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SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Reviewed by James B. Jordan

One enters a theater with a sense of apprehension when the film is "based" on a genuinely classic story, and the more so when the adaptation is from Walt Disney Enterprises, known for its **saccharinization** of evil in virtually all of its productions since the classic *Pinocchio*. When the film begins, however, the combination of music with the approaching train of Dark's Pandemonium Carnival is striking and impressive, and with a sigh of relief we see that Ray Bradbury himself wrote the screenplay adaptation of his book.

Virtually flawless in its presentation, *Something Wicked* can easily and readily be appreciated by Christians. The presentation of evil is, though fantasized of course, true to Scripture, in that the "Autumn People" of Dark's Carnival prey on the sins of men, by providing them opportunity to sin. Unlike the presentation of evil in other recent films, Bradbury's wickedness is a moral, not a metaphysical phenomenon. Seduced by their own unlawful desires, the people of the sleepy American town become food for the demons. Unholy lusts for easy money, prowess, youth, and women (very discreetly portrayed) form the platform from which evil works.

The clue to the interpretation of Dark's Carnival and its influence over the town comes from the records kept by a minister of a previous generation. The modern man, who does not believe in devils, comes to do so. The rejection of self-pity gives men the power to resist the seductions of this form of evil, and in the end lightning from heaven puts a temporary limitation on the work of these Satanic forces.

Something Wicked is genuinely frightening in places, not in the sense of shocking our sensibilities, but in exposing the consequences of our immoralities. If your children are highly impressionable, you might wish to preview the film. It is free of foul language and nudity, however. Highly recommended.

John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, tr. by Benjamin Wirt Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982. 365 pp. (paperback). \$16.95. Reviewed by Ray R. Sutton.

They say there is no such thing as a free lunch. From the price of this book, it is apparent that one is not receiving the contents free. Why the high price? Anytime a publisher has to pay for translation, the price must be adjusted to cover that additional cost. For some books, the price, no matter what it might be, is not worth the paper. As for this book, go ahead and spend the money.

Two reasons, doctrinal and theological, caused Calvin to write. One, the Anabaptists had congealed their movement around a confessional statement, *The Schleithem Confession* (or more accurately, the *Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles*), probably written by Michael Sattler (1490-1527). John H. Yoder, a modern Anabaptist in the true sense of the word, and one who has recently written a biography on Sattler, believes that Sattler is the most important first-century Anabaptist because of his work in writing the *Schleithem Confession*. The seven articles consist of (1) rejection of infant baptism, (2-5) statements on the ban, the Lord's Supper, ministers, and the need to separate from political abomination, and (6-7) rejections of the use of the sword and the oath.

Two, William Farel visited a town, Neuchatel, Switzerland, where this confession was being used to turn the townspeople from the Reformation. Farel urged Calvin to write a refutation. After several months, Calvin responded.

In reading the *Seven Articles*, one quickly sees that there is nothing new under the sun. Thus, upon consideration of Calvin's criticisms of the Anabaptists, one will be better equipped to notice the same theological fallacies in various modern Baptist theologies.

To summarize Calvin's more helpful criticisms: (1) Calvin shows the *Anabaptist paradox* of rejecting civil office on the one hand, and recognizing the state as a divine institution on the other (pp. 56ff.). (2) The Anabaptist view of discipline, banning, is implicitly perfectionistic (pp. 58ff.). Banning was a method of discipline designed to remove all sin from the church. Calvin agreed that sin should be disciplined when objectified, but the notion of removing all sin only results in the presumptuous notion that all sin can be removed, and leaves people in the church with the notion that all sin has been cast out. Calvin points out that perfectionism results in a sinful pride worse than the sins originally disciplined for. His comments on the practice of banning are worth the price of the whole book.

Finally, Calvin's evaluation of the Libertines indicates the radical anarchy that comes from a distorted view of the Holy Spirit. His title of the chapter, which addresses this subject, speaks for itself — "On the Libertines' Frequent Abuse of the Word 'Spirit' Which is Constantly in Their Mouth" (pp. 226ff.). Thus, one ought to read Calvin's treatise against the Libertines to understand better the many extravagances of modern evangelicalism.

If you like the writings of John Calvin, or want an introduction into the abuses of modern Christianity, buy the book. It is worth the cost. It has survived 400 years. It is a classic!

Josephus, *The Jewish War*, newly trans. and ed. by Gaalya Cornfeld. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982. Hardcover. \$39.95.

This is both a coffee-table and a scholarly edition of Josephus's important work. In size, it measures 12 x 8 1/4 inches, and it runs to 526 pages. It features a full index. It includes 32 color plates, with black and white photographs, maps, and drawings on virtually every page. The translation is somewhat simplified, but copious notes fill the reader in on virtually every aspect of the work. The notes are placed in a column parallel to the text on every page, and are invaluable.

Cornfeld argues that Josephus's attempt to portray the Jerusalem massacre as brought on solely by the Zealots, while the establishment disapproved, is a bit of special

pleading. Actually, he **argues**, "the extreme minority succeeded in casting the die for a sympathetic but reluctant majority" (p.7).

I can unreservedly recommend **this work**, wishing only that there were fewer typographical errors, and that a sensitive correlation with New Testament prophecies concerning the destruction of **Jerusalem** had been **included** in the notes. *The Jewish War* is most important in that it **displays** the fulfillment of the prophecies of **Jesus**, most **familiarly** recorded in Matthew 24, concerning the destruction of the Old Covenant. The midnight invasion of the city and **temple** by the descendants of Esau (the **Idumeans**) is **vividly** described by **Josephus**, on which occasion the Christians had literally only a few minutes to run across the rooftops and escape (**Matt.24: 15-20**). [For a detailed exposition of Matthew 24, obtain my taped lectures from Geneva Media, 708 Hamvasy, Tyler, TX 75701:\$38.00 for eleven lectures.]

Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1982. Xiii+ 485 pp. Fully indexed. 172 guilders (appx. \$62.00).

Not a history of Puritanism within the Dutch churches, **Sprunger's masterful study** is of the history of **English-speaking congregations** located in The Netherlands. This study is well organized and quite readable; it delineates, without too much detail, both doctrinal and personal **controversies** among the various English churches. **Conflicts** between Anabaptists and Separatists, between Separatists and non-separating Puritans, between Puritans and **Episcopalians**, and between each of these and the various **Classes of the Dutch Reformed Church** – all are developed in multiple dimensions and with a judicious balance of presentation.

The value of a study like this for pastors is that it provides a detailed account of ecclesiastical debates, controversies, and discussions for a century of time and at **several different cities**. A careful reading of studies such as this gives the reader insight into **the problems** encountered in previous generations, and how these were **or were not resolved**. The reader observes the traps into which men **fall**, or which they judiciously avoid. **He** is able to note the folly or the wisdom of their various decisions. From all of this, much of value can be learned, the more so since **Sprunger's presentations** actually get the reader into the midst of the discussions through an always judicious **select-**

tion of the relevant facts and opinions.

The English churches were **small congregations** in a strange, though **generally sympathetic**, land. Today, orthodox Calvinistic churches in America are **small congregations** in a somewhat **less sympathetic environment**. Although the actual matters debated were frequently different then and now, there is still much that is **parallel**, and much can be gained from a book like this-if the poor **pastor** can afford it! *Get it* for the church library, and peruse it.

Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, trans. with intro. by Stanley L. Jaki. The Hague: Mouton, 1975 (now available from Walter de Gruyter, Berlin). indexed. 174 pp. \$22.30.

Of interest to Christians involved in the sciences, this is the first **English transition of Bruno's La Cena de le Ceneri**. Until the work of Francis **Yates**, particularly her **Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition**, humanist scholars in the late 19th and **early 20th centuries** lauded **Bruno** as a herald of modern science. **Actually, Bruno was a self-conscious pantheist and magician**. His *Ash Wednesday Supper*, supposedly an early defense of **Copernicanism**, is actually a tract for an **animist** view of the universe, and as Jaki points out, a rather incoherent one at that.

Jaki's 31-page introduction is probably worth more than **Bruno's own work**. Jaki characterizes Bruno as "a soaring poet, an exalted mystic, an ardent pantheist, an instinctive Catholic, a born philosopher, a wizard of **mnemotechnics**, a **vitriolic critic**, an amateur scientist, a muddled dreamer, a secretive **cabbalist**, a **dabbler** in magic, a flamboyant reformer, and an amorous rogue" (p.9). For Bruno, "science was the wave of the **future only** inasmuch as it served the cause of **Hermeticism**, a synthesis of **occultism**, magic, **cabbala**, necromancy, and weird mysticism" (p.24). Thus, Bruno's work was **rightly assessed** as an embarrassment to the moderns of his day, and was ignored until 19th century romantics and materialists "chose Bruno as t heir hallowed symbol" (p.36). Bruno's influence on the rise of modern science was, in fact, **nugatory**.

if anything, **Bruno's Supper** illustrates the fact that "contrary to **cliche accounts**, the rise of Copernicanism was not simply the ascendancy of advanced intellects over **intellectual backwards**" (p.9). Jaki's introduction and notes, thus, contribute to the work of historical revisionism concerning Bruno. This is a book for specialists and libraries, but worth having by a wider circle because of Jaki's introduction.

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