 *Echoes of Eden*

Jerram Barrs, [*Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts*](http://www.amazon.com/Echoes-Eden-Reflections-Christianity-Literature/dp/1433535971)(Wheaton: Crossway, 2013)

Summary:

The Bible contains all of the content for which many evangelicals lambast much of today’s art: rape, murder, incest, cursing, treason, war, adultery, stealing, etc. Jerram Barrs argues that the mere presence of what some consider objectionable is a poor way to judge a piece of art, whether it be a book, song, painting, or film. Rather, Barrs proposes that good art contains within it “echoes of Eden” in that art should refer to: “(1) Eden in its original glory, (2) Eden that is lost to us, [or] (3) the promise that Eden will be restored.” Phrased another way, all art should reference Paradise owned, lost, or regained. Leaning heavily on the works of John Calvin, J.R.R. Tolkein, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, G.K. Chesterton, and Francis Schaeffer, Barrs builds a framework for a Christian evaluation of culture. This evaluation hinges on Barrs’s view that part of being human is being creative and having dominion, both of which pertain to the arts. Written in a concise, accessible manner, *Echoes of Eden* develops a Christian aesthetic that is apologetic without being militant.

Themes & Motifs:

* Story. Barrs quotes Tolkein: “Myths are echoes or memories of the truth that God had already made known to Adam and Eve…” Art helps us understand our world through stories. Consider Jesus’s use of parables.
* Imitation vs. self-expression. The arts can help us look beyond ourselves by shifting from being an instrument of self-expression to that which imitates the elements and stories of the world.
* Sacred/Profane. Barrs rejects a sacred/profane divide, particularly with vocation.
* Craftsmanship. Rather than a prophet or visionary, the artist is primarily a craftsperson, neither above nor below those of other professions.
* Christian art. The four criteria Barrs uses to identity Christian art are whether the piece is used in worship, contains Christian content, teaches spiritual or evangelistic lessons, or is made by Christians.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between creation and sub-creation? How does this apply to art?
2. Throughout history, some have interpreted the second commandment as forbidding art. How is this not the case?
3. Is the eschatological kingdom truly Eden restored? Or more?
4. How does Barrs use Acts 17:22-31?
5. Of the eleven standards for judging the arts, which is the most helpful to apply? The most difficult?
6. What authors that are not Christians might also fit within the “echoes of Eden” framework?
7. Barrs (somewhat awkwardly) ends his book without a conclusion. How would you summarize his arguments?