

The Quest for Community

To be sure, experiences can become idolatrous as well as addictive. Postmoderns collect experiences like moderns collect stuff. The church must offer Christ-initiated--or what Donald Whitney calls "Scripture-induced"--experiences.

Count me in

A fellow eBay-er calls the auction site a "participant sport." I felt such an adrenaline rush during my weeklong bidding war over an 1827 pewter communion token. eBay has made me into a global trader. It's exhilarating.

At eBay the power belongs to the people, not to the producers. In electronic commerce, the buyer sets the price. It's the medieval bazaar come to life in cyberspace.

Some call this haggling the "age of participation." Others call it the "horizontal society." Postmodern people take cues not from those above them but from others around them. There are no more bosses, only clients.

The Web typifies the trend. Online, we're all experts: we're all priests, we're all doctors or lawyers or architects, we're all authorities in whatever we're chatting about at the moment.

And we're already seeing its impact in church. The rituals of marriage and remembrance are becoming more EPIC.

More than clinking glasses, weddings also feature pull-the-kiss-from-the-hat performances, the surrender of the keys, and couples presenting to each other symbols of the things they bring to their union.

Do-it-yourself funerals are at a record high. More people are burying their dead without embalming, mortuaries, or cemeteries. More participatory rites are being created alongside official rituals, including *ad hoc* shrines, white caskets that mourners can sign, and eulogies in which almost everyone present has got to say something.

The problem is no longer onerous taxation without representation. **The problem now is worship without participation.** In the church, representation simply isn't enough anymore.

Get the picture?

Visit as many of the more than 2 million eBay sites as you want. You'll find each one has an image of what is for sale. Each image comes to life with story and sometimes music. Each site tries to draw you into a relationship with that image and story.

eBay is not alone in using images to establish relationships. NCR's ATM machines are "transforming transactions into relationships" according to their ads. Agency.com is dedicated to

what it calls "interactive relationship management." Its slogan: "It's not the medium, it's the relationship."

The lesson for the church is simple: **images generate emotions and people will respond to their feelings.**

Postmodern culture is image-driven. The modern world was word-based. Not until the fourteenth century did truth become embedded in principles and positions. Its theologians tried to create an intellectual faith, placing reason and order at the heart of religion. Mystery and metaphor were seen as too fuzzy, too mystical, too illogical.

The church now enters a world where metaphor is at the heart of spirituality. Propositions are lost on postmodern ears; but metaphor they will hear, images they will see and understand. These come as close as human beings will get to a universal language. Indeed, it seems clearer than ever that metaphysics is nothing but metaphor.

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