

**Photography =
Playing with
the Light**

The Theotog

**A newsletter for theologically
inclined photographers**

Volume 1, Issue 1

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Do you have a digital camera, a cell phone, or a film camera?

- Join the Club. It's free!
- Invite a Western Seminary member to join the club.

Welcome!

Welcome to the very first issue of **The Theotog**, the official newsletter of **The Theotog Club**, Western Theological Seminary's own photography club.

As the editors, coordinators of our club, and avid **theotogs**, we (Jaco and Keith) are excited to get this to you.

As we envisioned a club, we talked about empowering the members to develop their skills as photographers. We also recognized that the process of taking photographs may teach us something about our spiritual walk, and likewise, reflecting on the pictures we've been taking can help us discover our Triune God in new ways. We anticipate a display gallery, even workshops, and even group shoots.

In this very first issue you will find a piece that can guide you in your theological reflection on the photos you take. Douglas Purnell, who drafted

the guidelines for a forthcoming book, is a pastor and artist in Sydney, Australia.

Also, you will find a piece by Dr. George Brown on "Clouds" which he spontaneously created when he became a member of the club.

There will be information about a summer assignment and a FAQ section.

Both of us find ourselves busier than usual with end of semester tasks and activities, which meant we spent less time on the issue than we planned. Our desire to get this out to you before the summer break was paramount.

Welcome then! We pray that God will use our club to deepen our walk with God and to create self-care opportunities for us.

I (Jaco) offer you an image of a **koru**, the Maori (New Zealand) symbol of new begin-

nings, seen in the unfolding of a new fern leaf.

We pray that this humble beginning will lead to exciting times and new discoveries. Your editors.

Jaco and Keith



A Koru — taken in The Smoky Mountain National Park (Jaco Hamman)

Clouds, by Dr. George Brown

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1:7, NRSV)

Thunderstorms have always held a kind of fascination for me. I owe this interest in severe weather to my maternal grandfather, Gilmon McNeal. He and Grandmom McNeal would come from their Philadelphia row house across from a textile mill in Kensington to visit us in the then rural Lower

Southampton Township to escape the oppressive summer heat in the city. Grandpop McNeal loved to stand out in our front yard as an afternoon thunderstorm approached. He would stand there—his admiring gaze transfixed on the boiling thunderclouds—in the blowing wind, with thunder

Clouds (cont.)

crashing ever more loudly, until others finally convinced him that it was too dangerous to remain outdoors.

One August afternoon he convinced me to leave the security of the house and join him in a front row seat of that theater of God's glory that was our front yard. We watched the storm clouds turn the sunlit afternoon into a premature evening darkness. The wind gathered strength and the rumble of thunder grew until the sound was felt as much as it was heard. The feeling was both exhilarating and terrifying. We stood there, watching, listening, experiencing, until the first large raindrops starting pelting us, finally forcing us to retreat to watching the rest of nature's show from indoors.

Community

While reading Annie Dillard's *For the Time Being* (1999), I discovered I was not alone in my fascination with clouds. Dillard wrote: "We people possess records, like grave-stones, of individual clouds and the dates on which they flourished." In each chapter of her book, Dillard devotes one section to clouds. In the first chapter she reports that on June 12, 1824, Jon Constable "sketched, in oils, squally clouds over Brighton Beach" where he'd taken his wife, Maria, in hopes that the sea air would



Storm clouds, 4/11/2008 (George Brown)

cure her tuberculosis. In Chapter 3, she quotes from John Muir's observations of clouds over the California Sierra in the summer of 1869:

"...In God's calendar, difference of duration is nothing."

On July 23: "What can poor mortals say about clouds? While people describe them, they vanish. Nevertheless these fleeting sky mountains are as substantial and significant as the more lasting upheavals of granite beneath them.

"What can poor mortals say about clouds?" While people describe them, they vanish. "

Both alike are built up and die, and in God's calendar, difference of duration is nothing."

Dillard's catalogue of cloud references include a fictional character in a novel by Jorge Borges who could remember cloud shapes, the newspaper account of a Saharan sand cloud

whose path left a haze over the Caribbean, and her description of painter Jacqueline Gourevitch's 1981 graphite rendering of clouds over Middletown, Connecticut.

Theology

There are numerous references to clouds in scripture. God rides on the clouds (Psalm 68:4), they are God's chariot (Psalm 104:3). God is surrounded by clouds (Psalm 97:2), like a

tent covering him (Psalm 18:11) or a garment wrapped about him so that he is unable to see (Job 22:14). God's love is as high or higher than the heavens and God's faithfulness touches the clouds (Psalm 36:5, 57:10, and 108:4).

Dark storm clouds are associated with the day of judgment (Isaiah 5:30b). The "day of the Lord" is a "day of clouds and thick darkness" (Ezekiel 30:3; Joel

2:2; Zephaniah 1:15e).

The Son of Man will be seen coming on the "clouds of heaven" (Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Mark 14:62).

Ed: Thanks George! Keep it coming, George!



Image by Jaco Hamman

What makes art (photographs) religious?

As theologians, we want to reflect theologically on the pictures we take.

What themes should we reflect upon? And what would make an image theologically significant? Although answers to these questions remind me (Jaco) of theologian Karl Rahner who argued that the experience of self and the experience of God is more important than knowledge of God and knowledge of self, they

are important to answer.

Dr. Douglas Purnell, a practical theologian and pastor in Sydney (Australia) offers the following criteria. In his forthcoming book: **Being in Ministry: Honestly, Openly, and Deeply**. Purnell identifies the following criteria:

- “Does the work link contemporary life with religious tradition to shape meaning and action?”

- Does the work reach to address the mystery of ‘being’ that is beyond speech?
- Does it give form to the darkness that surrounds the source of ‘being’?
- Does the work speak pro-

Does the work by its beauty reveal something of the Divine?

“Is it true to the disciplined observation of the world?”

phetically by asking ultimate questions of the contemporary society?

- If the work were placed alongside traditional religious symbols would it bring those symbols to life in a new way?

- Does the work by its beauty reveal something of the Divine?
- Is the work true? Is it true to the disciplined observation of the world by the artist? Is it true to the integrity of the artist? Is it true to the materi-

als used? Is it true to the nature of being? Is it true in its ability to speak deeply to the viewer?

- Does it attempt to depict in fresh ways the stories, symbols, and truths of a religious tradition?

“Sunset wedding” by Keith Derrick



- Does the work have the capacity to break into the emotions and deep places of the viewer in ways that shape ‘being’?”

Becoming a theologian is hard work!



Photography = Playing with the Light



Classroom: Rule of thirds

(Taken to <http://digital-photography-school.com/blog/rule-of-thirds/>)

“Perhaps the most well know principle of photographic composition is the ‘**Rule of Thirds**’. It’s one of the first things that budding digital photographers learn about in classes on photography and rightly so as it is the basis for well balanced and interesting shots.

I will say right up front however that rules are meant to be broken and ignoring this one doesn’t mean your images are necessarily unbalanced or uninteresting. However a wise person once told me that if you intend to break a rule you should always learn it first to make sure your breaking of it is all the more effective!

What is the Rule of Thirds?

The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts....

As you’re taking an image you would have done this in your mind

Communion, by **Jaco Hamman**

“Perhaps the most well know principle of photographic composition is the ‘**Rule of Thirds**’...”

through your viewfinder or in the LCD display that you use to frame your shot.

With this grid in mind the ‘rule of thirds’ now identifies four important parts of the image that you should consider placing points of interest in as you frame your image.

Not only this - but it also gives you four ‘lines’ that are also useful positions for elements in your photo.

The theory is that if you place points of interest in the intersections or along the lines that your photo becomes more balanced and will enable a viewer of the image to interact with it more naturally. Studies have shown that when viewing images that people’s eyes usually go to one of the intersection points most naturally rather than the center of the shot - using the rule of thirds works with this natural way

of viewing an image rather than working against it...

In a similar way a good technique for landscape shots is to position horizons along one of the horizontal lines also as I’ve done with the following shot (I’ll let you imagine the lines).

Using the Rule of Thirds comes naturally to some photographers but for many of us takes a little time and practice for it to become second nature.

In learning how to use the rule of thirds (and then to break it) the most important questions to be asking of yourself are:

What are the points of interest in this shot?
Where am I intentionally

placing them?

Once again - remember that breaking the rule can result in some striking shots - so once you’ve learnt it experiment with purposely breaking it to see what you discover.

Lastly - keep the rule of thirds in mind as you edit your photos later on. Post production editing tools today have good tools for cropping and reframing images so that they fit within the rules. Experiment with some of your old shots to see what impact it might have on your photos.”



Summer assignment

The next issue of The Theotog will be in towards the end of September 2008. We wish you a blessed but “clicking” summer.

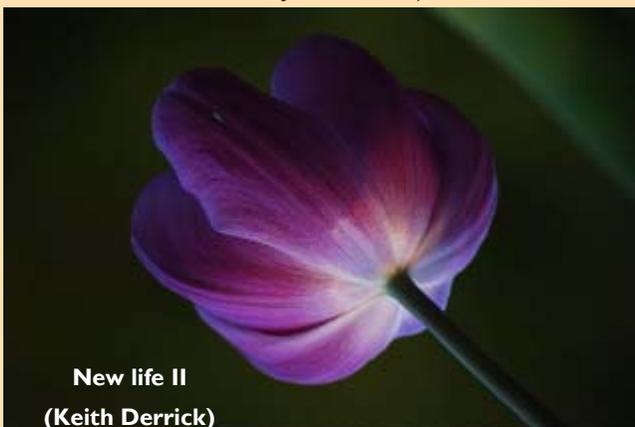
Please send us your photographs and reflections as an email attachment. We’d like to include as many images as possible in our next issue, which will include an online gallery of pictures received.

Your summer assignment is: **“Sabbath”**

Please send us your pictures and reflections (of no more than 500 words) by August 31. We look forward to receiving them.



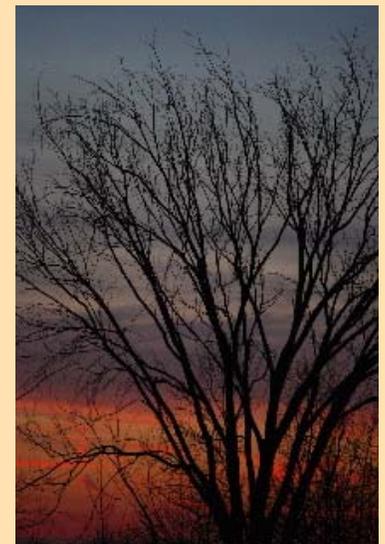
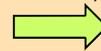
Peace
(Smoky Mountains National Park)
(Jaco Hamman)



New life II
(Keith Derrick)

Gallery

New Life
(Keith Derrick)



Three signs of spring
(Keith Derrick)

The Theotog Club Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Theotog?

A “Theotog” (yes, we created the word) is a photographer who recognizes that taking photographs can be a spiritual and theological exercise, and that the images themselves can communicate theological and spiritual truths.

What do theotogs do?

Theotogs take photographs and images that reflect more than the reality being photographed or the photographer with her or his photographic skills.

Theotogs interpret photographs as to their theological and spiritual message

What equipment do I need?

Any digital camera will work fine (even the one on your cell phone).

Film cameras can work too if you can scan the photograph into electronic form.

If you do not have a digital camera yet, but anticipate buying one soon, this club is for you.

Who can be a member of the WTS Theotog Club

Any member of the Western Theological Seminary community, including spouses and partners and children of current students, faculty, staff, and emeritus professors.

Parents need to accompany children under the age of 12 to any meeting/group shoot.

Membership ends automatically upon graduation or when WTS is no longer one’s employer. (Emeritus professors are excluded from the latter).

What are some of the WTS Theotog Club’s activities?

In the **WTS Theotog Club** we explore the wonderful world of photography.

In the **WTS Theotog Club** we educate each other on the “How to’s” of photography.

In the **WTS Theotog Club** we will have periodic group shoots. (Meeting on a selected evening, for example, to do night photography).

In the **WTS Theotog Club**, members will receive monthly themes to explore, ranging from “Nature” to “Resurrection” to “Epiphany” to “the fruits of the Spirit” to “Architecture” and more.

In the **WTS Theotog Club** selected images will be honored each month in a newsletter or as part of an online **WTS Theotog Club** gallery.

The **WTS Theotog Club** will have meetings periodically.

Who decides what?

Initially, decisions will be made by Keith Derrick and Jaco Hamman until more officers join the leadership. The decision of the officers is final, for the moment at least.

How much does it cost?

The **WTS Theotog Club** is a **free** club. Any equipment and printing costs you may incur are your responsibility.

How do I join the club?

Email either Jaco or Keith: jaco.hamman@westernsem.edu & keith.derrick@westernsm.edu

How do I leave the club?

Send an underexposed, overexposed, or out of focus image attached to an email to either Keith or Jaco: keith.derrick@westernsm.edu & jaco.hamman@westernsem.edu. (Just kidding, any request to leave the **WTS Theotog Club** will be honored).