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An Electronic Monastery for Quality, Subjects and Creativity

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The *Evangel of Henry the Lion* recently sold for over eight million pounds. This hand-painted mediaeval manuscript is considered one of the most valuable documents ever created. It is unique because of its extraordinary quality and its expression of divine and human subjects. Ironically, while such manuscripts are a great success on the market, they could not be produced by normal market conditions. The market focusses on efficiency. It therefore produces the cheapest version rather than the most carefully detailed example. The market focusses on quantity rather than quality: how many, rather than how good. The market focusses on objects rather than subjects, on objective things rather than subjective persons and values.

These values of the market now dominate many aspects of the Internet. There is a rhetoric which equates the Internet with e-commerce. The concern with efficiency leads to producing as many objects as cheaply as possible. The concern with quantity makes the speed of hardware, software and networks seemingly all important. The concern with objects leads to many applications dealing with their design (CAD), location (GIS, GPS), and their walkthroughs (VR). Living organisms and even persons are reduced to geometrical regularities as if they were objects. The market emphasizes applications and products and it creates work flow charts to achieve its ends. It is so concerned with the results at the end that there is no time for new beginnings. The net result is digital versions of analogue visions rather than new digital horizons: virtual reproductions of earlier worlds rather than bold new creations.

In the Middle Ages monasteries provided a context for transmitting, translating and interpreting the cumulative heritage of civilization. This produced numerous original works and commentaries as well as some simple copies. Today the copying and word processing functions have been relegated almost entirely to computers. There are some institutes to experiment with the use of computers for artistic expression. A new space is needed to explore the implications of computers for *quality* rather than quantity, the implications for *subjects* rather than objects, *creativity* rather than production. We need a place without deadlines and bottom lines devoted to the pursuit of excellence; a place for the priceless rather than the price-bound and bargain-ridden; a place for livening of souls rather than animations of our bodies. We need a modern electronic monastery for quality, subjects and creativity open to different religious traditions that explores everything beyond our daily routine and our all too short mortality: a place to give new expression to the depths of our humanity, the heights of our aspirations towards divinity, our visions of infinity and eternity, our understandings of ourselves, mankind and God.