

BOOK REVIEWS

G. T. Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich: Wesley's Arch-Heretic*. Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 2003. 265 pp. £16.99.

In 1757 John Wesley published his important book, *The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*. One of his most substantive works, its first edition included more than 500 pages. Among other reasons for publishing on this theme was his intention to attack John Taylor whose views on original sin, principally printed in Taylor's book, *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (1740), were interpreted by Wesley to be an attack on one of the central concepts of Christianity. Taylor's book had been widely circulated and his assault on the doctrine had gained support among many.

As early as August 18, 1748, Wesley commented on the influence of Taylor in a journal entry, "We came to Shackerley ... before five in the evening. Abundance of people were gathered before six; many of whom were disciples of Dr. [John] Taylor; laughing at Original Sin, and, consequently, at the whole frame of Scriptural Christianity." Wesley's disdain for Taylor's views is also evident in his reference to them in another journal entry for March 31, 1757 where he referred to "Dr. Taylor's poison."

Geoffrey T. Eddy has written a very sympathetic account of Taylor's life and thought. He argues that Taylor, brilliant Hebraist, biblical scholar, theologian, as well as effective pastor, was, and is, a voice still to be reckoned with on the matter of original sin. He concludes that Taylor had the better of his views against Wesley and Taylor's other detractors:

Enough has been said, and extracted from [Taylor's] remarkable book, to exhibit its author's case against the doctrine of Original Sin as it was held and taught at the time. Not only did his formidable biblical scholarship enable him to undermine its alleged foundation in Scripture; his recognition of the need for good sense in religion, and of the role of reason in the formulation of doctrine, enabled him to see clearly, and express trenchantly, the downright absurdity of it. (83)

Since Wesley considered original sin one of the essentials of Christian doctrine, saying that all who deny it are, “but Heathens still” (sermon, “Original Sin” [1759]), Eddy’s is an especially significant work. It is a superb presentation of the life and thought of one of Wesley’s theological adversaries and provides illumination on one of the critical topics not only in 18th-century theology, but our time as well. It is clear, readable, and substantive.

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.
Madison, NJ

Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*. 2nd Revised Edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003. 406 pp. \$35.00.

We are delighted to see this important revised edition of Heitzenrater's research on John Wesley. In its original form it was a two-volume work which appeared in 1984. Now the two are available in one binding with the addition of new material on Wesley scholarship which has emerged since the first edition. This is a fascinating book which illuminates the elusive nature of Wesley's life and ministry. It is highly recommended for any who want to know better the founder of Methodism.