and communal lives. Let's read the 1st paragraph. The middle paragraph on p. 231 is a fine summary of his thinking while using a fine quote from the Rule of Benedict. On p. 223 at the top of the page he quotes from *Lumen Gentium* of Vat. II to help us see how the very hiddenness of our life contributes to our closeness to our contemporary world. More and more I am convinced that it is not so much what we do in our world as the love with which we do it that makes all the difference.

Finally, Roberts gets into 5) **LOVE OF THE ORDER**. We don't think a lot about the Order as a whole but how we relate to it or feel about it can make a huge difference. The 2nd paragraph on p. 234 gets into this. At one point he addresses a false or true love of the Order so let's read paragraphs 3 & 4 on p. 235. Also the last paragraph on p. 236.

The Church's teaching on the life of monks is describes in the quotes at the bottom on 238 and top of 239. At the same time our life is always evolving so let us read the 4th paragraph on p. 240. Our living faith is key in all that we contribute to the Church's life so finally let's read paragraphs 2 and 3 on p. 241