

Grace under Pressure: Wesleyan Moves from Charity and Advocacy to Deep Solidarity

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Abstract

In the Wesleyan traditions, grace is often more readily experienced under pressure than on the mountaintops. The means of grace help illustrate this, in terms of John Wesley's concern to hold together the so-called works of piety and works of mercy. As a result, this paper will argue that revival, reform, and revolution—the theme of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies 2018—belong together inextricably and that current ecclesial models of charity and advocacy need to be complemented and reshaped by what I have been calling deep solidarity (with Kwok Pui-Lan and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger).

Introduction

In the Wesleyan traditions, grace is often more readily experienced under pressure than on the mountaintops, a point I have made repeatedly in recent years.¹ In other words, grace is experienced more profoundly in the struggles of life than in occasional moments of triumph, elation, and ecstasy. Without taking experiences of grace under pressure into account, both Christian theology and praxis are easily distorted and misled, a problem which might explain in

¹ Joerg Rieger *Grace under Pressure: Negotiating the Heart of the Methodist Traditions* (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2011), Portuguese and Spanish translations.

part the woes of Christianity in the United States today. In Wesleyan theology, grace under pressure is manifest in preventient grace, helping people understand who they are in relation to God in the midst of the pressures of life, including a growing sense of their limitations and the reality of sin. Grace under pressure reminds us that sin is not just a personal matter but is manifest in distorted relationships within communities and the threats to the survival of millions of people and the planet. Next, justifying grace initiates a new relationship with God in the midst of pressure, and thereby with others, overcoming the injustices of distorted relationships that take both personal and structural forms. Sanctifying grace, finally, is the grace-driven effort to work through the pressures of life, beginning with the most severe forms, with the goal of overcoming sin in all its embodiments, personal and structural, local and global.

In all these manifestations, grace under pressure engages in struggles against sin and evil. It all begins with grace opening our eyes to the realities of sin and evil for the first time under preventient grace, and continues with an ever-deepening engagement of sin and evil as people move along the process of sanctification towards perfection. As a result, grace is always engaged in the most profound pressures of the world; on the mountaintops it is lame, tame, and often delusional.

Means of Grace

A theological reflection on the Wesleyan means of grace helps illustrate this, keeping in mind John Wesley's concern to hold together the so-called works of piety and works of mercy. To recap a case I have made in more detail elsewhere, Wesley defines means of grace, in accordance with the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, as “outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might

convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”² In other words, means of grace are channels provided by God through which we experience God’s grace. To put it in more contemporary language, means of grace are special points at which God connects with us and we connect with God. The purpose of the means of grace is the cultivation of our relationship with God and with others. Grace is, therefore, essentially a relationship, and because relationships are dynamic, Wesleyans believe that we can grow (as well as decline) in grace.

Thinking through the traditional Anglican list of the means of grace, which includes reading the Bible, prayer, and Holy Communion, in terms of relationship would be a fruitful exercise. After all, it is not just that we read the Bible, the Bible also reads us. In praying we not only speak but also listen, and Holy Communion is more about relationship with God and others than about miraculous transactions from the top down.³ However, since space is limited, let me move on to the other aspect of John Wesley’s theology of the means of grace that has been neglected by the church.

The older Wesley broadens his notion of the means of grace by adding what he calls “works of mercy” to the traditional “works of piety” of reading the Bible, prayer, and Holy Communion. In a late sermon titled “On Zeal,” first published in 1781, Wesley notes that works of mercy are also means of grace, aware that “this is not commonly adverted to.”⁴ Moreover, he gives them a special place: Whenever works of mercy interfere with works of piety, he argues, the former “are to be preferred.” Wesley explains further that “even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, ‘at charity’s almighty call’—when we are called to relieve the

² John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 381.

³ For more detailed reflections, see Rieger, *Grace under Pressure*.

⁴ John Wesley, “On Zeal,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, Vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 313.

distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.”⁵ Here, grace under pressure enters the picture.

This inclusion of the works of mercy into the means of grace is different from the well-known distinction between the “instituted” and the “prudential” means of grace; works of mercy cannot be relegated to a secondary list of prudential means of grace.⁶ That works of mercy belong to the core of the Wesleyan tradition is reflected in the central place of Wesley’s General Rules, which in United Methodism belong to the non-negotiable doctrinal standards. In the General Rules, works of piety (“attending upon all the ordinances of God”) are mentioned last, while works of mercy come first (framed in terms of “doing no harm” and “doing good”).⁷

In addition, Wesley clearly states that Methodists already in his own time have fallen from grace because they were not aware that works of mercy are genuine means of grace.⁸ There were Methodists who read the Bible every day, prayed even more often, and attended Holy Communion as often as possible—good and solid church people that any pastor would welcome with open arms—but who still had fallen from grace because the neglected the works of mercy as means of grace. One can only wonder what Wesley might say about contemporary Methodism in this regard.

Adding works of mercy to the works of piety and making them an essential part of the

⁵ Wesley, “On Zeal,” 314.

⁶ For Wesley the works of mercy are not just “prudential” in the sense that they would be optional means of grace, which may or may not be used according to changing circumstances. Wesley’s distinction between “instituted” and “prudential” means of grace does not apply here because works of mercy are not listed in either category. Cf. John Wesley, “Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and others, from the year 1744, to 1789,” (*The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed. [London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprinted Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986], hereafter cited as Works), 8:323-24. This is overlooked also by Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies 3 (Metuchen and London: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 5.

⁷ For the General Rules of the United Methodist Church see <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-general-rules-of-the-methodist-church>. Accessed September 3, 2018.

⁸ Cf. John Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” in *The Bicentennial Edition*, Vol. 3, 385.

means of grace has far-reaching implications. Most importantly, works of mercy are now also ordained channels of God's grace and part of grace as a relationship. Works of mercy are not only social outreach but also what I keep calling "inreach," means by which we connect with God and with each other and through which God and others enter our lives: this is the fundamental issue that I will develop further in this paper. Moreover, works of mercy serve as a constant reminder that grace is most powerfully experienced under pressure.

Perhaps the most important result of this constellation is that works of mercy and works of piety are now in a position to reshape each other. We see new aspects of works of piety from the perspective of practicing works of mercy, and practicing works of piety can help us deepen our involvement in works of mercy. Engaging in works of mercy opens up new encounters with the Bible, transforms how we pray, and reshapes our theology of Holy Communion. Works of mercy as means of grace also deepen our experience of preventing, justifying and sanctifying grace. Vice versa, reading the Bible, praying, and Holy Communion informs how we engage in works of mercy. These dynamic interactions that will be developed in what follows are what self-declared centrist approaches to Methodist theology that have profoundly influenced the church for several decades are missing.⁹

Charity and Advocacy

What are the deeper implications of considering works of mercy as means of grace? At the most basic level, works of mercy might be understood in terms of charity. Charity is a time-honored way for Christians to respond to the pressures of the world, and Methodists since the days of John Wesley have been engaged in it. Arguably, charitable giving is how the majority of

⁹ The work of legendary Methodist theologian Albert C. Outler serves as an example for such a centrist approach, picked up more recently by Scott Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

people of faith today believe they can make a difference. Many take it for granted that this is the most faithful response to the pressures of life.

No doubt, charity has done a lot of good, providing relief for hunger, homelessness, poverty, and many other pressures that people face. Yet charity is not the only and perhaps not even the most helpful response to experiences of pressure. Grace under pressure pushes further. To put it bluntly: *Jesus preached good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed rather than charity* (Matt. 11:5, Luke 4:18). What is good news to the poor and the oppressed? Is it to be recipients of handouts—or is it that they will no longer be poor and oppressed?

When understood in terms of the means of grace, our conception of charity as a work of mercy deepens because it will have to be reconceived as a two-way street. As noted above, means of grace are channels of God's grace, and in this framework charity and works of mercy are not just about what Methodists do for others but also what comes back to us. What comes back here, of course, is twofold: an encounter with the other person who is the recipient of a work of mercy and an encounter with God.

Encounters with others and with God open our eyes both for grace as well as for sin—such encounters help us to see more clearly where the pressures are and what the underlying problems might be. For John Wesley and the early Methodists, for instance, engaging with the working poor enabled them to understand some of the problems of early capitalism such as exploitation and sharply increasing inequality.¹⁰ Charity, therefore, is at its best when it begins to push beyond one-way streets. When the eyes of those who engage in charity are opened to what causes poverty and oppression, we move one step closer to the experience of grace under pressure. That this is a step in the right direction is confirmed by hitting a nerve. As Dom Hélder

¹⁰ See the account of Ted Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

Câmara, a former Roman Catholic bishop from Brazil, put it: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.” Even seemingly harmless acts of charitable giving have the potential to open our eyes.

When the one-way street of charity begins to open up to a two-way street, we are led into deeper understandings of the pressures of life, and a deeper search for experiences of grace under pressure begins. Advocacy is often the next step after charity. By advocacy I mean speaking out against injustices that cause pressures and challenging them. Although this may come as a surprise to most Christians and even to some Methodists, advocacy can be understood as a more faithful approach to sin and evil than charity, as it deepens the experience of grace under pressure. Advocacy is solidly grounded in many religious traditions. Many of the Jewish prophets speak out against injustice in the name of God, challenging those who “trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain” (Amos 5:11), and many voices in the New Testament concur.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks of God’s advocacy when she proclaims that the God who lifts up the lowly pushes the powerful from their thrones and fills the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53). Her inspiration is Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10), recognized not only by Christians but also by Jews and Muslims. Jesus, following along these lines, blesses the hungry and the poor and challenges the rich and the full (Luke 6:20-25). To be sure, both the lowly and the powerful as well as the hungry and the rich are experiencing grace under pressure here, albeit in very different ways: those who are forced to endure the pressures experience liberation; those who cause pressures and contribute to them are challenged and prodded to change their ways. Grace under pressure is not “one size fits all.”

Standing in this tradition, John Wesley proclaims that the majority of people were poor not by their own fault but because they were pushed from their lands by wealthy landowners and then exploited in the factories of early capitalism.¹¹ Wesley's categorical opposition to slavery and his support for enslaved people provide another example for the prominent place of advocacy in the Methodist traditions. This kind of advocacy is closely linked with an understanding of the works of mercy as means of grace under pressure: advocacy for others grows out of a deepening concern for those for whom one advocates, a clearer view of understanding of what causes the pressures they experience, and a deeper engagement with the roots of these pressures—all with an eye to how God's grace is already at work under pressure. Advocacy, thus, grows out of a recognition that the one-way street of charity is not enough—a recognition shared by Wesley in many cases.

Advocacy, therefore, brings us one step closer to the experience of grace under pressure and good news to the poor. Instead of works of mercy, however, we might now talk about works of justice. Even though that terminology cannot be found in Wesley, it is clear that he was engaged in works of justice, as his engagement cannot be confined to charity and the giving of alms.

Nevertheless, even advocacy remains limited and does not yet fully embody the insight that works of mercy are means of grace. While a two-way street begins to emerge with advocacy and relationships between self, other, and God gain in importance when compared to charity, the relationship between those who advocate and those for whom they advocate is often still limited. Advocates tend to perceive themselves as standing above those for whom they advocate—sometimes assuming that they are the voice for others who presumably have no voice. This limits

¹¹ In his “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions” of 1772, *Works* 11:56-57, Wesley talks about various causes of poverty, including the monopolizing of farms by the “gentlemen-farmers” and the luxury of the wealthy.

not only the effectiveness of advocacy and the relation to other people but also the depth of relationship with God, which is at the heart of the means of grace tradition.

Advocacy and works of justice that fail to fully embrace the means of grace tradition can lead to advocates overestimating their own power and neglecting the contributions of others and of God. Not surprisingly, advocates often act in patronizing fashion, as if they were in a position to solve the problems of others. In this way, they lose the community support necessary to bring change and tend to stifle the initiative of those for whom they advocate. In the end, advocates without community support often burn out and walk away, or they lower their expectations and return to models of charity, never really experiencing the full potential of grace under pressure.

Both charity and advocacy ultimately amount to reforms of the status quo, as they do not lead to the reconstruction of the deepest problems of the current situation. In this way, they miss not only revolution but also revival—the theme of this year’s Oxford Institute of Methodist Studies being Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism—as will be argued in the conclusions. Unfortunately, in many discussions today, charity and advocacy are the only models that are discussed.

Deep Solidarity

Considering works of mercy as means of grace requires a more holistic response. This is what I am calling “deep solidarity.”¹² Deep solidarity includes both charity and advocacy, but it reaches further. The messages of Amos, Mary, Jesus, and even of John Wesley, can also be interpreted in this way. In what follows, I will argue that talking about works of solidarity

¹² For a more extensive discussion of the term deep solidarity see Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui Lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012); and Joerg Rieger and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger *Unified We Are a Force: How Faith and Labor Can Overcome America’s Inequalities* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2016).

captures the deeper theological meaning of the Wesleyan concept of works of mercy as means of grace.

To begin with, deep solidarity is more profoundly relational than either charity or advocacy. Unlike charity and advocacy, deep solidarity is not a matter of the more privileged supporting the less privileged; neither is it about solving the problems of other people. Deep solidarity is a matter of realizing our deep connectedness with others and with God, that the pressures that affect others might be affecting all of us in some ways, and that nothing will change unless we are facing the pressures of the world together and unless we experience grace under pressure together. Theologically speaking, this requires a more profound doctrine of sin and a more profound doctrine of grace than many of our theologies have to offer.¹³

Those who are experiencing the pressures of our time most severely—like for instance the many children whose families (including nontraditional families and single parents) have trouble making ends meet even in the United States¹⁴—can help us see how sin is distorting all of our lives. Sin, in its most basic theological meaning, is the fracturing of relationships with God and with others, and this affects not only the poorest of the poor. Even the middle class is increasingly pulled into this fracturing of relationships and forced to endure the precariousness of existence and the pressures of our times in new and challenging ways.¹⁵

As we deepen our relationships with others and with God under pressure, we find that our stories are often connected. What is happening at work may serve as an example: “Mean and

¹³ For the theological background of the relation of sin and salvation in Methodist theology see Joerg Rieger, *No Religion but Social Religion: Liberating Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministries, 2018).

¹⁴ 21 percent of all children in the US living below the poverty line, 43 percent live in low-income families that often have trouble making ends meet! See the National Center for Children in Poverty, <http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>. Accessed July 24, 2018.

¹⁵ For a reflection on what is now called the “precariat” see Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

lean production” is practiced today not only in blue-collar factories but also in white-collar settings and even in universities and churches; likewise, low-wage work depresses all wages, and widespread reductions of benefits and violations of worker rights are creeping into all job sectors. All these pressures are rising, and they are further compounded by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and mounting challenges of deportation and the associated separation of families.¹⁶

Mary, the mother of Jesus, provides an example of deep solidarity in the Christian tradition. Instead of speaking for the lowly ones of the world, she recognizes that she is one of them, and she takes sides (as liberation theologians realized decades ago, even the poor need to make an option for the poor). In so doing, she finds a deeper relation to God, who raises up the lowly and pushes the powerful from their thrones (Luke 1:52). Jesus, unlike many of his followers, remains conscious of his lowly beginnings as a construction worker born in a barn and he never renounces his roots. His ministry takes place among people under pressure, in deep solidarity with them and in deep solidarity with God (“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me,” John 17:21). The prophet Amos, a shepherd, likewise does not hesitate to side with those who are getting a raw deal in his time—and his concern is not merely the fracturing of human relationships but also the relationship with God (“For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: Seek me and live,” Amos 5:4-5). In their own ways, Mary, Jesus, and Amos embody deep solidarity in situations of tremendous pressure, and they realize, with the apostle Paul, that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). The experience of grace under pressure goes deep and requires works of solidarity (mercy) as means of grace.

¹⁶ This has been the depressing news in the United States in the summer of 2018, when the Trump administration started to separate even young children of immigrants from their parents.

An even older embodiment of deep solidarity can be found in the stories of Moses, whom all three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) hold in high esteem. Raised as an Egyptian prince, Moses wakes up when he finds himself in a situation of pressure, observing Hebrew slaves being abused by their taskmasters. Later, having joined the workforce as a shepherd, Moses accepts the call to join the solidarity movement of God and the Hebrew slaves, working for liberation (Exodus 3:1-12). This might be the real miracle of the Burning Bush story: both Moses and God enter into deep solidarity with people under pressure (observing, listening, and experiencing it)—the miracle of a bush that burns and is not consumed pales in comparison. As a result, grace is experienced under pressure and good news is brought to the poor and the oppressed.

In his own ways, John Wesley was involved in deep solidarity as well. As a young man he traveled to the United States as a missionary, interested in learning “the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the Heathen.” This included learning from the Natives how to simplify his own life and to learn the practice of the community of goods as described in the book of Acts.¹⁷ While some of this reflects romantic ideas that Wesley maintained even after he returned to England (never having had an opportunity to engage with Native Americans), his attitude also reflects a genuine two-way street that is characteristic of the works of solidarity (mercy) as means of grace: he notes challenges posed by others and calls for conversion of the self. The same is true for Wesley’s reflections on slavery and his emphasis on the lessons that Europeans would need to learn from Africans, as he claims that the latter were more advanced in practicing “justice, mercy, and truth”!¹⁸

¹⁷ *Works* 12:38.

¹⁸ “Thoughts Upon Slavery,” *Works* XI 64-65.

Wesley's sense that true religion does not go from the greatest to the least but from the least to the greatest¹⁹ is yet another example of his willingness to learn from those under pressure who are pushed to the margins by dominant power. Not surprisingly, in his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" he reminds those going on to perfection that they need to continue to be taught not only by people like himself "but by the weakest Preacher in London; yea, by all men," adding that it is a mistake "to imagine none can teach you, but those who are themselves saved from sin."²⁰

In all of this, deep solidarity and works of mercy as means of grace are closely related to works of piety, and putting them together makes all the difference: those who engage and are engaged at this level are enabled to read the Bible with fresh eyes, to pray in more profound ways, and to deepen their experience of God and others in Holy Communion. Those who read the Bible in this context will realize the deep concerns for poverty and justice—how is it possible that so many Christians, Methodists included, overlook thousands of passages that speak about this?²¹ Those who pray in this broader framework are less likely to engage in pious monologues. And in this context, the Methodist tradition of the Open Table makes sense, because it defeats the narcissism that is so pervasive when it comes to this sacrament. According to the liturgy, invited are all "who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another": the

¹⁹ In a Journal entry of May 21, 1764, Wesley states that "religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be of men." Wesley, *Works* 3:178. Almost two decades later, Wesley expresses this insight the other way around in a sermon in the year 1783: "'They shall all know *me*,' saith the Lord, not from the greatest to the least (this is that wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God) but 'from the least to the greatest,' that the praise may not be of men, but of God." In: "The General Spread of the Gospel," *Bicentennial Edition* Vol. 2, 494, the biblical references are to Heb. 8:11 and Rom. 2:29.

²⁰ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *Works* 11:428. For an intriguing story Wesley tells about the liberative effect of listening to a strange woman whom others declare "mad," see "A Remarkable Providence," *Works* 11:497-98.

²¹ See the impressive editions of the *Poverty and Justice Bible*, where all of these passages are highlighted.

Open Table is not a free-for-all but a place of restoring relationship and engaging in deep solidarity. Holy Communion is where it all comes together in relationship: self, others, and God, informed by readings of the Bible and prayer. In sum, deep solidarity with others and with God is what discipleship is all about—in opening up to others we learn to open up to God, and in opening up to God we learn to open up to others.

Reform and Revolution

Where does that leave charitable giving and advocacy? If charity and advocacy lead to reform, deep solidarity leads to revolution: nothing will be the same, as all relationships are being transformed—those with others, those with God, and even those with the environment. Understood in the context of the means of grace, works of solidarity (mercy) serve as the strongest possible clue that we are not talking about works righteousness but about the exact opposite: works of solidarity (mercy) are not done in order to earn salvation but in order to open ourselves up to God’s grace and to become more open to God and to others. The same is true for works of piety: reading the Bible, praying, and participating in Holy Communion are not done to earn salvation but to open ourselves up to God’s grace and to become open to God and to others. The point is that transformation is put in motion by the grace of God under pressure, the experience of which moves us into action together. Charity and advocacy, by contrast, often leave us with the assumption that transformation is put in motion by what we do.

Deep solidarity places us in relation with those we intend to support and with God, helping us realize that we share some important concerns (recall that solidarity grows out of experiences of pressure that point to some common roots), making us ready for deeper experiences of grace under pressure that might surprise us. Transformation happens not because

we are optimistic about our ability to reform the pressures we encounter; transformation happens because we learn to take the pressures more seriously and invite God's revolution and join it.

The ever-growing pressures of our time and the increasing need for charity and advocacy can help make us more aware of the seriousness of the situation and that there can be no easy fix. The challenge of Anselm of Canterbury still stands: "You have not yet considered the gravity of sin."²² As we begin to address the gravity of sin and the pressures we experience together, our differences do not fade away but can be put to use more productively. In the process, our relation with God deepens—experiencing and valuing differences among humans can open us up to experiencing and valuing the difference of God—and even our engagement with the works of piety is transformed.

The point of deep solidarity and of works of solidarity (mercy) as means of grace is, therefore, not to make every one look alike. The point of deep solidarity is to realize the pressures that are upon us and then to employ our differences—as well as our limited privileges—for the common good. Those who endure the greatest pressures in their own bodies are the guides in our quest for grace under pressure and the profound nature of sin: They help us become aware of how the pressures of our time destroy lives and communities, how they increasingly affect all of us, and they put us on a search for the root causes.

As we deepen our relationships and our sense of solidarity, those of us who enjoy more privileges can put these privileges to use for meaningful transformation: rather than supporting systemic racism, white people can use their white privilege in solidarity with racial minorities to bring down oppressive structures. In the process, white privilege is being deconstructed. The same is true for male privilege, ethnic privilege, and even for heterosexual privilege. The early

²² Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Janet Fairweather, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 305.

Methodists, following the General Rules of avoiding “softness and needless self-indulgence” and “being in every kind merciful after their power” understood some of these dynamics.²³

Deep solidarity reminds us that the experiences of minorities are linked to the experiences of the majority of the 99 percent, and that the divisions of racism and sexism for example serve the elites (the proverbial 1 percent) more than anyone: who ultimately benefits when white and black, male and female, gay and straight, Latinx and Anglx are played off against each other? Deep solidarity helps us resist the fracturing that is a result of sin and the divide-and-conquer tactics used by the power brokers and allows us to form new relationships that create both the power and the energy to make real differences.

Grace under pressure is experienced most profoundly when we know what we are up against, realizing that we need each other because even middle-class people are not in control, and start deepening our relationships with each other and with God. Working in solidarity with our sisters, brothers, siblings, communities, and the environment calls for taking sides. Even the 1 percent are not excluded; they are invited to take the side of those who are struggling in the mist of the most severe pressures of life.²⁴ If our Abrahamic religions traditions are right, God does so as well.

Concluding Remarks: Revival

When all is said and done, Christians know that revival is the work of God. That is, of course, the point of the means of grace as well: works of piety and works of solidarity (mercy) are not effective in and of themselves but get whatever power they have in a relationship with

²³ The General Rules of the Methodist Church, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-general-rules-of-the-methodist-church>, accessed July 24, 2018.

²⁴ Everyone knows, of course, that “rich people have problems, too.” But we need to start with the pressures that endanger the survival of millions of people and the earth and work our way up from there. Grace under pressure demands no less.

God, which is what we are calling grace.

Of the three models of dealing with the pressures of life: charity, advocacy, and deep solidarity, it is deep solidarity that displays the greatest potential to experience God at work in grace under pressure. Deep solidarity reminds us that we are not in control, that we need others and God in order to understand sin and deepen our experience of grace, and we can do nothing without working together with others and with God.

As a result, what might spark the next revival is not the social engagement and the activism of a few privileged Christians, and neither is it the triumphalistic spirituality of the mountaintops that is preached by so many today. What might spark the next revival is engaging in deep solidarity with others and with God, experiencing grace under pressure in places where we least expect it.