



# Past & Present:

## The Western Civ. Newsletter

### WELCOME

"You have to learn to think for yourself, Ben," my mother used to say, "or someone else will come along who is more than willing to think for you." This was her way of instilling in me the importance of critical thinking, of challenging the facile or merely conventional. This habit of mind has served me well in academics, in politics, in religion, and in other areas of life.

But my mother also instilled in me a love for reading, particularly a love for that class of book we call "classic" or "great." Thus, although she never phrased it in just this way, what she taught me was the importance of thinking *for* myself but not *by* myself. She taught me to think alongside Homer, Shakespeare, and Burke.

Russell Kirk, in his book *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, argues that life is too short and the big questions too big for each of us to start from scratch each generation on looking for meaning in life. To think at all, one must think within a tradition. One must avail one's self of "the permanent things," the phrase Kirk borrowed from T.S. Eliot to denote the lasting contributions Western culture has made to the pursuit of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

In the Western Civilization program at OBU we encourage our students to think for themselves but not by themselves. We encourage them to think in the company of Augustine, Dante, and many others.

And now we want to think along with you, to share with you our thoughts and, we hope, to hear back from you. We offer *Past & Present* as a way to inform you of what is happening in the Civ. Program at OBU, but, more importantly, we offer it as an opportunity for us to think together about topics of importance to anyone who has a stake in Christian classical or traditionalist approaches to education, anyone invested in the ideals of the liberal arts. This newsletter will contain short essays, articles, and book reviews on topics related to the study, teaching, and appreciation of the Western tradition.

We know you appreciate "the permanent things," and thus we hope you will enjoy *Past & Present*.

Benjamin Myers  
Crouch-Mathis Professor of Literature  
Editor, *Past & Present*

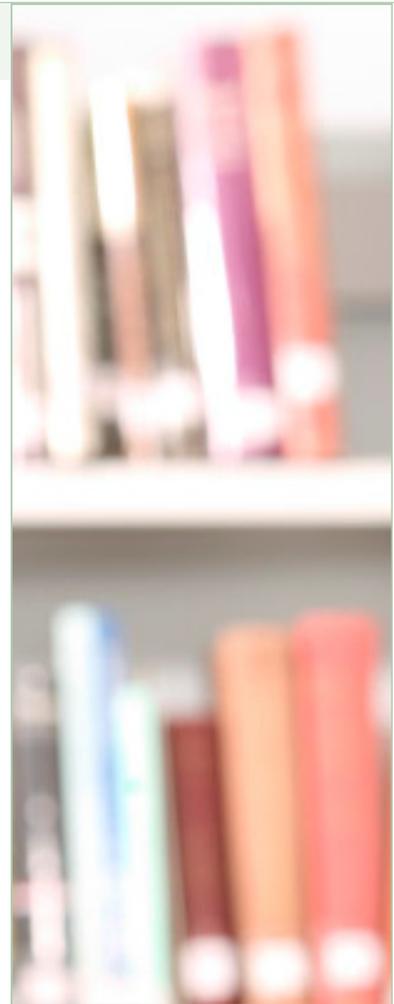
### ESSENTIAL READING FOR CITIZENSHIP: THE GREAT BOOKS EVERY AMERICAN SHOULD KNOW

By Christopher P. McMillion,  
Assistant Professor of Political Science, Oklahoma Baptist University

#### 1. *Second Treatise of Civil Government* by John Locke (1689)

Locke's *Second Treatise* is the primary philosophical foundation for the U.S. Constitution, and his perspectives on nature, community, and government were of paramount importance during the founding era. Locke posited that people should come together to form governments of freedom and choice—by means of a social contract, binding both the government and citizens. The Constitution was designed to fulfill this goal for the American people, and it is difficult to overstate the influence of Lockean thought on the Constitution and our early republic.

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### IN EACH ISSUE!

- Brief Essays on Western Civilization and the Life of the Mind
- Book Reviews
- Information on Programs at OBU



## ESSENTIAL READING FOR CITIZENSHIP, CONT.

### 2. *The Spirit of the Laws* by Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1748)

By contrast to Locke, the Frenchman Montesquieu is not well known in America. That is a shame, as Montesquieu was vitally important to the founders of our nation. If you read the debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists closely, you will discover that both sides frequently invoke Montesquieu's work—both explicitly and implicitly. Montesquieu's firm arguments for the separation of powers and for intermediate institutions (think about federalism in our context) were essential.

### 3. *The Federalist* by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay (1788)

Though particular papers from the *Federalist* have worked their way into the American canon, many Americans have only read #10 and #51. While there is value in individual papers, the whole of the *Federalist* is crucial to understanding our government and society. Together, the papers display Madison's groundbreaking political thought, combined with Hamilton's careful argumentation. Those two men and their respective intellectual and literary strengths helped to shape the American political experience.

“Tocqueville forces us to consider how well the American experiment has worked and how we might improve it, continuing to inform and challenge us almost two centuries later.”

From *The Federalist Papers*

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” (Madison, #51)

### 4. *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835)

Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s. His aim in this book was to help an unstable France find its democratic footing. However, his insights have proven to be valuable here in America. Tocqueville's diagnosis of the benefits and drawbacks of American democracy in the 1830s is incredibly insightful. His work is also disconcertingly accurate, both when unraveling the mystery of the early American republic and when predicting future developments based upon that knowledge. Tocqueville forces us to consider how well the American experiment has worked and how we might improve it, continuing to inform and challenge us almost two centuries later.

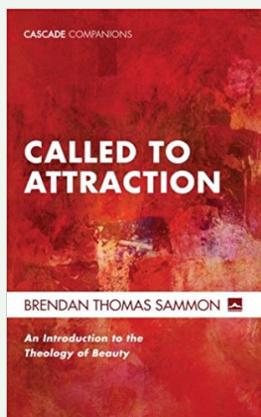
Chris McMillion teaches political science at OBU. He holds a bachelor's degree from Baylor University and a Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame. In his scholarship, he focuses on constitutional law, federalism, and American political thought. He is particularly interested in the connections between political theory and the American constitutional and political experience. Chris teaches a broad variety of political science courses at OBU. He also serves as a manuscript referee for the journal *American Political Thought*.

Chris and his wife, Heather, live with their three children in Shawnee. They attend Shawnee Presbyterian Church.



## WESTERN CIV. AT OBU: QUICK FACTS

1. A three-semester, fifteen-credit-hour sequence
2. From ancient Greece to the world of today
3. In correlation with other core courses in Bible, Philosophy, Fine Arts, Science, and Languages
4. Team-taught, at the Sophomore-level, by an historian and a literary scholar
5. In the freshman year and the fall of the sophomore year, highlights works by Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and more
6. In spring of the sophomore year, explores modernity, secularization, postmodernity, and globalization
7. Debuted as a pilot course in the fall semester of 1969, taught by Dr. William Mitchell and Dr. Jim Farthing



## THE GREAT BOOKS AT OBU

OBU students begin reading classical Greek literature during their freshman year and continue to read the great books as part of the Western Civilization courses all the way through their sophomore year. Why do we dedicate so much time to old books? Here are five reasons:

1. We want our students to know the value of always thinking for themselves but never by themselves. Good thought is thought that happens in company. The person who lets others think for him is always in danger of following a monster. The person who thinks by himself is always in danger of becoming a monster. We read great books not because we always agree with them, or because they are all equally wise, but rather because such a reading program gives us history's finest minds as partners in our thoughts. We can bounce our ideas off the great thinkers, make the geniuses of a previous age our debating partners.
2. We want our students to understand the difference between the great tradition and mere convention. A convention is the ever-changing thing that "everybody" seems to believe at the moment. Tradition, on the contrary, is the deep reservoir of truth passed down through the ages. When a people throw out tradition, they make themselves the slaves of convention. The great books help us to discern the difference between the two, to identify what T.S. Eliot called "The Permanent Things."
3. We want our students to understand beauty as a mirror of grace. We read great books because they are beautiful, and the Christian intellectual tradition has always recognized that real beauty is something greater than mere pleasantness. Unearned and undeserved, all true beauty is a gift and points us to the goodness and the love of God. The experience of beauty is crucial to the health of the soul.
4. We want our students to see the dignity in humanity's struggle for truth and to be humbled by the failures of the past. Every attempt at truth is a tribute to the value of truth. The success of great thinkers inspire us, and their failures should humble us. Thus we come to appreciate what it means to be human beings in search of knowledge.
5. We want our student to live in the fullness of time. This final point summarizes the previous four. The present moment is too narrow to contain a healthy mind and a robust soul. Great books are vehicles through which we learn to live in both the past and the present as we anticipate the future.

At OBU we take seriously the call in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Reading the great books together, we hope to encourage our students to live lives in pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

### A Review of Brendan Thomas Sammon's *Called to Attraction: An Introduction to the Theology of Beauty* (Cascade Books, 2017)

Sammon's little book (just 160 pages, including bibliography) is a concise and interesting introduction to a very important topic. Focusing on beauty as one of the "divine names," Sammon traces the theological treatment of beauty from its genesis in Plato and the scripture, through the crucial medieval formulations of the scholastics, into the modern period. In the latter parts of the book, he addresses concepts of beauty in existentialist thought and in the work of German philosopher, Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

The latter chapters of the book are the most useful. The various views of beauty in the age of Thomas Aquinas are well covered in such works as Umberto Eco's classic, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. We have fewer solid accounts of modern theology's view of the beautiful. Sammon's particular contribution is in linking Kierkegaard's emphasis on the *particularity* of beauty with St. Francis' view of beauty rooted in the particularity of the incarnation. Also especially useful is Sammon's concise summation of Von Balthasar's sprawling body of work on theological aesthetics.

Sammon's book is useful for those looking for ways to integrate arts courses with a Christian worldview. He offers several compelling alternatives for ways to discuss aesthetics in a theological context, providing a very good start on grounding artistic expression and an appreciation of the arts in the love of God.

Benjamin Myers

## FROM UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY

BY ALAN BANDY,

ROWENA R. STRICKLAND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT

The genre of the prophetic literature could be thought of as a multifaceted gemstone. When you look closely at a diamond set in a ring, you will observe that the surface of the diamond is covered with several geometrically arranged flat surfaces called facets. Each one of these facets catches and reflects light in a stunning display that causes the gemstone to sparkle and dazzle. A faceted gemstone evinces a complex character that derives from the intricate interplay of multifarious angles, edges, and shapes. Its beauty and complexity can only be fully appreciated when one carefully inspects all the details and subtle nuances of each cut. Prophecy, like a gemstone, is literary genre that is faceted with a myriad of types, forms, and subgenres. Individual oracles, narratives, and vision reports exhibit formal features that cast the prophet's message in a distinctive light. Whereas as lapidist (i.e., one who cuts and polishes gemstones) uses angles, lines, and flat surfaces to create specific contours, the prophet uses subgenres, literary conventions, and figurative language. So when one approaches prophecy, its meaning and message will sparkle most clearly when held up to the light of careful attention to the details and subtle nuances through literary analysis. The reason is because our understanding of the genre to which a particular text belongs shapes the expectations regarding how the contents should be read.<sup>[1]</sup>

From a literary perspective, written prophecy alternatives between prose and poetry. The sections written in prose contain narrative reports related to the life and ministry of the prophet (e.g., commission, activities, symbolic acts, and visions reports) as well as historical narratives regarding Israel, Judah, or the nations.<sup>[2]</sup> Narratives most often appear to add background details or heighten dramatic tension for theological purposes. In these instances the narrative contains not only details but accounts of the speeches and dialogues that comprise the scenes or episodes, which make up the full story. As Robert Alter observes, "The biblical writers . . . are often less concerned with actions in themselves than with how an individual character responds to actions or produces them; and direct speech is made the chief instrument for revealing the varied and at times nuanced relations of the personages to the actions in which they are implicated."<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, the narrative material is not only factual information but also theological and doxological (accomplished ultimately by God and to his praise), didactic (in order to teach proper response and conduct), as well as aesthetically constructed (as a pleasing literary work).<sup>[4]</sup>

Prophets did not communicate in the straightforward terminology of the law codes or use the cerebral language of logical discourse, but they spoke for God using the most convincing, emotive, and memorable way possible—poetry.<sup>[5]</sup> D. N. Freedman states that most of the prophets were poets and "their oracles were delivered and have been preserved in poetic form."<sup>[6]</sup> They predominately couched their message and oracles in poetry. Concerning the prominence of poetry, Robert Alter has eloquently remarked, "Since poetry is our best model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with intricate internal connections, meanings, and implications, it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry."<sup>[7]</sup> This has implications for reading prophecy because poetry has certain characteristics and if one is not aware of them it will result in confusion.<sup>[8]</sup> Because poetry is less precise and sometimes ambiguous, some evangelical interpreters have struggled with how to approach it.<sup>[9]</sup> Hebrew poetry exhibits features found in all poetry: *terseness, structure, and figurative imagery*.<sup>[10]</sup>

Its *terseness* is evident in that poetry expresses ideas with a minimum of words. The power and impact of poetry does not reside in a quantity of words, but in the quality of how well those few words communicate imagery and meaning. While terseness is part and parcel of the poetic genre, it also helps to accomplish the emotive aspect that impacts the reader. The poet has felt an emotion, observed an event of import or considered a worthy idea and desires that the recipient share the same emotion, excitement, or dread that gripped the writer. We are drawn into his or her experience and gain wisdom and perspective. With Moses we rejoice in Yahweh's triumph at the Red Sea (Exodus 15), we celebrate with Hannah at the birth of her son (1 Samuel 2) and we share with David in both victory (2 Sam. 22; Psalm 18) and defeat (Psalm 51). Through Isaiah we recognize the terror of Yahweh's judgment (Isa. 12-24) and the wonder of his salvation by the work of the suffering servant (Isa. 53). With Jeremiah we mourn the loss of Jerusalem (Lamentations) and rejoice at the restoration (Jer. 31:1-22).

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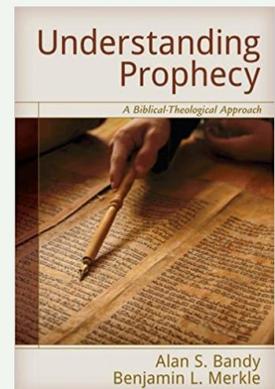
## UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

By Alan Bandy and Benjamin Merkle

Kregal Academic, 2015

"For thoughtful readers who are curious about biblical prophecy, this book will help them learn the place of prophecy in the message of the Bible and clear up the confusion that often surrounds reading these texts.

Studying biblical prophecy is about much more than predicting end-times events. Rather, a proper approach to prophecy acknowledges that the threads of prophecy crisscross throughout Genesis to Revelation, forming the fabric of canonical Scripture. This is why having a good grasp of the prophetic genre is essential for understanding the message of the entire Bible. Authors Alan Bandy and Benjamin Merkle not only offer thoughtful and careful explanations of individual biblical prophecies, but also give the reader the big picture of how all prophecy relates to and should be interpreted in light of Jesus Christ."



## UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY, CONT.

All poetry also uses *structure* to communicate its message. It is important to observe that *parallelism* is the chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry rather than the features we usually associate with poetry (rhyme, cadence, plays on words).<sup>[11]</sup> Parallelism in Hebrew poetry presents a balance of one idea with another idea.<sup>[12]</sup> Rather than writing in a single sentence, the poet would write a couplet. . . The prophets used parallelism to their advantage by often saying the same thing more than once, but with different images and different emphases (e.g., Zeph. 2:13-15).<sup>[13]</sup> Merely observing and identifying parallelism is of little value in and of itself. When applied to interpreting prophetic oracles, it enables us to see the relationship between ideas, concepts, and words. The concept of line balance is so great in Semitic poetry that two lines with two statements placed together must be related in some way and are not merely independent thoughts written side by side. The content of one line bears on the interpretation of the other.

Poetry employs figures of speech or unusual uses of words to communicate concepts through *figurative imagery*. We also use these figures of speech on a daily basis in English. One may commonly hear phrases like “cart before the horse,” “pave the way,” “off the cuff,” “between a rock and a hard place,” “a smoking gun,” or “circle the wagons.” Osborne observes that, “figurative expressions associate a concept with a pictorial or analogous representation of its meaning in order to add richness to the statement.”<sup>[14]</sup> We use these terms and phrases in a non-literal or metaphorical manner to express an idea by comparing it to something else. A figure of speech is a use of language in which there is a comparison, either stated or implied, between two terms. Ian Paul explains that all figures of speech share the same basic feature whereby two terms are brought together that have different, apparently distinct ranges of meaning to express something new.<sup>[15]</sup> It is important to note that “literal” and “metaphorical” are terms which describe types of language that have very little to do with the truth or falsity of what we say or the existence or non-existence of the things we refer to.<sup>[16]</sup> In fact, Leland Ryken goes so far as to state that metaphor and simile are not merely poetic devices, but that “they are a new way of thinking and formulating reality.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Dr. Alan S. Bandy joined the College of Theology and Ministry faculty as the Rowena R. Strickland Professorship in New Testament / assistant professor of New Testament in the fall of 2009. Before arriving at OBU, Bandy served as assistant director of Ph.D. studies for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to that he was an assistant professor of Christian Studies at Louisiana College and taught adjunctively for Liberty University Online.

His area of expertise is the New Testament and Greek with a specialization in The Apocalypse of John. He completed his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from SEBTS under the supervision of Andreas J. Köstenberger in May 2007. He published his dissertation as *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation* in the New Testament Monograph Series by Sheffield Phoenix Press (May 2010). He also contributed some sections in *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); the chapter on the Book of Revelation in *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: A Comprehensive Introduction to the New Testament*, by Andreas Köstenberger, Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009); and the chapter on interpreting the Book of Revelation in *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, by Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).



### Notes

- [1] Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 99.
- [2] David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 19.
- [3] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 66.
- [4] Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 68–71.
- [5] D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 158.
- [6] David N. Freedman, “Pottery, Poetry and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry,” in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 18.
- [7] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 141.
- [8] For some helpful guides to reading Hebrew poetry see Adele Berlin, “Introduction to Hebrew Poetry,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 301-15; David Petersen and K. Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 40-45.
- [9] Louis A. Markos, “Poetry-Phobic: Why Evangelicals Should Love Language That Is Slippery,” *Christianity Today* (October 1, 2001): 66; W. B. Stanford, *Enemies of Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). See also Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 158.
- [10] Duvall and Hayes, *Grasping God’s Word*, 370-71.
- [11] Bishop Robert Lowth made the first formal presentation of this poetic feature in his *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753).
- [12] See Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
- [13] Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 158.
- [14] Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 105.
- [15] Ian Paul, “Metaphor,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 507.
- [16] G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 131.
- [17] Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 169. See also Leland Ryken “I Have Used Similitudes: The Poetry of the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (July, 1990): 259-269.

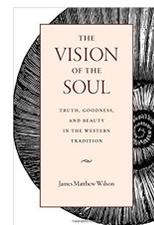
“Little can be hoped from a ruler, for example, who has not at some time or other been preoccupied, even if only confusedly, with the first beginning and ultimate end of all things, and above all of man, with the ‘why’ of his origin and the ‘wherefore’ of his destiny.”

Miguel de Unamuno  
*The Tragic Sense of Life*

### Recommended Reading

*The Vision of the Soul: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition* by James Matthew Wilson (The Catholic University of America Press, 2017)

Starting from the truism that politics is downstream from culture, Wilson enlists scholastic thinkers ranging from Thomas himself up to Jacques Maritain to offer a philosophical argument for cultural renewal. Wilson argues that our political climate is debased because our horizons are diminished. What we are missing, he says, is a full and developed understanding of how beauty is related to truth and goodness. He laments the politicizing of the arts and their subsequent marginalization in our lives, including our education: “Our culture thus lies to itself in denying the reality of beauty, and barbarizes and narrows its intellect in treating aesthetic education as unimportant to the formation of a complete human being” (231). Wilson emphasizes the role of story-telling and of contemplation in any proper conception of the good life. There is much stern redress here for contemporary culture, but Wilson’s approach is less pessimistic than Rod Dreher’s controversial “Benedict Option.” This book is a sophisticated approach to cultural renewal.



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