

# RSR Editor Spotlight

## Stan Harstine, Christian Origins

Editor's Note: *Religious Studies Review* is made possible by the dedicated work of our area editors, who solicit, commission, edit, and write short and long reviews that are included within our journal's pages. As a regular feature for our readers, we plan to highlight our editorial staff by offering a brief "editor spotlight" in every issue. In this issue, we present Stan Harstine, Professor of Religion at Friends University in Kansas. Stan is our co-editor of our Christian Origins area.



[Image of Stan Harstine]

I have served on the Faculty at Friends University in Kansas for twenty years now. I graduated high school in a town only forty-five minutes away from where I now work. I studied mathematics at Kansas State University before switching my career emphasis and attending seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and later earning my PhD in Biblical Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. My research focuses on the Gospel of John, however, as a faculty member at a small, midwestern university, I teach a broad range of courses. The main challenge to these diverse options comes in treating each course with its own suitable approach for both the topic and the student's experiences while still developing my research into narrative methodologies.

For over ten years, I have been exploring the topic of repetition in the narrative of the Gospel of John. When I was awarded a sabbatical, I could finally dedicate the necessary time to the research and writing and complete a manuscript. In *Reading*

*John Through Johannine Lenses*, I look at various questions raised by assorted methodologies over the past decades. The historical-critical method pursues a different series of questions than the rhetorical method does. The narrative approach provides a third means of inquiry. Each of these methods utilizes a rather unique set of lenses. By examining terms found in the Prologue to the Gospel of John as they appear throughout the narrative, I was able to create a fourth lens, one the Gospel itself designs for its reader. My analytical approach, shaped by my mathematics training, represents a distinct manner of engaging religion as a humanities discipline.

As a classroom instructor, I find the teaching interchange with students often produces luminescent moments. Sometimes the student has the metaphorical bubble appear over their head, but quite often, it is I. The synthesis of their contributions to a discussion and my own attempts at explaining the topic of the hour form a malleable moment in time. I find this to be especially true when teaching the Gospel of John. Explaining similarities between passages often results in more similarities uncovered. I was recently looking in John 6 as Jesus lifts up his eyes and sees the crowd. This phrase, often used for times of prayer, is earlier employed in John 4 with respect to Jesus as the citizens of Samaria come out to see if he is, indeed, the awaited Messiah. The moment of illumination came when I realized that Jesus models a behavior in John 4, emphasizes it to Philip and Andrew in John 6, and they demonstrate a change in their behavior in John 12.

When others ask me whether I have read a recent book, I ask them if it deals with the Gospel of John. While meant to be humorous, my readings outside my field are quite limited. However, because my work with undergraduate students seeks to help them develop in their adult cognitive development, I have found that leadership books provide a host of practical advice for developing individuals within their own skill and talent levels. I regularly listen to two podcasts, "The Look and Sound of Leadership" by Tom Henschel and "Coaching for Leaders" by Dave Stachowiak, which provide me a host of insight and book options. *The Eight Paradoxes of Great Leadership: Embracing the Conflicting Demands of Today's Workplace* by Tim Elmore is a recent read. The challenge leaders face to hold two ideas in tension, like his Paradox 7: Modeling high standards and gracious forgiveness, is suitable for the current higher education classroom where instructors must move students toward a higher goal they have not yet envisioned for themselves while also taking care they do not fall off a cliff and injure themselves on the journey. Another crucial book is *The Advantage*:

*Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* by Patrick Lencioni, which focuses on clear communication and caring for those under one's leadership. As a Professor of Religion, I am challenged to communicate clearly with the students in my classes and to develop a "healthy classroom culture," all the more so following the COVID-19 disruption of the previous two years.

My association with *Religious Studies Review* came through writing reviews on the Gospel of John. After several years the editor for Johannine Writings approached me to replace her, and I began to solicit and edit short reviews in 2010. When the editor for Christian Origins decided to step aside, I was asked in 2017 to assume responsibilities for the current twelve sub-editors and over forty NT topics. This experience has challenged me to improve my organizational and communication capacities. While I can be a detail-oriented individual, the greatest challenge comes when something gets lost in the cycle of requests and reviews and must be tracked down. However, the rewards from working with fine editors in other areas of

the NT and reading reviews written by a host of reviewers has benefited me tremendously.

For those who seek to study religion, my advice is to read in a pattern of concentric circles. It is impossible for most individuals to read everything about a single topic. However, it is possible to read strategically around a topic. *Religious Studies Review* provides an amazing number of short reviews that provide guidance for whether a book covers material appropriate to your strategy. Each review should provide an assessment of the publication on how well argued or even well written the volume might be. Find other professional review resources that can also enable you to read strategically. Finally, do not become fixated on a single topic. One never knows when the material you have read will coalesce and point you in a direction you never considered but can now never turn away from. Research is a journey, an exciting and challenging journey, where the ups and downs, as well as the curves in the path, help you realize that the goal is the journey, not solely the initial destination!