



Monks of Weston Priory in prayerful dance

Monos—A Greek Word Made Flesh

- brother John

■ WAS INTRIGUED RECENTLY BY THE TITLE OF A RECENT BOOK ON MONASTICISM, *Finding the Monk Within*! I suspect that the book treats the question of the authentic monk – what is the real meaning of the monk in life today?

Like so many words in current use, the words ‘monk’ and ‘monastic’ seem to have lost their original, authentic, inner meaning. Perhaps we have lost contact with their root meaning found in the Greek word for monk—*monos*. In current popular understanding a monk may be ‘a loner’ – even someone living a ‘monotonous’ or boring life. The word ‘monastic’ may refer to isolated experience, out of touch with others and current reality – at best, abstract or idealistic. If we look deeper into the actual experience of the monk – authentic monastic experience – we find that the reality is very different from the prevalent misconception.

The Benedictine monk today is deeply involved in rich human relationships – monastic life is profoundly communitarian. The monastic community is rooted in *conversatio morum*, sharing in the things that really matter. In this *conversatio* the word is made flesh and expressed in a life-long commitment: the gift and gifting of self to and for others.

The description of the monk as ‘withdrawn’ from the real and actual world dismisses a much-needed gift for the contemporary world. An obsession with technology has replaced the joy of adventure, discovery, and creativity in the human spirit and body. Replacing personal human conversation, the machine provides interest and answers. For many in contemporary culture, the word ‘spirituality’ is abstract even to the point of becoming irrelevant. In the ‘information age’, perhaps technology has replaced spirituality as the most critical human experience?

If we look deeply at the word ‘*monos*’, we find that it means the opposite of boring and isolating. It is a radical and dynamic call to oneness, unity, and creativity. It indicates adventure, discovery, newness. The human begins and ends with the search for the One—*monos* is a verb as well as a noun—a call as well as a description. The search for the One is a basic value and challenge for a new human social order. The Rule for Monks by St. Benedict is an invitation to join in this search—a way of life lived in prayer, faith, trust, hope, and love within the gift of human communion/community! ■



Monks of Weston Priory with participants in the Grand March on St. Benedict's Day