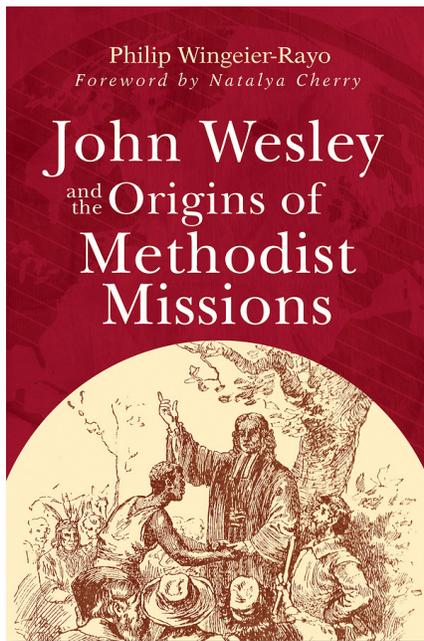


## REVIEW: John Wesley and the Origins of Methodist Missions by Philip Wingeier-Rayo

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REVIEWED BY  
KIRSTEEN KIM

Wingeier-Rayo, Philip. *John Wesley and the Origins of Methodist Missions*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2025. 339 pp, ISBN: 978-1791035167. \$29.00 paperback.



*John Wesley and the Origins of Methodist Missions* is a history of early Methodist missions that is alert to the global context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, understanding Wesley and other protagonists as people of a particular time and place. This approach allows the author to convincingly explain early Methodist decision-making and mission strategies, and the theologies that informed them.

This volume is in three parts that move the story forward, while focusing on different mission topics and issues faced by Wesley and early Methodists. Part I treats John Wesley's engagement with the wider world as Britain developed an empire. This was through his well-connected home and elite education, his exposure to contemporary mission models, his life-changing encounter with Moravian Christians and missionaries, and his own travel to North America and Europe.

Part II concerns the missiology that Wesley developed over his lifetime that spanned almost the entire eighteenth century (1703–1791). The author covers Wesley's university years in Oxford where he sought holiness, to his time in the American colony of Georgia where, as a chaplain to settlers, he learned first-hand about colonial brutality. The author then describes Wesley's years in London, where he established the United Society at the Foundry along Moravian lines. Here, the author shows how Wesley rediscovered a more genuine expression of Christianity, centered on Scripture and an experience of God's love and grace that resonated with the people of England. These victims of the Industrial Revolution remained his primary mission and, parting

company with some Moravians, his mission included works—mercy, piety, education, and support for social justice. The author also demonstrates how, through encounters with others—such as Native Americans and Jews—and his wide reading, Wesley came to understand that God’s prevenient grace was also at work in them.

The book sustains an overall argument that, while Wesley’s ministry at home in England was “missional” in the sense that “he wanted all people to be saved by the grace of Jesus Christ” (94), Wesley actively discouraged overseas missions for most of his life. The author gives various reasons for this and interprets Wesley’s mission as building up the English church so that, as it spread globally, believers would share the gospel organically, “person to person” (109).

Part III tells how Methodism did indeed grow in North America and the Caribbean during Wesley’s lifetime through people who bore faithful witness to Jesus Christ. These faithful witnesses included Europeans and Africans who traveled, emigrated, or were moved for slavery. Subsequent chapters deal with Methodist expansion into Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This expansion occurred mostly after Wesley’s lifetime, and initially as a result of the leadership of Thomas Coke, who sent missions globally. The author brings to light stories of multiple lay people, including many women and people of color, who began Methodist societies around the world.

With this well-researched book, Philip Wingeier-Rayo does the intersecting fields of missiology and world Christianity a great service. Most importantly, the perspective of Wesley and Methodism helps to fill the gap between Catholic and Protestant missions. For this reader, the strongest chapters are Chapter 2, which details the various models of mission in Wesley’s time, even before William Carey sailed for India, and Chapter 3, on what Wesley learned from Moravian missionaries. The style of this book is accessible for the general reader. There is plenty here for students, and many insights for seasoned scholars, too. I heartily recommend it.

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*Kirsteen Kim, PhD, is Pierson Professor of World Christianity and Associate Dean for the Center for Missiological Research, Fuller Theological Seminary.*