

Spirituality and Photography

Spirituality: Christian spirituality is the lived encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit. [Lawrence Cunningham and Keith Egan via Bill Clemmons] It is more about trust, obedience, awe, and mystery than beliefs, institutions, and rituals.

Photography: [literally *light writing*] The recording of images on light sensitive surfaces.

- Photography records views which are discovered in the “given.” *Still photography* particularly invites us to *pay attention to* [contemplate] certain “givens.” Other graphic arts create images from human imagination. In spiritual practices/disciplines we seek to open ourselves to the Holy Presence which is given [John 1: 1-9]
- *Framing:* Photographs draw our attention to certain “givens” by framing out distractions. The single most important decision the photographer makes is: “what do I want out of the picture ?” Likewise spiritual practices help us to lessen the distractions that hinder our openness to the Holy Presence. These distractions can be viewed as “pulls” [desires, lesser goods, bright ideas, etc.] and as “pushes” [anxieties, “oughts”, responsibilities, unfinished projects, etc.]
- *Lighting:* Front-lighting and back-lighting tend to flatten or even erase features in a picture. Side-lighting creates shadows and reveals texture and shape. Growth in our experience of God requires both light and shadow. Carl Jung writes of our “shadow” side, St. John of the Cross of “The Dark Night of the Soul,” and C. S. Lewis of “the law of undulation.” For our relationship with God to deepen we must learn to trust and obey even when we do not see or feel the Holy Presence.
- *Exposure* refers to the amount of light which falls on the light sensitive recording surface. To create a good picture requires an adequate combination of time [shutter speed] and lens opening [f stop]. For a particular exposure-value the time and opening combination can be varied, but as time decreases opening must increase and vice-versa. To receive the Holy Presence into our lives we must allow sufficient time and opening.
- *Depth of Field:* By varying the possible combinations of lens opening[*f stop*] and shutter speed one can control the depth of the area in the picture which is in focus. The smaller the f stop, the deeper the *in-focus* distance. In spiritual reading [*lectio-divina*] longer time with briefer passages may bring our spirits into better focus.

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