

# CONVERSATIO 2008



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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

A very happy ST. BENEDICT'S FEAST TO ALL OF US. Once again we will look on St. Benedict as our model and cite one or the other of his virtues that we could emulate. Perhaps in my common letter on the feast of St. Benedict, I will choose a wider topic, but for this editorial I want just to cite St. Benedict's concept and practice of the SENPECTAE. The Rule writes:

*Let him send senpectae,  
that is, brethren of mature years and wisdom,  
who may as it were secretly console the wavering brother  
and induce him to make humble satisfaction;  
comforting him  
that he may not "be overwhelmed by excessive grief" (2 Cor. 2:7),  
but that, as the Apostle says,  
charity may be strengthened in him (2 Cor. 2:8).  
And let everyone pray for him.*

I really find this practice of St. Benedict absolutely endearing. It is also so Filipino. It is also very effective as I have practiced it myself. St. Benedict wants loyal observance to the Rule which facilitates living together, so that if one seriously transgresses a prescription, due punishment is meted out. But St. Benedict does not discipline for discipline's sake, much less to exercise an ego trip to prove who is the boss. And so even if he has to do his duty of chastising a monk, his heart makes him want to console the erring one but so as not to undermine his authority, he sends a wise and mature monk who will console the person and help bring him to repentance.

I have found it really effective, when I feel I cannot reach a Sister or make a Sister see the point of the decision of the Priory Government, to send a mature and wise Sister whom that Sister respects to talk to her and to gently bring her to an understanding or to make her feel better. I am truly grateful that we have effective senpectaes in our Priory. When they read this editorial they will recognize themselves.

Let us also thank God for our Holy Patron who gives us such a beautiful example of compassion!

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# S T A T I O   C O N F E R E N C E

## **MISSIONARY BENEDICTINE STABILITY**

Sister M. Hilda Buhay, OSB

### ***Introduction***

In this fast-moving and fragmented-driven age, incessant changes shake stability more than ever. Nowadays people are not wont to wait and stay put. “Instant” is the promo that sells: we order “hate-late pizzas”, use microwave ovens, arrange same day surgery, even navigate over cyberspace for super- speed. It seems almost unrealistic to speak of staying in one place for a lifetime when we see people are continually on the go, migrating, changing jobs, even changing husbands and/or wives. Constancy and perseverance are aspects of stability which our climate today belittles.

The present world is the place where we live out our day to day existence as a Missionary Benedictine. Our vow of stability is actualized in a community of Sisters who are daughters of their time and space. This leads us to consider the problem of culture and community, of environment and bonding.

Life even for us Missionary Benedictines can be very mobile. We are transferred from one community to another, from one Priory to another. Mission assignments are often times rotated, community *horarium* and decisions are altered as casually as we change into our gray or white habits. We can even count on Sisters who request for exclaustation, ask for dispensations, transfer to another Congregation or shift to another lifestyle. One may even stay physically for a lifetime in a community, but may have “migrated” emotionally because one’s heart has gone astray. It seems permanence and fidelity are hard to come by. If there were already problems with stability in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (RB1:6-12), we should not be surprised that Sisters in our highly mobilized culture would seriously find this vow difficult.

### ***Overview***

The *statio* conference will treat with three topics on stability:

- 1) Stability and Our Constitutions
- 2) Stability and Ages of Human Life Cycle (God’s Stability in Us)
- 3) Stability and the Mother of God.

### ***Stability and Our Constitutions***

The spiritual legacy of many canonized Benedictines testifies to our rich Benedictine heritage. Closer to our times, the Missionary Benedictine Congregation of Tutzing has gifted us

with forebears as well as Sisters of our times who have trekked the way to *conversatio*, by way of stability. Like them, let our ears be alert to the stirring of His voice crying out to us everyday: “Today if you hear His words, harden not your hearts” (RB Prologue:10).

*“The unshakable fidelity of the Lord gives us confidence and courage to persevere in our vocation. Stability binds us in a special way to our Congregation and helps us to live in community together advancing towards our goal.” (Constitutions II Profession: no. 14)*

Norm 206 of our Constitutions explicitates the commitment we are called upon to make:

*“We oblige ourselves to persevere in seeking God (**stabilitas cordis**) while actualizing this commitment in our fidelity to our Congregation. (**stabilitas in congregatione**)”*

**Stabilitas in congregatione** is our chosen place, **stabilitas cordis** is love that casts out fear, making sense of time. If **stabilitas in congregatione** firmly “roots” us, our **stabilitas cordis** gives us “wings.”

The vow of stability, of course does not freeze us into immobility. It is the ability to abide perseveringly, to stand firm and to stay where one has decided to live. It implies a capacity for “stick-it-out-ness” and calls us to stand still within ourselves, not running away from who we are. Fidelity, however does not mean not to commit a mistake; it is not getting stuck in it. It is learning from it and changing one’s heart. Yet our stability of the heart (**stabilitas cordis**) urges us to be open to continual conversion, ready to change, grow and move on. Was this not the process David had to go through after taking the wife of Urias? Was this not the experience of our flawed founder Father Andreas Armhrein after having an illicit relationship in a moment of human weakness?

For us who aim at true *conversatio*, stability is one of the means offered to us as a good avenue towards achieving our inner freedom. The Rule of Benedict makes an allusion to the metaphor of a craftsman at work with the instruments of good works:

*The workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery.” (RB 4:78)*

Our stability throws our lot in with our assigned community, with its mission, problems and shortcomings. There is no suggestion that we will stay only until the going gets tough or until a better offer comes along. We embrace the life as we find it knowing that this, and not any other, is our way of seeking God and advancing towards Him.

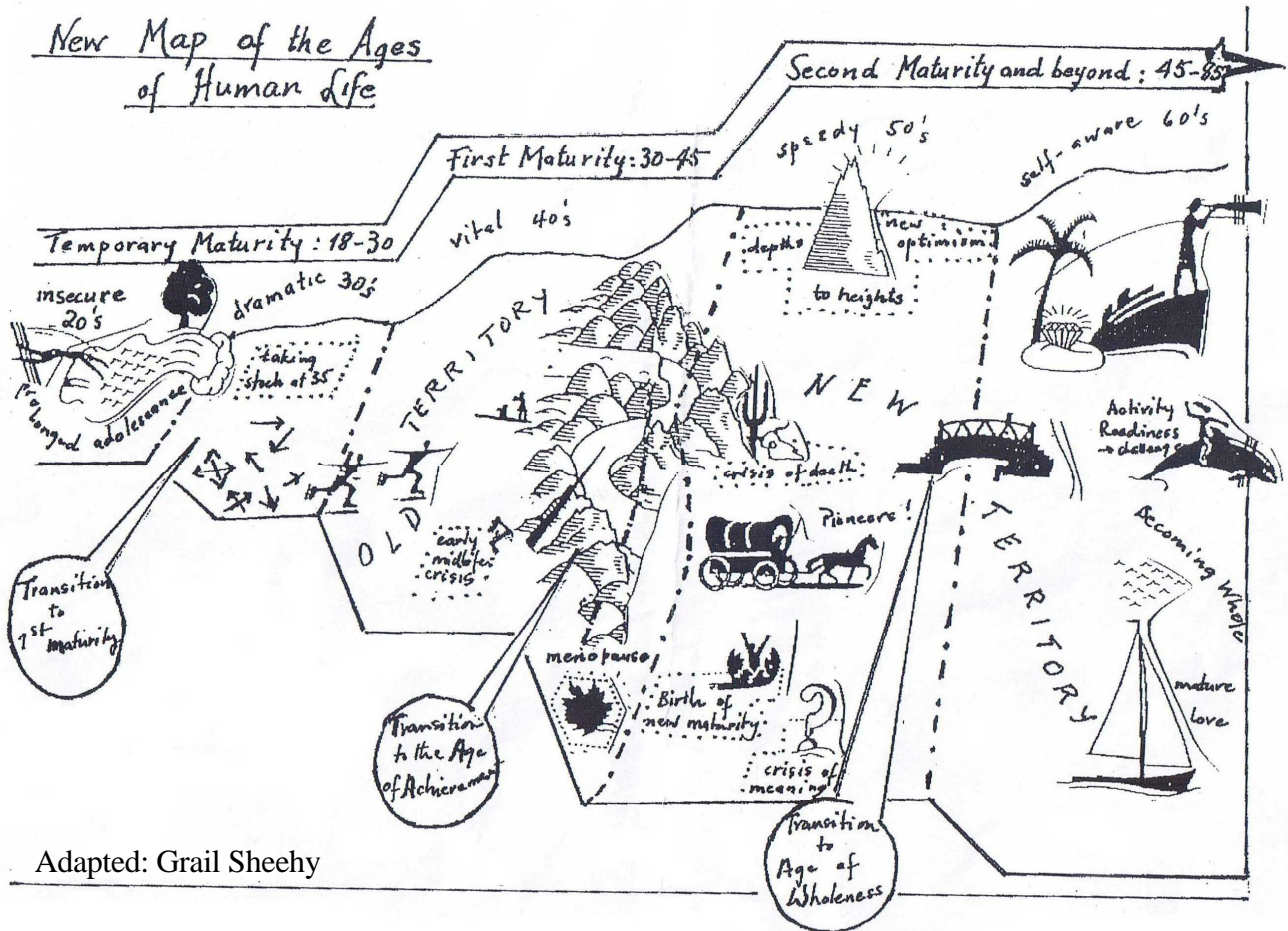
Stability, however is something that takes place in our heart, where the decision is not only made but desired. It also takes place at the level of our community life where it is still a matter of will and love rather than of emotions and surface reactions. Each time we reenter the realm of the heart to hear the Word of God, each time we listen to each other in community, we encounter our true and inner stability, we find that our feet are firmly set on the road after all.

**Stability and Human Life's Cycle (God's Stability in Us)**

Stability is part of our autobiography. It is part of the history of our human growth which is generally gradual in its development. As we mature in our life cycle, we have different developmental goals to achieve at different phases and times. At each stage in our lives we attract the experiences we need to learn which will help us evolve towards our next phase. During our retreat, Mother Irene Dabalus, OSB handed us an adapted "Map of the Ages of Human Life," from Grail Sheehy (Figure 1). She then posed these reflections for our group sessions:

"Where are you now in the biography of your prayer life?  
Share your awareness of God's work in your life from your earliest year."

Figure 1:



It was a simple question with a simple statement. But it made a lot of sense to me. It is as if I got reconciled with God's unfolding in my life. I discovered my interior stability in a heightened manner as a Missionary Benedictine: of being a child constantly lost and found again and again, of growing up with questions and answers, of experiencing maturity in confusion and clarity. My inner world stood crystal clear, knowing and accepting myself, the way I am and allowing others in the group to touch my life!

### ***Passage I (Childhood)***

Born in Manila in 1934, I lost my mother when I was just 9 months old. By the end of the Japanese time, my only brother and I were completely orphaned when my father was shot during the war in 1943. Hence, we were brought up in my grandparents' ancestral home where we grew up with *tios, tias* and cousins in Balayan, Batangas.

My paternal family could be classified as one of those *catolico cerrados* in town. They shaped my image of God as an Overseer and inculcated in me to be a child with an attitude of *may takot sa Diyos*. I had a grasp of what was displeasing to God as well as what was pleasing to Him. At night the whole clan would be gathered for the *oración* before Supper after which we youngsters had to take the right hand of our elders, letting it touch our foreheads as we say *Mano po*. There would be constant reminders of going to Confession in order to receive Communion on First Fridays. My *Lola*, having had an uncle priest, was a pious woman. She used to sit by her *butaca* in front of an enthroned *Cristo Rey* every morning. I often wondered why she closed her eyes as she muttered from time to time some prayers in Latin. Perhaps that was my first lesson on how it was to open up to mystery.

### ***Passage II (Youth)***

Liberation time (1945) saw me in my teens as a Scholastican *colegiala* and a daily Mass-goer. I was proud to own a daily missal, a possession few of the boarders had at that time. My prayers were mostly oral and memorized, although I made an effort to say the words with devotion. My spiritual life was simple: when feeling high or low, I spontaneously uttered favorite ejaculations and turned my heart to our Lady at the college grotto when I prayed the rosary. My aspiration to be a Child of Mary was deterred due to the low grade in *Conduct* given by Sister Aida, the Prefect of Boarders. When finally I was accepted as a Sodalist, I was introduced to do 15 minutes of mental prayer daily. I had trouble getting anything from the mental gymnastics and found it hard to think of God even for only some short moments.

I had just graduated from college (1954), when I began to relish reading *Seeds of Contemplation* and *Cloud of the Unknowing*. Impinging in my memory was the time my brother observed me reading such stuff. His suspicions of my entering the convent somehow got confirmed. I have seen from his eyes something I have not seen before, some thoughtfulness, some worry all his own, seemingly perplexed and skeptical at the same time. He knew I was not cut out to be a nun. I was a socialite, pleasure-loving and vain – keeping several butterflies flitting their wings around me. The first time he came to see how I was doing, Sister Paschala was hesitant to call me to the parlor. Sister Ligouri and Sister Caridad stood guard by the lobby for fear I might be kidnapped. He joked to hide his impatience: "*Palabasin na po ninyo siya, hindi pa ho naman ata kalbo!*" Neither did my friends and classmates expect such a turn in my life. Although I was popular among my peers as "Suki" – the comedian, whose swirl of laughter made others laugh, I was almost always neither here nor there. Neither outstanding enough to be on the Dean's list nor poor enough to be just fished out from among those hanging by a thread to the next year level.

To avoid painful partings, I “escaped” when I entered the Novitiate. My decision was instant and I was allowed to enter out of the usual entrance date arranged for newcomers. Despite the intense anguish of detaching myself from loved ones, for the first time I felt the boldness and adventure in asserting my personal freedom! To this day I marvel at such *bravado* and am overwhelmingly surprised at how much inner strength I got from the recollection of that moment of instant decision. It has enabled me to survive the harsher moments of life and to cope with the “*dura et aspera*” which St. Benedict expects beginners to pass through in their search for God (RB 58:8).

Major questions invite silence, making dominant motives come to the fore. It was only after some time in the convent that I discovered I entered to run away from problems in my love life, in my relationships at home and in my new teaching job. I could not really say that I had a “vocation” when I knocked at the convent door and that “entering” was my “chosen path.” Paradoxically, when I was a postulant, I dreaded being “sent-out” as I observed sudden disappearances of one or the other candidates leaving their beds empty and their mats rolled up in the Novitiate dormitory. Was that a sign that I was happy in this enclosure? Was God teaching me “to listen with the ear of my heart” (RB Prologue) and say “yes” to His claim on me to remain in the place where He had placed me? I do not know when or how it happened but I became aware of the true reason: *Yes, I shall love you, Lord.*

I began to take my Missionary Benedictine formation seriously. I got enchanted with the *Liturgy of the Hours*, relating to God and responding to Him in His own Words. The God I learned about at home, in school and in The Creed became Jesus of Nazareth in the Scriptures, befriending me and drawing me towards His God. I devoured Columbia Marmion’s books and Delatte’s *Commentary on the Holy Rule*. The book *St. Elizabeth and the Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity* nourished and kept aflame the “burning bush” in my inner *sanctum*. I even wished I would die young to attain fast the bliss of sainthood. That day when I told Sister Assumpta, my *Magistra*, I will surprise her when I become a saint, she blushed red with hearty gut-feeling laughter, affirming and celebrating the holy ambition of a neophyte! With the feeling of at-homeness rendered by stability during this first passage in my life as a Sister, I seemed to have found my niche in life.

### ***Passage III (Mid-life)***

The second stage of my stability naturally begins the moment something threatens to undermine it. Living the life of a full-fledged Sister offers many twists and *tsunamis*. It is not just incense, candlelight and celestial peace.

The implementation of *aggiornamento* called for by Vatican II and the *First Quarter Storm of Marcos’* dictatorship were events that erupted during my early mid-life years. These times saw me at the height of my functioning powers, years of non-stop activity. I was busy attending seminars, implementing and evaluating programs in school as a principal. As a formator I joined rallies, demonstrations and clandestine meetings. The contextualized formation program set exposures to depressed areas. It necessitated seminars and orientations on human development and the current socio-economic situation. I felt so burnt-out pushing myself to do well and knowing it was all haphazard. One part of me felt self-satisfaction, while another part

felt trapped. At the same time I was half aware that I was entertaining the noon-day devil as I observed polarizations and “exits” of certain religious not only in our communities but also in other congregations. I found myself even questioning the relevance of the way we live our religious life amidst massive poverty in the country. As I longed for a much simpler witnessing of my religious commitment, I sensed the tastelessness of religious practices and traditions that seemed to be irrelevant. It depleted my psychic and physical energy such that when I ended my term as Directress of *Sisters Formation Institute* (SFI) now *Institute of Formation and Religious Studies* (IFRS) after the 1986 Revolution, I felt like a depleted balloon, too tired to be buoyed up.

I had a six-month stint in England and a 30-day retreat in Rome. Undoubtedly my sabbatical time replenished my spirit and revived my verve. It was a signal gift and a harbinger of Truth which invited me to “look Life in the eye”. This asked of me to be silent, to listen to what stirred within me, to open myself to his Presence even in His seeming absence. I then woke up to the certainty that He was all the while with me, loving me. I ardently prayed that if everything should be inconstant about me, my new found awareness of His healing presence might remain.

I arrived in Spain in 1986 of October. I was in my late midlife and approaching 53 years of age. My palpable experience of God’s grace did not last long. We have no big institution in Madrid and Barcelona. Full of enthusiasm at sharing my rich experiences in Manila, I felt I was not maximized. Having no lay household help in our convents, my first struggle was waged with domestic work: I was not good at washing dishes and clothes, cleaning glass windows, sweeping floors nor cooking simple food. It was ironic that at this stage, when I was looking forwards to turn a new leaf in my life, I was back to square one when my “monsters” began to reappear, the “monsters” in others, too. The cobwebs which I had swept aside seemed to re-emerge again in a crisis that ranged all the way from feeling suffocated in a community, to needing to gossip, to murmur about not being trusted and to go through all sorts of psychological strain, perhaps due to covering up my personal agenda, which deceived no one except myself.

When one becomes a superior, all that one can think of is to make the community happy. Was that the reason why when I was put in the job, I sometimes found it hard not to be defensive when given negative feed-back? When a blind spot of mine was pointed out and I thought I have been hurt, I pulled down my defenses and mulled over it. Only then did grace seem to descend as I accepted the grain of truth there was. This prayer stance purged my self-centeredness and led me gradually to claim the dark sides of my personality. Forgiving myself was a tall order but it gave me the impetus to be patient with self and to have compassion with the failings of others. Thank God for an understanding community that understood and dealt with these contradictions in me as normal and even as healthy manifestations – a necessary passage to something more integral.

#### ***Passage IV (Mature Age)***

These upsets and disturbances do not last forever. Our road widens on the other side of Benedict’s narrow door. We can surmise that the older we grow, the more urgent it becomes that we learn to live with discords within ourselves and live with them in such a way that we are neither fragmented nor exhausted; not succumbing to depression but rather learning how to hold tension together and letting them become potential gifts and powers for good.

“Being in control” had always been an issue in processing myself. When I was recalled to the Manila Priory in 2005, I could not deny the sorrow of parting from the people whom I have learned to love. I could still feel the pain of being up-rooted from the place where I stayed for 20 years. However, having reached maturity in age and carried forward by *stabilitas cordis*, amazing grace stood at the threshold of my experienced loss. As if by force of love and the habit of *letting go* (RB 7:68), my “*fiat*” to the challenges facing a returning missionary became an astounding “*magnificat*”. Truly, I savored the gift of joy, enthusiasm and potential hope for a new beginning.

Recalling my earlier transitions helped put things in perspective and did not in any way threaten my stability. In retrospect, I realize that only by passing through such experiences can the way to a new level of interior stability be opened up. It has in fact prodded me to take hold of my shadows and integrate them with my desire to advance in God’s love. True enough, in my life’s transitions, I can own the experience that “...*as we walk the way of Jesus Christ, we encounter darkness and the folly of the cross but we also experience the mystery of His saving love.*” (*Constitutions II: Profession 16*)

I turned 74 when I celebrated my golden jubilee of Profession. Fifty years ago I thought I dumped my “worldly baggage” once and for all, patting myself at the back for being a great convert! As I move from one passage of life cycle to another I am discovering the meaning and shape of my own fragile maturity. Approaching the twilight years, I am getting convinced that I cannot annihilate my pride by switching on the James Bond mentality in me. The *stabilitas cordis* I aspire for is not going to be attained by gritting my teeth and still less by hanging on through sheer will power. Christ is the bottom line, my staying power, sometimes present or sometimes absent but – He is there!

How am I imparting at the moment a blessing on my own life? How celebrate the gift of belonging to the Congregation where I made my profession? Reborn by my feminist awakening, I now strain towards a life-affirming spirituality as a woman, as a monastic missionary—to be more compassionate and liberating in order to heal and to empower others. I am more aware of how my environment can enhance my quest for interconnectedness with all of Mother Earth’s creatures. Having lived with our elderly and sick Sisters in St. Benedict’s Home, I can now confront the issues of death and old age with less fear than when I was young; also because some of my contemporaries have passed away, making me realize I am living on bonus time.

Words that begin to deepen now are *simplicity of lifestyle, fidelity to lectio divina* and *growing in faith in my prayer life*—the only eyes with which to “see” God. When I cannot soar high or plumb the depths of God’s mysterious presence, I am happy enough to be an ordinary sparrow with the heart of an eagle, keeping up with St. Therese of Lisieux’s little way. I rest in this naked stark, present awareness that I am in the heart of God even if many times He is not in mine (Kahil Gibran).

At the moment, my prayer summons me to live life with joy and enthusiasm. Here I would like to put in a good word about the thrill of learning something new after 70. I got high grades (surprisingly!) in my gerontology courses when I became the oldest student of St. Joseph’s College – disproving ageism’s myth: “you cannot teach old dogs new tricks.” My learning to play the accordion was self-taught. I was never considered a pianist but I take pride in having played in the grand piano of St. Cecilia’s Hall for the 100 fingers concert during the

Centennial Celebration. I can also now play old romantic favorites by ear (*de oídos*) and I notice a growing ambition to master blowing the flute without losing my breath: good exercise for the lungs!

Health journals say the bonuses are considerable if exercises are done in fresh air. Each morning, I bounce and jog my way to Holy Mass via St. Cecilia's highway, sometimes tap dancing *a la flamenco* for fun and fitness. I now waste time without feeling guilty and do my work leisurely to curb the rat-racer in me. Delightfully reading Joyce Rupp's *Shall I Have This Dance*, and Matthew Fox's *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*, I can well understand a statement written by Lou Andreas Salome, a friend of Rilke, "Having lived our youth, our youth lives on inside us." These are sparkles of my own desire to recapture the sense of wonder and the inner child in me.

God's stability has become real, as I enfolded some experiences of transition from one passage to another. I have been touched by the Lord's fidelity in my life. I cannot thank Him and my Congregation enough for taking me for who I was, for what I am and for continually affirming the potential gift of what I can be. Along my life's passages, I have known the Lord! There are no regrets, no turning back, only gratitude.

Isn't this *stabilitas cordis* continually lived?

### ***Stability and the Mother of God***

The text about Mary can only be found in our Constitutions within the chapter treating on the vow of Stability. That the spirit of stability can be gleaned in this simple Jewish woman's life can be attested in this section of Our Constitutions:

*She is the woman of faith who listened with her whole heart  
and received the Word of God.*

*In joy as well as in suffering, she gave a believing and  
loving response and remained the humble handmaid  
who brought Christ to the world.*

*(Constitutions II Profession, norm 17)*

To live out our commitment of stability, we have Mary as our icon of constancy and steadfastness of love. She who remained fixed at the foot of the Cross is depicted by Scriptures as a woman of unflinching faith in her fidelity to the will of God as well as a woman for others.

Our missionary role of proclamation is a "birthing" task. Like the Mother of God who gave birth to God's only begotten Son, we too, have to bear the pangs of giving birth to Self – to one's maturity and integrity. Only then can we be bearers of the Good News and become midwives in "birthing" Christ in the hearts of many people who do not yet know Christ.

### **Conclusion**

The vow of *Stability* is God's gift to us. It is not stability of place. It is stability of the heart. It signifies the disposition to change in order to constantly do the same essential thing in life. It does not deviate from following the star so that one does not lose the orientation of seeking the *Unum Necessarium*.

Translated into the setting of today the gift of stability allows us to hope that God Himself will fulfill our desire to make progress towards fullness of life. Together, as Missionary Benedictines Sisters of Tutzling, we journey in faith along the same road with “hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.” (RB: *Prologue 48*).

A poem\* written by a monk in our own day praises stability thus:

*“What a life! What are you doing in your chrysalis!,”  
asked brother snail who was cheerfully dragging  
his shell to the four corners of the world.*

*“I am pushing out my wings”, replied the night butterfly  
from its chrysalis, “you will never have them  
because it is a gift from God to those who are stable.”  
(Georges Chopin, OSB)*

### SHARED REFLECTIONS

1. Reflect and share your experience of God’s stability in your life as a Missionary Benedictine. Where are you now in the biography of your prayer life? Share your awareness of God’s work in your life from your earliest year.”
2. Choose a favorite passage on stability in our Constitutions. Explain why you chose it.

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**SYNCHRONICITY:**  
**How Moment Becomes Momentum**  
by David Richo, Ph.D.

**What is Synchronicity?**

Synchronicity is the phenomenon of meaningful coincidence. It is a resemblance, concurrence, correspondence, or connection between something going on outside us and something happening inside us. In any ordinary coincidence, the events are connected by meaning rather than by cause and effect. This may not yet be synchronicity but simply synchronization. It becomes synchronicity when it makes a meaningful connection with our life's purposes or helps unfold our destiny to show love, see wisely, and bring healing to ourselves and our world. All coincidences are connected by meaning, but synchronicity happens when the meaningfulness is relevant to our personal evolution. It is the spur of the moment in that it spurs us on and in that it may happen suddenly! It happens just in time. It is also *just* in time in the sense that it is part of the justice of the universe in bringing us exactly the pieces we need to fashion or be fashioned by our destiny.

Synchronicity is a word made from two Greek terms meaning "joined with" and "time". Synchronicity is a bond or connection that happens in a timely way. A correspondence between two things is suddenly made clear. The unifying connection was always present but an immediate and meaningful coincidence makes it visible here and now. Synchronicity thus combines an essential unity with an existential one. The eternal present makes an appearance in the momentary present. This is why it seems fitting to say that synchronicity guides us into spirituality.

Here is a simple example of the difference between synchronicity and synchronization: I am afraid to dive, and while at the pool, I see someone teaching his son to dive, so I watch and learn. This was a simple coincidence, synchronization of need and resource. Because of my learning to dive, my confidence builds, and eventually I become a diving teacher, start a diving school and even help an Olympic hopeful! I can trace it all back to my first eavesdropping and experimenting at the pool. This makes that original event synchronicity. Later, I unexpectedly find myself reading this book and its chapter on crisis brings me to a new depth of understanding. I find that in ancient times, diving from a high cliff was an initiatory sacrament, representing a plunge into the unknown waters of rebirth: a primitive form of baptism. This enriches my own experience of my spiritual work. Now the synchronicity has reached me more deeply and the grace of it has appeared more clearly. I have entered the realm of the miraculous.

Synchronicities cluster around significant events. Many meaningful coincidences occurred, for instance, when the *Titanic* sank and when Lincoln and Kennedy were assassinated. Personal disasters or crisis in our personal life will also invite synchronicity. Norma orders a red dress for a party but a black dress is delivered to her. As she is about to phone the store to report the error, her sister calls: "Mother has died. Come for the funeral." Norma thought she was in control of her life; she thought she knew what would happen next.

The synchronous event told her otherwise and outfitted her for what was actually coming next: something much deeper was about to occur.

Synchronicity is the surprise that something suddenly fits! Synchronous events are meaningful coincidences or correspondences that guide us, warn us, or confirm us on our path. Coincidence happens at a specific moment. In this sense it is existential, tied to the here and now. Correspondences are ongoing. This is how synchronicity is essential, always present, to our human experience. Synchronicity is also found in a series of similar events or experiences. It can appear as one striking event that sets off a chain reaction. It is always unexpected and somehow uncanny in its accuracy of connection or revelation. This is what makes it impossible to dismiss synchronicity as mere coincidence.

Jung called synchronicity “a non-causal but meaningful relationship between physical and psychic events... a special instance of acausal orderedness.... Conscious succession becomes simultaneity... Synchronicity takes the events in space and time as meaning more than mere chance.” A coincidence is two unplanned events that happen simultaneously. It becomes synchronicity when it is connected by meaning. You and I love red roses. That is a coincidence. If unknown to each other, we meet as our heads bump while we are both smelling the same red rose that caught our eye at the same time and then later, we are married, that is synchronicity.

Synchronicity is the counterpart to cause/effect connections. In synchronicity, the link is forged by meaningfulness, not by linear reaction of cause to effect. Since the Self is not bound by linear time, it is possible to have another model for succession. Instead of one thing following another, there can also be instances in which things happen together. Simultaneity takes the place of linear progression in the timeless world of the psyche. Synchronicity is the word for this alternative.

Synchronicity represents a perfect paradox. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that is nonetheless true. There is an apparent contradiction between multiplicity and unity. Yet in synchronicity, two events become one in significance. The existential display of two circumstances, one of which may be external and one internal, are essentially one in meaningfulness. An analogy might be in ancient herbalism. The law of signatures referred to the similarity between certain plants and parts of the human body. It was believed that this resemblance meant that the herb had healing qualities for that organ. In homeopathy, the law of similars is also an example: one is healed by what ails one. In both instances, similitude and symmetry are vehicles to wholeness.

The Self is a field of perpetual possibility in time and of infinite possibility in space. Its potential is in the vast extent of its love, wisdom, and healing power, in people and in all of nature. For these potentials to be actualized in us requires the creative commitment of the ego to love generously, to access intuitive wisdom, and to bring balance to the world and to human relationships. Synchronicity is a message from the Self to the ego about how to trust this and about how to do it.

Synchronicity gives us a clue to the deep underlay of purpose and meaning in the universe and how that purpose is working itself out in our lives. Our own wholeness has a

foundation and support in the larger order of things. All objective events have a corresponding subjective configuration in our psyche. Synchronicity is an instant instance of this correspondence. Its spontaneous timely events are articulations of the continuous nature of creation, intimations about the irrefragible unity underlying it. Synchronicity is always striking and sometimes eerie. The “otherworldly” feeling we have when it happens to us may be an indicator that an archetype is arising into consciousness from the depths of our psyche.

Synchronicity is an unexpected significant coincidence between an external event and an internal readiness for a change or a transition. Some events are coincidences in that they touch off a chain reaction on our journey, e.g. a painful loss leads eventually to a surprisingly positive outcome. Sometimes an unusual event sets in motion a series of changes or a whole new direction in our life. In such synchronicity, the event may be critical or minor, a loss or a gain, a correct choice or an error, something voluntary or involuntary. “We do not know whether the things afflicting us are the secret beginning of our happiness or not,” wrote Jorge Luis Borges.

Things happen as they need to for the best purposes of the universe. Our belief that we can interfere with this is another trick of the arrogant ego. We may not know how what is happening right now really fits into our future. I can only trust that in addition to all I see, there is some other vision that will appear and make all this appear as just right.

Synchronicity may appear in this specific symptom I now face in this depression I am in, in this quandary that obsesses me. I may find in any of these painful experiences a new potential for self-healing or a new direction on my journey. There is a healing predisposition in the psyche to produce just the spurs we need and just in time.

Synchronicity also works by presenting an unconscious image (as yet unknown to us) which comes to us directly or symbolically as a dream, intuition or premonition. This may correspond to an existing life situation with an identical meaning. To perceive this meaning requires a coincidence of two psychic events: a normal knowledge of the causal world and an interpretation of the normal state by an archetypal constellation. When these two are simultaneous, the experience is synchronous.

Consecutive events in life make up the exterior order of our existence. An interior order manifests itself in dreams and synchronicity, which show us the hidden acausal order of things. Sudden intuitions or moments of truth are synchronous because they represent explicating moments in which the greater cosmic meaning of our life becomes visible. The function of intuition is to reveal the vast field of possibility in this one moment of insight. Intuition is thus a springboard to the release of our inner immense potential. This is why intuition is a spiritual gift that opens the Self to its destiny.

Synchronicity shows us the latent meaning of our human archetypes – inner dispositions to live out challenges to our versatility. Ordinary coincidences are not synchronicity. They become synchronicity only when they are or prove to be meaningful, that is, related to our journey/destiny toward/of wholeness. To be synchronicity, the meaningfulness of the coincidence also has to be evident to us. When there is no observer of a meaningful coincidence, it is synchronicity but simply “synchronization.”

Yet synchronicity can not happen by any conscious intervention of ego since it is a phenomenon of grace: an entry of the transpersonal world onto our personal turf. It is a moment that manifests the unity that always and already existed between psychological and spiritual, mind and universe, you and me, me and everything. It occurs when our unconscious is ready for a step into wider consciousness. The ancient oracles were about precisely this!

The inner artist of our true Self uses two brushes: a conscious one, synchronicity, and an unconscious one, dreams. The synchronicities (meaningful coincidences) of our lives and the dream images that have most excited or stupefied us are the best—though often most ambiguous—clues to our self-actualization. When a dream confirms a movement in the psyche, that is itself synchronicity. Prayer that is answered is synchronicity, since prayers that are answered are the ones that are consistent with our destiny.

Synchronicity is actually calibrated into the psyche in two ways. Since opposites constellate and combine there, if we become too one-sided consciously, our psyche will shower us with synchronous events, dreams and relationships that commandeer us gently to the other side. For instance, if we are overly controlling, things will happen that topple our house of cards. To work with synchronicity is to go along with such a program and lighten up ourselves and others.

Sometimes, however, the ego is meant only to maintain or contain a tension of opposites without making a choice in favor of either. This prompts the psyche to release a healing third dimension. This “transcendent function” is the synchronous capacity to present us with exactly the reconciling or balancing image that unites or cuts through our either...or’s. This miracle of paradox allows a whole new possibility to open for us. It happens to us when we simply do not take sides with either opponent in the inner argument. For example, I am alone now that you are gone. I have grieved your loss. Now I can start looking for someone new or I can continue to avoid connecting with anyone else. I decide not to seek but certainly not to avoid. And, spontaneously, along comes someone who is neither pushy nor passive. Or, along comes an opportunity for a whole new focus in my career and I find such great sources of nurturance in it that relationship becomes less important for now. Maybe later that very career turn will introduce me to someone new.

Thus, our psyche is the algebra expert with two favorite ways of reaching a pleasing equation: it can compensate for onesidedness by dealing the opposite to us. Or it can factor out a third solution to us as we are holding two alternatives and not acting on either. The unique shapes of the synchronicities that cluster around us tell us which program is in place.

Synchronicity is the special moment in which destiny summons us to move forward. It is, as we saw above, the spur of the moment that initiates movement and may at the same time smart! This is the process by which archetypal reality incarnates itself in historical time: something unknown is doing we do not know what or why or through whom. Synchronicity really means that we are never alone in the universe. “O mighty love! Man is one world, and hath another to attend him,” wrote George Herbert.

Many psychic events do not occur instantaneously but undergo an incubation period in the unconscious. Something has not yet happened but is in the works. Synchronicity cuts across time-bound warps. It transcends the limits of being and becoming. This is because in the inner world there is no separation between past and future, time or timelessness, what is happening, what is about to happen, and what will happen. Only the present exists, which contains it all. In synchronicity, we meet our future—or our past—in our present. “To transform itself in us the future enters into us long before it happens,” Rainer Maria Rilke wrote.

Synchronicity sometimes pieces itself together over days or months or even years: I was climbing in the mountains of Crete this year when I suddenly realized that they had a voice. The next month I was climbing to the top of Mount Sinai and I remembered that Moses heard a voice that drew him up this same mountain. That was the voice I must have meant in Crete, I thought. That evening, I was sitting with Father Paul, one of the monks of St. Catherine’s monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. He said: “The mountains pray.” The voice was now speaking to me, asking me to hear it or even to find my voice in its own.

Finally, is synchronicity a form of superstition? Superstition is an irrational belief in a cause/effect connection when there is none in reality, e.g., a black cat crossing my path produces bad luck. Synchronicity is an alternative to cause/effect. It is acausal. The connection is based on a rational meaning, not irrational belief. Superstition is maintained by ignorance of the laws of nature or by false faith in magic or chance. Synchronicity is supported by a long-standing wisdom about the correlation between a coincidence and something spiritual that is afoot. It respects and is mediated through nature, and it abrogates the belief in chance altogether.

To appreciate synchronicity as it is treated in this book requires a conviction that meanings are discovered, not imputed. The bias in these chapters is that an objective value exists irrespective of whether it is acknowledged as such by a subjective observer. In fact, synchronicity is founded on a trust that there is meaning in the world but that this meaning appears only when are open to it. a piano sonata of Mozart strikes Jeckel with deep, unnamable, life-affecting meaning. Heckle scoffs at it as cacophony and receives nothing from it at all. The essential (abiding) value is in the sonata. Its existential (here and now) meaningfulness is in the hearer. This is why the full phenomenon of synchronicity requires that someone become conscious of it as a meaningful coincidence. Even the most spiritual events wait for our human yes. This is the loving respect of the divine for the human.

## **Synchronicity at a Glance**

*What to look for in synchronicity:*

- Coincidence, correspondence, connection, resemblance
- Trigger-points to a series of events or turning points
- The unexpected, unusual, uncanny, improbable
- What happens on the spur of the moment and just in time
- What is meaningful, is revelatory, and has become conscious to us

- The fluke or choice or happenstance that uncovers a whole new possibility in our psyche or a most useful path to our true bliss
- Serendipity, finding good fortune by accident, which is a way of referring to the playful dimension of synchronicity

Since synchronicity is an advantageous juxtaposition or turning point that occurs spontaneously and unexpectedly in the course of life, it happens beyond our control, i.e., by a grace. This makes it feel uncanny or strange but yet welcome and confirming. It is meaningful in that it increases our consciousness, i.e., casts the light of consciousness onto something that was hidden. Something is meaningful when it reveals or exposes the bond between the ego and the Self, uniting apparent opposites so that wholeness can come into full view.

Synchronicity invites or challenges us to become more capable of loving, and/or of accessing wisdom, and/or of becoming a source of healing and peace. The actualization of these potentials is our destiny. We do not create our destiny; we participate in its unfolding. Synchronicity happens as an activating assistance toward the design of that destiny. It can help us in this way because it is a numinous visit of the transcendent/transpersonal into our transitory/personal world. Synchronicity is thus a major tool of soul-making, divulging immortal meanings through personal events so that we can find our way toward integration.