



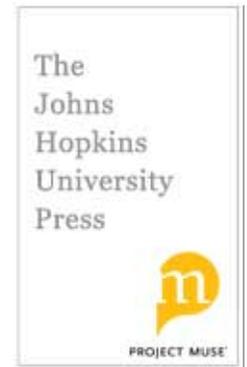
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*Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature and
the Arts* by Jerram Barrs (review)

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primary source quotations fluctuate between breezy and ponderous (as in the extended examination of the writings of Archbishop Wulfstan, pp. 172–200), suggesting that some of the densest (and most original) sections might have benefited from publication as stand-alone essays. Chapter 5 arrives at the conclusion that “the body’s fate” at the Last Judgment “was determined by the soul and not by the body itself” (328), although the author has omitted from consideration a substantial group of well-known Old English homilies and poems that depict the soul ascribing to the body all responsibility for good and bad deeds undertaken during life. And while Foxhall Forbes is right to observe that Augustine of Hippo’s opinions on the condition of the soul in the afterlife were neither uncontested nor universally available in Anglo-Saxon England, I believe she overestimates the availability and influence of his *De civitate Dei* when she concludes that it “was very widely known, copied and cited” (268). These are all minor criticisms, however, and the only feature of *Heaven and Earth* that actually disappoints me is its poor copy-editing, which has left the pages peppered with errors in spelling, concord, and formatting, as well as a handful of more substantial errors in quotations and citations.

Nonetheless, these small shortcomings pale in comparison with what Foxhall Forbes has achieved in this study. *Heaven and Earth* is clearly written and thoroughly documented, making it accessible and useful to medievalists across the disciplines. At the same time, specialists will find it to be an enjoyable and stimulating read: it is refreshing to encounter a book that takes medieval piety seriously and bravely embraces its complexity and internal contradictions.

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Jerram Barrs. ***Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature and the Arts***. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. Pp. 208. \$17.99. ISBN 978-1-4335-3597-0.

Perhaps it comes as no surprise that a student of Francis Schaeffer has published a book of reflections on Christianity, literature, and the arts. Jerram Barrs worked at L’Abri Fellowship in England for almost two decades and has taught at Covenant Theological Seminary for more than two decades, and his recent book *Echoes of Eden* draws from a lifetime of thinking about the relationship between Christianity and culture. And when, in a three-page catalogue of praises by eleven notable thinkers in this field, Tim Keller describes this book as “the most accessible, readable, and yet theologically robust work on Christianity and the arts that you will be able to find” (1), expectations are high. Barrs is interested in seeing God and humans as creative artists, so he begins his book by examining the doctrine of creation, which affirms the goodness of the created world. Barrs looks at four

aspects of God's creative genius—perfection, diversity, profusion, and inventiveness—and argues that anything less than “the glad reception and enjoyment of the gifts of God's creativity” is ascetic heresy (16–17).

Having been given the gift of creativity, human artists ought to exhibit a humility in their work, because imitation is at the heart of human creativity. Art is not merely an expression of the self, but is rather a privileged participation in the divine act of making. Whether or not this fact is understood by all artists is moot, in the sense that Christians can enjoy the work of non-Christians, and Barrs employs several lengthy quotations from C. S. Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism* and John Calvin's *Institutes* to support his claim. This section includes a fascinating, though brief, history of the terms *arts* and *crafts*, and it concludes with a helpful bulleted list of responses to the charges that art is unnecessary, unspiritual, and worldly.

Barrs denies that there is even such a thing as “Christian art,” and in doing so he rejects the practice of embracing only the kind of art that is “designed for use in worship or devotion” (39), that “contain[s] depictions of biblical scenes or scenes from church history” (40), that is “didactic, teaching us spiritual or evangelistic lessons” (41), and that is “produced by Christians” (41). Likewise, “Christian topics” do not exist because of the comprehensive nature of the Creation–Fall–Redemption schema: that is, the scope of reality appears unwhitewashed in Scripture, and that fact carries implications for art. Barrs also includes brief comments on representational and abstract art, and while his argument defending images of Christ is thin (in the sense that he does not get into the details of the regulative principle of worship), this fact does not mean that his conclusion is false.

Chapter 4 may be the weakest chapter, simply because he tackles the topic of evaluation, and evaluating is notoriously difficult to do without resorting to generalities and abstractions. Barrs presents eleven criteria for objectively evaluating art, and yet getting at specifics is difficult. For example, within the criterion of “continuity of form and content,” Barrs argues that a “trite and shallow” melody communicates something about the value of the song as a whole, but Barrs does not (and I might go so far as to say *cannot*) categorically define what makes a melody “trite and shallow” (61). To be more specific, exactly how many times does a melodic line have to be repeated before it becomes trite? What is a shallow chord progression, and what makes it shallow? I am not saying that trite melodies do not exist (and I certainly do not oppose noble efforts, as Barrs's effort is, to determine value), but it is hard to produce specific, agreed-upon standards for evaluation.

The final chapter in the first part of the book summarizes different kinds of general revelation, including revelation through creation, in humans, through providential care, by God's rule over the history of the nations, and through what Barrs calls “echoes of Eden.” Referring to Carl Jung's concept of a “collective unconscious” (79), Barrs claims that there is “a pool of memories within the human race of the truth about our condition” (74). Then Barrs suggests that all groups of people everywhere and at all times have some concept of an original world that has become corrupted but that still maintains a possibility for restoration: in other

words, Creation–Fall–Redemption. These echoes appear most vividly in religions, myths, and legends. (Barrs refers to Don Richardson’s *Peace Child*, a book that I highly recommend.)

The final five chapters (all longer than the first five chapters, which are no more than twenty pages) address particular authors, and Barrs attempts to show “echoes of Eden” throughout their works. C. S. Lewis is an appropriate author with which to begin because Lewis directly refers to a poignant desire that, to him, made clear the fact that this world was broken and longed for restoration. Barrs enumerates many of the events that stirred this longing within Lewis, then recounts some of the factors that moved him from atheism to theism, and finally to Christianity. A major factor was J. R. R. Tolkien’s insistence in conversations with Lewis that the longing evoked by myths pointed to the power of the “true myth” of Christianity. Some readers may be irritated by the lack of citations throughout this chapter, even though at the beginning of the chapter Barrs mentions the sources that he draws upon (85).

It is somewhat predictable that the next writer to appear is Tolkien, but fans of the Inklings will be pleased to see so much attention given to two of the group’s brightest lights. Barrs gets close to a kind of hagiography in his effusive praise, and the Creation–Fall–Redemption trope is almost overdone. But, as Barrs points out, Tolkien was overwhelmingly the greatest author of the twentieth century according to a BBC poll (a poll that was conducted twice due to outrage that neither James Joyce nor Virginia Woolf was chosen), so attention to this popular Christian writer is warranted (36, 113).

The placement of J. K. Rowling after Lewis and Tolkien and before Shakespeare and Austen is a clever move because Barrs has just spent two chapters defending fantastical elements in literature, and readers who object to his decision to highlight Rowling (either on moral grounds, or because they think it is premature to place her in such esteemed company) will at least have a hard time ignoring the themes of self-sacrifice in Rowling’s books. I do think that Barrs misses an opportunity to explain the difference between the use of magic in the books of Lewis and Tolkien, and the use of magic in Rowling’s books, especially since some have noticed that Lewis and Tolkien are careful not to give magical powers to humans. Readers should note that a footnote pointing to a location in Calvin’s *Institutes* is inaccurate—it should read “2.2.15” (137). (The Appendix on Dumbledore and homosexuality seems random and unnecessary.)

Barrs’s undiluted praise for Rowling may seem inaccurate to some readers, but if anyone deserves such high accolades, it is William Shakespeare. However, this chapter meanders through Barrs’s personal experience, movie adaptations, authorship debates, Shakespeare’s biography, and poetry. The section on two plays reads a little like a book report as Barrs discusses the interpretation of the witches (156–57) and the effects of alienation (161–67) in *Macbeth*; and because of its brevity, the single page on *Measure for Measure* at the end of the chapter (*Macbeth* gets eleven pages) seems tacked on, but Barrs is right to emphasize the many echoes of Eden in Shakespeare’s work.

Finally, Jane Austen makes an appearance, and Barrs notes that in complement to Tolkien, she was chosen by the same BBC pollsters as the author whose work (specifically, her novel *Pride and Prejudice*) most influenced the lives of English women. Barrs again takes considerable space to mention film adaptations, and he supposes that Austen's use of humor has contributed significantly to her continuing popularity. After exploring moral vices and virtues that appear in *Pride and Prejudice*, he concludes with an extended quotation from Elizabeth Jenkins's biography of Austen, including the following words:

When Macaulay mentioned Shakespeare and Jane Austen in the same breath, he did not suppose it necessary to state the obvious difference in their art and scope; admirers of Jane Austen understood what he meant in making the comparison, and feel that however far apart they stand, the two share the quality . . . of creating character. (192)

A comparable book is Philip Ryken's *Art for God's Sake* (2006): it is not groundbreaking scholarship, but it is a helpful primer for the layperson and provides a good review and summary of what has been said on this topic, as well as an opportunity for further investigation. Barrs uses copious references to Scripture, and for more in-depth studies, readers might consider a book by another of Schaeffer's protégés: Nancy Pearcey's *Saving Leonardo* (2010). One criticism is that Barrs includes only works by Christian writers, and the kind of art he considers is almost exclusively fiction. My guess is that Barrs chose authors because of their popularity, and also because the Creation–Fall–Redemption theme resonates most clearly in their work.

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Jane Rupert. ***John Henry Newman on the Nature of the Mind: Reason in Religion, Science and the Humanities***. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. Pp. ix + 123. \$75. ISBN 978-0-7391-4047-5.

John Henry Newman on the Nature of the Mind, by Jane Rupert, is a valuable recent addition to scholarship on John Henry Newman's understanding of religious epistemology, and the role that the imagination, as well as the liberal arts, plays in this mode of knowledge. Given *Christianity & Literature's* recent reviews on books about Shakespeare, Milton, and Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens and Gerard Manley Hopkins, it seems fitting to review here a book on Newman, a Victorian who although primarily a church historian and theologian wrote two novels and religious poetry. Rupert, who obtained her doctoral degree in English at the University of Toronto, is author of *Uneasy Relations: Reason in Literature and*