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Paper Proposal

The Global Spread of Methodism in the 18th and 19th Century:
Mission from the Vulnerable to the Vulnerable

Philip Wingeier-Rayo, PhD
Dean and Professor of Missiology and Methodist Studies
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington DC

The spread of Methodism in the 18th century followed British colonial expansion to such a degree that by the end of John Wesley's life there were approximately 75,000 followers in England and an equal number around the world. Given John Wesley's organizational genius one might guess that this growth was due to John Wesley's well organized and resources missionaries sharing the gospel to helpless imperial subjects vulnerable to unequal power relations. A careful examination at Methodist expansion, however, reveals that John Wesley was actually anti-world missions and the spread of methodism in many cases was due to individual Christians starting societies without the direction, authorization or knowledge of British Methodism. This paper will examine the roles of the powerless in the growth of Methodism in the 18th and 19th century, for example, enslaved Africans, women, immigrants, sailors and conscripted soldiers. For instance, two enslaved African women, Sophia Campbell and Mary Alley helped to establish a Methodist society in Antigua in 1759--the first in the Western hemisphere. Shortly afterward, Philip Embury and Barbara Heck, two Irish immigrants, organized the first Methodist society in New York. British soldier Henry Tice did the same in Gibraltar in 1769. Later in 1810, Kitty Dorset, an enslaved African, introduced Methodism into the island of Montserrat. All these efforts were done without the support of a missionary society and were not part of a pre-meditated missionary plan.