

A Theology of Keith Wasserman

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As a person, I have lived my life in the absence of significant cultural diversity for most of the forty-five years I have been alive. Born into a middle-class suburban family, I grew up seeing very little of people who were different from me. There were Italians and a Japanese family in our neighborhood, but they were the exception, and not the norm. I grew up learning that people unlike me were often less than me. African Americans, Poles, Italians, Jews, and many more were the constant butt of jokes in the household and among the people in our social setting.

Although I would tell you, "I was not like that," in a subtle way, I was. The underlying mentality I had is clearest in my memories as a young adult when my sister announced that she wanted to join the Peace Corps. I remember telling her, as did others in the family, that it was a dangerous job because you would be working with people who could not be trusted (people from another country not like us) and they deserved where they were because they allowed their lives to be the way it was. If they wanted something better, they should pull themselves up by their bootstraps just like we need to do in this country. I did not bare these people any ill will, but they were the way they were because of themselves, it was the way thing were.

Fast forward twenty years, at the age of forty, I was feeling a call to enter into ministry. As I sat working in a gas turbine sump, I had been praying about this call and what it might look like. One condition God was not willing to accept was that I not have to go to another country to work. I did not want to live in some far off village in India or China where my life was in constant danger. As I was working on the turbine, I began to cry and just looked up and said out loud, "Okay, I will do it if that is what you require."

This marked a beginning of a change in my life's philosophy that would continue in my life over the next several years.

Part of the change in my life has been through reading books, such as The Long Loneliness¹, Life Together², Grace Matters³, and many more. These as well as other books posed questions that I had to consider in light of the way I grew up in middle class America. In addition to books there were also people who had an effect on my life's philosophy. One such person was Keith Wasserman, the director of a non-profit organization called Good Works Inc. I met Keith Wasserman in the fall of 2007 as a guest speaker in the class "Foundations in Christian Discipleship"^a.

As I sat and listened to what Keith had to say, I found that he was speaking too many of the questions and issues I was wrestling with at that point. Following the class, I met with Keith and we talked. This talk turned into doing two January internships at Good Works Inc. While there and in the past year, I have gotten to know Keith better and was finding answers to issues that I was struggling with in my own spiritual development.

The ministry Keith was given by God is with the rural poor in the southern Appalachian counties in southeast Ohio. Before I spent time at Good works and with Keith, I felt that God was leading me in the direction of working with "Least of These". As I worked and conversed with Keith, I realized that God had put me in touch with a person who was trying to live out what God had prepared for him to do in a manner that combined what scripture implores us to do, to seek out the poor, with the building of community within the community these people came from. For Keith/Good Works it is

^a This class was taught by Ellen Marmon in the fall of 2007 at Asbury Theological Seminary.

not enough to just help people, but they envision a goal of building a community that will then help to sustain the people and the community.

Their theology is one that embodies love of God, for their neighbors and embraces community in the way Jesus, His disciples, and those who followed them had community. As I interviewed Keith, it became clearer and clearer that Keith's Theology was not systematic, process, historical, natural, liberation or any of the standard theologies espoused today. Keith is not a theologian's theologian, or in the word of Albert Outler in describing John Wesley, Keith is "no theological titan, no system builder, no theologian's theologian....By design and intent he is a folk theologian⁴." I say this because Keith's theology, like Wesley's, has no academic or political backing. And instead of there being one of the types of theology noted above, again, like Wesley, Keith has "various types of divinities⁵" that make up his theology. Hence, I feel that Keith, like Wesley has a "conjunctive theology", one that is not an either/or, but a both/and^b.

Also keeping in line with Wesley, if you press Keith for a definition of his theology, he turns to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral⁶. Scripture is used to inform on tradition, reason, and experience. I believe that this group of characteristic does not form a systematic or exhaustive interpretation of Keith's theology⁷. I would also say that Keith's theology is centered on God, this fact will become clearer as this paper progresses.

The following paper will briefly look at the early development of Keith's understanding of Christianity, then explore the aspects that make up the theology that

^b The idea/understanding of a "conjunctive theology" comes from Kenneth J. Collins class notes for the fall semester at Asbury Theological Seminary for the year 2008, page 13.

has developed in Keith over the years, and then move to the application of this theology as applied at Good Works Inc. in their attempt to live out God's calling to them. A good deal of the information for this report concerning Keith/Good Works has been gathered through one-on-one interviews with Keith Wasserman and through materials located on Good Works Inc.'s web page (www.good-works.net) and blog site. The transcripts of the interviews are attached for reference.

Keith came to Christ at the age of 17 in the Baptist Church. At this point, Keith was reading Scripture, internalizing and memorizing it as he read. As a member of the church he learned the values of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism⁸. These values along with the Scripture he was learning were the foundation for what he was to do with the rest of his life.

Shortly after his conversion, Keith enrolled at Ohio University located in Athens Ohio. As a student, he was enrolled in a simultaneous four year bachelor's degree and two year associate's degree program in mental health. It was in this setting that Keith began to become interested in finding out how his faith intersected with his line of studies in the mental health field. The Journal of Psychology and Theology, was first tool that Keith read that attempted to bridge these two parts of his life. The journal was extremely intriguing to Keith because it gave a real life example of what he was pondered at this point in his life.

It was during this time period that Keith started to develop his concepts of "Ministry of mercy, or the ministry of justice and engagement with the poor"⁹. This idea or concept had been absent from what was learned as he attended church following his conversion. However, what he had learned in the church and from memorizing and

internalizing Scripture was the undergirding that supported these new thoughts he was having. At this time, Scripture that may not have been fully understood previously, started to find circumstances in which they were brought to the surface. What Keith was experiencing is common among Christians, God allows for or places issues/trials before us so that we can then start to better understand them and grow in them^c. We may know a great many truths from Scripture, but sometimes, until we are confronted by them we do not truly understand or know what to do with them.

In response to these feelings, while still in class and participating in three internships, Keith organized a program for visiting “shut-ins^d”, taught a class called “Counseling the Older Adult”, and opened his house to allow “displaced persons^e” a place to sleep and eat. The experiences Keith had from his conversion to this point are what he considered “The bedrock of the formulation of the theology that would later be articulated through writing and practices¹⁰”.

If you ask Keith what he was thinking or why he took homeless people into his house, somewhere in the explanation he will tell you that he suffered from “naïveté”. Prior to Keith taking strangers into his home, he had never seen this action modeled by other Christians or non-Christians. Keith will tell you that God had blessed him with the gift of naïveté. He describes the gift of naïveté in the following manner:

“Had I know then what I know now, I would have never started the shelter for the homeless in the basement of my own house.

Knowledge would have sabotaged my initiative at faith. But, God

^c During our interviews, Keith several times referred to the first chapter of James, more specifically verses 2-4 in which we are told to expect trial, rejoice in them, and allow for our faith to grow in them.

^d “Shut-ins” was the term in the 1980’s that referred to senior citizens.

^e “Displaced persons” was the term used in the 1980’s to describe homeless persons.

used my not knowing to get me to do something I would have never done had I known what I was doing. Therein lies the mystery of faith¹¹".

For many of us, this must seem like an alien idea, not something that would be part of the make up of a theology for anyone. In our culture this is alien because we thrive on knowing exactly what it is we are doing and why we are doing it. Information is a very important part of why we act sometimes and not other times. So when Keith says he was given the gift of naiveté and explains it, many people are perplexed as they sit and listened. I have seen this as I have sat and listen to Keith talk on this subject in churches. But Keith's argument is compelling as he refers to Moses in Exodus three, someone we all know.

Keith points out that Moses, in the early stages of his conversation with God, asks the question "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?¹²" God responds and says "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.¹³" If you were to ask this question of someone and they gave you this response, we would look at them in disbelief. Keith will tell you that this is not an answer to the question; it is not even what Moses asked. But on some level, God is answering Moses, he is telling Moses, I will be with you, so do not worry about who you are or what I am asking you to do, just know I will be with you. This is what Keith believes Jesus is saying in the last line of the Gospel of Matthew, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age¹⁴." We need to trust in this, God will be with us. In the end, although he calls it naiveté, what it

really means is Lord, I am going to trust you because I have never done this before, so please lead and I will stay close to you.

Closely associated with Keith's Theology of naiveté is a theology of failure. As Keith talks about the gift of naiveté, he contends that even though we are naiveté and God is with us, we are still somewhat unsure of what we are doing. Hence we are probably going to make mistakes, get things wrong and mess up. However, this is not as bad as it may seem because through these mistakes and problems, we are able to learn things through our mistakes that otherwise we would never learn. The mistakes we make lead us to what Keith refers to as "second generation questions"¹⁵. These questions are things that nobody would have thought of until your right in the middle of something. The answering of these questions energized Keith as he has sought to figure out what the solutions were and how to avoid these pitfalls in the future. He sees this "being energized" as confirming of his call.

So, even in failure, we can see positive out comes. But to able to see the positive of failure often depends on the vantage point you are looking at it from. As we look back at Jesus death, we see nothing but glory because we are alive this side of the resurrection. This was not so for the men and women who were following Jesus after His death on the cross. Actually, those following Jesus probably saw this as absolute failure. It would come as no surprise if they thought about hanging up their hats and returned to their previous lives. However, three days later, this failure turned into victory for these same people. Just as those following Jesus learned more about who God was in Jesus' presumed failure at the cross; Keith believes that we as Christians learn more though failure.

This, like naiveté, is countercultural. In the same way our culture want us to stop and analyze everything we are about to do from a thousand different perspectives, it also preaches that failure is not acceptable. Yes, we give lip service to “we learn from our mistakes”, but how many people really buy into its okay to make mistakes. This is at the heart of what Keith is saying. We need to put our self-esteem, our pride, our identity aside and be naiveté enough to walk out on the limb and make mistakes.

Keith points to the apostle Peter who not only failed his Master, but also then watched as Jesus dies a humiliating death. Although Peter had failed, Jesus appears to the apostles and Peter is not excluded, but include. In Matthew and Mark, Peter, along with the others, is sent into the world by Jesus^f. In John’s Gospel, Peter is pulled aside and told to take care of and tend Jesus’ sheep^g. In his failure, Keith sees Peter learning that God/Jesus still loves him, Jesus is asking Peter to follow Him, and ultimately he is learning what is important in the Kingdom of God¹⁶.

Jesus also points to another issue when he is speaking to Peter in the last chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus lets Peter know the type of death he will have, and says follow me^h. Here, Jesus is asking Peter to follow Him and suffer for Him, to partner with Jesus and suffer. Again, this is very a countercultural idea not only in America but in our churches as well. I think that suffering may be one of the most important parts of Keith’s theology.

In discussing this issue, Keith brings up the story of the woman at the well. Keith says concerning this story:

^f Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15

^g John 21:15-23

^h John 21:18-19

“In my opinion, Jesus looks at her and says, “I, who speak to you, I am the Messiah.” This is inspiring to me. Here’s a suffering woman, and I think that suffering people have the edge on us in knowing God. When we choose suffering, choose to suffer with others, then, we enter into the suffering of Christ. What does that mean? It means we begin to connect with God in ways that those not suffering don’t¹⁷.”

If John Wesley were preaching on this, he would recognize the tension that exists in what Keith is saying. Thus far, each of these religious truths have pivoted on a paradox¹⁸, but none so pointed as this. “Come and be happy suffering with me”. Would you go? Would you have come along side this woman who was already suffering as Jesus did? Keith does “enter into there suffering”, and views it as a privilege. It is a privilege because we are invited. We may not get an invitation, but we are welcomed into other areas of a person’s life, the joys and the suffering. Keith says of this experience that “This is where I love the mystical side of our faith, because somehow being with them in their pain is being with Jesus^{i 19}”.

As I understand Keith, it is not only in suffering myself, but being willing to suffer along side others that is just as important. It is also in watching those you come along side continue in the ways that have brought them to this place. No matter your expectations for them to have a better life, or the help you offer refused or used in a way contraire to what was expected. They continue in their addiction issues, making bad

ⁱ Keith is alluding to Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

decisions, and perhaps not dealing with mental health issues correctly. When we stop to help these people, we will suffer when they suffer.

As I listened to Keith speak about suffering, of coming along side, of suffering with the person, I recalled the story Celisse, a drunk who Andre Trocme (a Protestant Pastor in France) had helped out in France in the 30's. As Trocme and his ministry came along side Celisse, he had stop drinking, beating his wife, and selling all they possessed for alcohol. However, Trocme was reassigned to another church in 1934. Despite all the improvement and changes in his life, Celisse started to drink again and then committed suicide²⁰. Although Andre had suffered with Celisse to sober him up, he suffered more when he found out about the suicide. In the same way, what Keith is relating is that we will suffer the same fate as Trocme and suffer with those we come along side.

Keith also issues a warning concerning suffering. There is a temptation on many peoples part is to try and fix people who are suffering. Keith is very pointed that he does not want to run peoples lives for them so that they can be better people, all he wants is to enter into people's lives. Once you have entered into a person's life, you will be privileged to begin entering into their suffering.

To suffer with people, to walk into a situation without all the knowledge, or to fail in a situation can be extremely inefficient. The more we know about a situation and the less involved personally we become, the more likely we are to succeed and use our time efficiently. This is a very "Western" concept; to use our time wisely and efficiently. However, Keith is quick to point out that ministry is not always efficient. In fact, it is often extremely inefficient.

Keith's explanation of naiveté is very inefficient. God calls and you answer, and then you walk into situations that you do not have answers to. In the example of Moses, it would have much more efficient if God had chosen a powerful king to free the Israelites, or just simply transported them to Moses. In Keith's situation, it would have been much more efficient if God had called the government and had them provide money and houses for all the people. But these are not the ways of God; He does not operate in an efficient mode that behooves us, but Him. In being inefficient in both of these situations, both Moses and Keith had to trust God would see them through what He was calling them to do.

Just as naiveté is inefficient, so is coming along side people and suffering with them. It would be a great deal more efficient to just give people from a distance what they need. Not to learn their names, find out their history, or learn a single thing about them. All you really need to know is if they are going to cause trouble or not. If so, do not let them in. If they are going to behave, they can come and we will give them what they need. In Keith's way of thinking, if you follow this model, you are doing what you think is good, not what God thinks is good. In the act of coming along side a person and getting to know them, you open yourself up to pain and suffering. As we do this, we "connect to God, we fulfill what God desires for us, which is to know Him and make Him known"²¹. Being inefficient and suffering with others reveals God to us and through us.

Of all the disciplines cover thus far, truly the most inefficient one is failure in our western mind set. We tend not to see failure as an opportunity to learn, but simple as failure. If we do not succeed, we have failed, and this is very inefficient. This is so because instead of what we started out to do being completed, we now have to go

back, spend more time and money to see why it failed and correct it. In the mean time, those who have failed are removed and replaced. These people are learning that failure is a one way ticket to nowhere.

Keith however sees failure as an efficient way to teach, and for us to learn. It is not so much about the failure or failures as it is about what is learned from them so that they are not made again. Again, interwoven in this message is the idea that God is with us. If our intentions were true and focused on God, then he will see us through these failures. In God, our inefficient failures can be transformed into efficient growth in God.

Each of these disciplines as I have said are countercultural, perhaps even un-American, and at best illogical. However, as we have looked at naiveté, failure, inefficacy, and suffering, there is another striking resemblance between John Wesley's theology and that of Keith's. Simply put, there is always a tension between what Keith does, and what we want. We want to help those who are the "least of these", but, we do not want to do it blind, we want information about what it is we are getting ourselves into; We want all the answers before we start so that there are no failures, only successes; We want to help only to a point, one where there is separation between us and them so we can not be hurt. We desire to help but with little or no cost to ourselves.

To illustrate this point, Keith has related the following story in my presence several times. It is a reworking of the "Good Samaritan" story from Scripture:

A man was beaten and robbed and left on the side of the road in the ditch. The first person who happened by is a doctor. Upon regarding the man, the doctor tells him, "You look very bad and you

seem to need medical attention, here is an appointment, just come into my office and we will take a look at you". The doctor places the appointment next to the man and leaves. The next person along is a social worker who says, "It looks like you need some help, here is a bunch of paper work, fill it out and bring it by my office and we will see what we can do". This person also leaves. The next person that comes by is a politician. The politician sees the man and asks what has happened. When he hears the story, he says "this is a very dangerous part of the road; I will have people look into this and get back to you". Before leaving, the politician leaves the man with literature about how safe the surrounding area is and all of the sights to see. Next the politicians aids show up and see that this is indeed a bad stretch of road and very unsightly. So, they go back, craft a bill, and get it passed. The following day they go out and install a garbage can so that people will no longer litter.

As we read this story, we see that each person did stop and help. The doctor, social worker, and politician all helped, but in the end, all that anyone can see is a pile of paper that needs to be cleaned up. The help offered did not cause them to go outside what they knew, it had no possibility of failure because each person did offer their brand of help, it did not require coming along side and perhaps suffering with the man in the ditch, and it did not require the people to use their time inefficiently.

In the conjunctive theology I see and hear in Keith's words, we are called to stop, get out of our cars, and help this man, even if we are unsure of what we are doing, even

if we might botch things up, even if stopping to help will cause us pain or make us late. In stopping to help, we have the both/and of Keith's theology: We have holiness and are both holy and practicing the moral law (love), and we have grace, both free grace given by God alone to us and the one we are helping, and co-operant grace a divine/human co-operation initiated by God and through God. In this sense, it is by faith alone, knowing that God is with us, that we are enabled to act in this conjunctive manner. It is not just an "assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance in the blood of Christ"²².

Entwined with these aspects of Keith's theology is the understanding that God is with us, so in each thing he does, he is doing it not for self, but for God. This is a good beginning to understanding Keith's theology as it pertains to Worship. At the age of 17, Keith's first experience of worship was in the Baptist church he attended and his understanding was that it was locational, or you go to the church for worship. In the ministry which Keith found his calling, he realized that his understanding of worship, coming out of the Baptist church, was different than what he was experiencing. Keith started to see worship not defined as locational but as spiritual. He began to see that while worship can happen in a location, it is not contained to that location only.

During our talks, Keith said "Worship is our joyful and loving response to God's grace in our lives"²³. As I heard Keith say this, the underlying thought is that worship is our ongoing effort to let Christ shine through us, to let it be less about us and more about Jesus, verbally, and with our actions and examples. Hence, worship is not a once or twice a week meeting or gathering, but an ongoing way of living. In everything I do, here God it is for you, the heart of worship, making it all about Jesus. So, in our

failure, suffering, naiveté, and inefficiency as well as our joy and triumphs, we are always worshiping because we give it all to God

As I reflect on this and what I know of Keith, I am drawn to the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor. Both of these commandments are central to the ministry that Keith began in 1981. In a manner of speaking then, the ministry Keith has started is not initially about those he is serving as much as it is about worshiping God. God is the subject of what Keith does and when he makes an effort, it is for God.

Keith also believes that worship as defined here confronts what we think of as success in the western mind set. This is seen when we labor to love those who have been violated or sinned against or those who are reaping the consequences of their own sin. We make this effort and labor and it is for God only. We do not labor to get good statistics such as baptisms or conversions, nor do we put the effort in to grow our churches or to get a better salary. It all comes back to God; God working through us to His glory, not ours.

Often we have the minds set of thinking about worship as an outward act only. However, worship is not only God working through us, but it is at the same time God working in us. Keith speaks to four paradigms: The garden, the wilderness, discipline of the Lord, and Trials²⁴. In each paradigm, suffering in the garden with/as Jesus did, alone in the wilderness, being disciplined, or in times of trial, God is working in us. God uses these times in our life to get our attention and point it in the direction He wants us to follow. Keith sees two purposes for the act of worship by God acting in us: First for

us to be God's own, and second to transform us to work with others²⁵. For Keith, it is fulfilling to know that God can use Him, that he has potential.

Because of Keith's understanding of worship being everything one does, the church model becomes irritating and troublesome. As stated previously, many of us think of worship as being for one or two hours on Sunday and perhaps on Wednesday. When this is the only way we see worship, then the church gathered becomes something different than the church scattered. When we leave the church location, does it stop being important to continue our worship? John Wesley when speaking about holiness speaks of the inward signs, "habits of lowliness, meekness, purity, faith, hope, and love of God and man²⁶". He sees all outward expressions as tempered by these inward habits. Just as Keith is speaking about taking what we do in the church building with us into the world, I believe Wesley is saying the same. It is not enough to just do in the building, but it must be with us always, just as Jesus has promised to be with us always^j.

Keith sees this problem as compounded when we speak. From the perspective of language, we invite people to a worship service. In doing this, what we are implying is that there is a place, somewhere you go to do worship. While this is true, it is certainly not the only place we "do worship". Then when these people show up for to worship, they are greeted in a manner similar to this "**We** are happy that **you** could join **us** today and worship with **us**". So not only are we conveying that this is the place to do worship, but **we** are also letting these people know that **we** are the church and **we** are glad they could be with **us**. This language instead of building unity creates disunity. Could we not just say that it is a great day to be worshiping God as the body of

^j This is in reference to Jesus saying he would be with us always in Matthew 28:20.

believers? This may seem trivial, but when taken in connection with many other small points may really convey that this is ours and you do not yet belong. To Keith and myself, this is not what should be conveyed intentionally or **unintentionally**.

Included in the issues of language and worship are also the words “Clergy” and “Laity”. While Keith does not want to do away with clergy, he sees a problem when the clergy are the only ones leading/doing worship. The hindrance to worship Keith sees in this is that the laity never do much of anything except show up at a given time and go to the service. Keith does not see this in and of itself as the problem, but he always comes back to one passage from Scripture, **in Ephesians 4:11** “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”.²⁷” When the priest, minister, or pastor runs all the operations, are they equipping the saints? Is the laity being prepared to do all the works God has for them to do? Most importantly, if you do not have to do anything but show up on Sunday or Wednesday, are you worshipping God all week long. I agree with Keith concerning this and wonder what our churches and congregations would look like if people knew that the expectation is that they be active in the congregational life of a church.

The above passage from Ephesians brings up another topic, unity, in particular, unity of faith. Unity has two purposes according to Keith, “That the world would know that the Father sent the Son, and so that the word would believe^{k 28}”. The unity that

^k This information comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 17, verses 6-26, specifically verse 23 and verse 20 respectfully.

Jesus is speaking to here in Keith's understanding is relational unity. In an abbreviated form, Jesus is saying "I am in You God and You are in Me, and just as We are one, make these disciples one in Us". The unity here is not among the disciples but first between God and Jesus, then between God/Jesus and us and is all relational. If we as a body of believers can not have this relation with God, then we can not have it among ourselves. In worship, we all need to seek relationship with God and then all other Christians. Keith does understand that there will be denominational divisions, but he does not see this as an obstacle to forming true unity in the body when we are truly worshiping God inwardly, outwardly, and in our entire daily lives.

An aspect that Keith sees as wanting in the church is reconciliation. Keith sees this one aspect of Christianity as one of the most, if not the most, central themes to the Scripture. Keith sums up the broad topic of reconciliation this way:

"From Genesis to Revelation, you see this movement of a loving Creator wanting to be in relationship with a broken humanity. It's the broadest theme in Scripture. You see this in such a wide-ranging way—how far will God go? Broad theme, the varieties of ways in which we see loving Father/Creator building bridges back to His broken humanity. Unlike humans who get tired and say, "Enough!", God doesn't seem to have that word in God's vocabulary, instead we hear God say, "Grace!"

I agree with Keith on the subject of reconciliation. I, like Keith see the objective of being a Christian is to fully understand the story of redemption from Scripture. God himself has redeemed us; He has laid down the life of His Son so that we could be

redeemed. So we say “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people²⁹”.

However, this is not the case in our churches, or with those who are Christian. Keith mused while we were speaking about having fifteen minutes before each service to go around and make sure that if anyone has anything against another, they are able to clear the air between them. In order this to happen, we must remember that redemption starts with and ends with God. In this aspect, reconciliation between each other is dependent on our relation to God/Jesus and just as they are one, we must be one. How though can we be one with God/Jesus if I am harboring something in my heart against my brother? And further, if I am not one with God/Jesus, am I really living a lifestyle that worships God in all I do and declares to other “I am a follower of Christ”?

For Keith, there are two main points about reconciliation that we must consider. The first is presenting our gift at the altar and we remember that my brother is upset with me¹. This is where the practice of humility comes into play within reconciliation. We must go to the person we have something against or we know has something against us. Sometimes we will know what we have done, but sometimes we don't, but we have to go in humility and ask. The point is that we are to do this before we worship God. The act of going to the person is a type of worship. But once we are reconciled, then God is pleased with what I'm doing at the altar with Him. Keith also adds that:

“If I'm not willing to take care of the horizontal relationships, then I'm hypocritical when I come before Him (vertical relationship). It is the Spirit of God that prompts us to do these acts. We put cover-ups and layers onto our hearts trying to dismiss this prompting³⁰.”

¹ This is from Jesus' sermon on the mount, Matthew 5:23-24

The second point is intentionally loving people who haven't sinned against you, but have sinned against others³¹. Our role in this situation is to be reconcilers, to facilitate reconciliation for the goal of unity. The goal of unity is not an end in and of itself; the end purpose is unity is for the glory of God. What we are attempting to do in this situation is bring about reconciliation between divisive parties for God's glory.

Being the leader of Good Works has placed Keith in a position whereby he is able to utilize the practices that have been described thus far. For Keith, the leadership he shows is not just for the organization, but for God. This being said, he does not separate himself from the people that work at Good Works, from those who are clients, or from those who support. In many ways, Keith as a leader lives a life that embodies community. Keith takes this seriously, and he sees this type of leadership in Jesus. Keith is convinced that Jesus was committed to community, laid down principles for community, and was trying to build it up at all times.

At this point in Keith's life, he has been going through a change. This has affected his leadership style **and** has moved from a founder director style of leadership to become a sustainer director. Now, Keith's position as a leader is more about the development of those with whom he works, not just about what they produce for the organization. He notes that the difference between social agency and faith-based organization is that personal development is as important as the work you do. In short, it is not about having good numbers; it is about developing each person to their fullest potential. In this view, Keith brings to life in this ministry setting exactly what he says concerning the pitfall of clergy: Through God, he is raising up saints and equipping them

to do the work God has for them to do^m. It is not enough to just do the work that has to be done, What Keith wants is for each person to move beyond that and become who God wants them to be.

Although this is true, leadership is not always what it is said to be. For Keith there are aspects of leadership that are **not as rose (?) as other**. The first is that leadership is lonely. Jesus experienced this in the garden when he went to pray and all of those with him slept. The second is that ministry is fragile. Keith has come to realize that at any given moment anyone in the community can get up and say “I am out of here”, and there is nothing one can do about this. This is particularly painful when there is never any reconciliation between the person and the community. When Jesus told the people that He was the living bread, it says latter that many of his disciples turned and deserted Himⁿ. The third is that the real fruit of a ministry is not seen for years if ever. When Keith spoke of this, I thought of Paul who at the end of his life was still writing letters to various churches but knew, because he was under house arrest, that he would never see the outcome of what he was telling the people.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity^{32!}” The first sentence is not only a good introduction to Life Together as it delivers the overarching theme of the book in one line, but also of Good Works Inc. Namely, between Jesus’ first coming and the advent of the New Jerusalem, we as Christians are called to live lives in community with other Christians and non-Christians.

Good works is a ministry like none other I have experienced in my life to this point. The organization works on many levels in the community to serve and support

^m This is in reference to Ephesians 4:11-13

ⁿ This is taken from John 6:22-70

those in the community. To name a few: The Timothy House^o, the Hannah House^p, Life in Transition, the Good Works Small Businesses, the Transformation Station, Friday Night Life & Kids Club, Hope and Possibilities, and Samaritan Projects. In addition those who work at Good Works partake in meals together and worship together weekly.

I am sure many other organizations like Good Works have similar programs. However, what made this community different to me is their intentionality in being with the people they seek to serve. As note previously, Keith desires not just to fix a problem or help, but he wants to come along side the people. This principle is evident in each of the programs listed above. An example of this is Friday Night Life where each Friday, different groups come and host a dinner for all that want to come. When you **site** to eat, you do not have one or two tables with all the Good Works people sitting around them. What you do find are the Good Works personnel, the volunteers, and the hosts for that week sitting at the tables with people from the community. While serving meals at other locations with different groups, I have never seen this done. What I have found are the servers sit together and those being served sitting separately. While I am sure there are good reasons for this, I am unsure if the reasons are valid in every case.

While at Good Works the last two Januaries^q, I did not find an “us them” mentality. An example of this is the Timothy House which houses homeless persons from the surrounding 9 counties. When you show up to volunteer, you are told to interact with those staying at the house. You have a shared meal, shared chores, you talk with clients and socialize. Everyone is involved in all that happens. People are not

^o The Timothy house a shelter providing a ‘care-community’ for the rural homeless in rural Appalachia.

^p The Hannah House and Life in Transition are a long term solution for people who choose to work through long term problems by living in a community.

^q January 2008 and 2009.

made to feel marginalized. The Good Works Timothy house is not a shelter, The Good Works Timothy House provides shelter³³.

This does not mean that no one on the Good Works staff will ever make a mistake though. They will make mistakes and they will raise second, third, and perhaps fourth generation questions as they go along. However, their goal will always be the same, to worship God in doing the work He has for them to do. And Keith and other leaders on staff will use these mistakes to raise up future leaders, and to teach them and equip them for the work they have to do.

Mistakes will happen in dealings with those being served and within the Good Works organization. From time to time hard feeling will be felt. From time to time there will be a need to reconcile, to have reconciliation be part of their lives. Within the organization they have a practice called clear. Clear is intentionally designed to be a non-threatening way for people who have issues with each other to come together and “clear” the air between them. Keith pointed out in our conversations that in order for a community to work, there must be reconciliation. “Clear” as a practice provides this and allows the community to work and function, and develops a deeper trust among the group and the broader community they serve.

“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ³⁴”. This quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life Together I think sums up what it means to work at Good works. There day begins with Jesus and ends with Jesus. In each of the practices related in this paper, naiveté, suffering, leadership, reconciliation, inefficiency, or worship, they all have Jesus in common. There is a concern for doing what Jesus wants and for being in relationship with Jesus through what they are doing. It is not

enough to just be doing a good deed, it must be for Jesus. They are walking in Jesus foot steps carrying on the mission Jesus started while on this earth. This again goes back to the purpose of Good Works: To bring the Good news to the poor.

I also see a unity in the work that is performed at Good works. The unity is seen in two distinct ways. First is the unity that the community shares, both staff members, people from the neighborhood, and with people from the larger community. Good Works allows people from the entire southeast region into community with them. They are truly interested in the people and it shows as they continually come to events such as the walk for the homeless and Friday night life. The principle of being clear among the staff materializes as they go out into the broader community and people feel safe and are willing to enter into relations where there is mutual “coming along side” on the part of the staff and the broader community.

The second is in working with the churches in the area to raise awareness and to create unity in the body. The only other model I have seen that attempts to do this is D.A.R.T. or the Direct Action and Research training center. The chapter they have in Lexington Kentucky is called B.U.I.L.D. or Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct-action. The purpose of BUILD is to create a self-sustaining, interfaith, interracial, proactive organization, rooted in religious congregations, which is capable of creating system-wide, long-lasting change for low-to-moderate-income communities in Lexington/Fayette County, Kentucky³⁵. In the same way BUILD has done this in Lexington, Good Works is doing the same in the nine county region around Athens Ohio. Again, Good Works has attempted to come along side the churches in the area

to promote unity in the body and work towards the common goal the ministry Jesus started

The purpose of Good Works is to fulfill Jesus own mission to "bring good news to the poor". I believe that the examples noted above show that through God, Keith's theology has been successfully articulated by the organization. The organization works to come along side people, to live with them where they are, to get to know them and to live in their suffering and in their joys. In doing so, they are creating unity in the body of believers and witnessing to those who are not believers through their actions. Most important of all, they are giving it all to God. They are worshiping God in all of their action.

[†] This is from the Gospel of Luke 4:18

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Hi Hank,

I just finished reading your paper on Keith Wasserman and found it most interesting. It is of course not the sort of paper one would normally write for an academic course in method and praxis in theology, but I can see the relevance in that it shows that how our theology is profoundly shaped by our life experiences and sense of divine calling. In the Anglican context which shaped Wesley, practical theology is learning theology in the context of the believing and worshipping community as distinct from the Continental methodology of Calvin where theology is largely done in a systematic and academic setting that depends primarily upon a formal theological exegesis of Scripture. Of course, that is important, but the Anglican tradition emphasized that theology is best done within the context of the worshipping community, praying and reading the Scriptures together and participating in the liturgy of the church (e.g., the Book of Common Prayer), and this was extended by Wesley beyond the church cathedrals to the fields where people worked and died. Significantly, Wesley's theology is contained in what is called his standard sermons, not in an academic textbook in systematic theology. Likewise, the theology of Anglicanism was contained in the sermons (homilies) written largely by the English Reformed, Thomas Cranmer. Undoubtedly living on the streets and working with desparately needy people will surely shape one's relationship to God and one's theology. Unfortunately so much in the Western Church consists of formalities in theology, which more often than not has led to an inadequate theological understanding often associated with the less than biblical methodologies associated with Bultmann and John Cobb, to cite but a couple of hundred possible names. If the gospel is intended to change the world, then it won't be the gospel of most modern theologies. Keith Wasserman's Good Works ministries is a reminder that theology is intended to serve the needs of the church and not the other way around.

Thanks for sharing your experiences with me.

Your grade for the paper and course is A.

Blessings,

Larry Wood