

JBL James C. VanderKam Completes His Service as General Editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*



This year James C. VanderKam is completing his second term as the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the flagship journal for biblical studies in North America. He is also at the end of eight years of distinguished service to the Society in two significant positions. Before accepting the editorship of *JBL*, Jim served for two years as the chair of Research and Publications, the committee charged with overseeing and developing policy for the Society's publishing arm. I was a member of R&P when Jim chaired the committee. I succeeded him in that position and was the committee's chair during much of his tenure as *JBL* editor when in that capacity he sat on R&P. In both of these positions, Jim exhibited the kind of calm, steady, and outstanding leadership that anyone who knows him would expect as a matter of course, and he brought to both R&P and *JBL* the same incisive

intellect that characterizes his scholarship.

During Jim's years of leadership, publishing in the Society has undergone a number of significant changes, many of which are related to the difficult issues of electronic publication and internet access to Society publications. The most public, and potentially controversial, was the shift from having book reviews in *JBL* to having them all appear in electronic form in *Review of Biblical Literature*. The process of making this change illustrates well the qualities that made Jim such an effective editor of the journal. When this transition was first proposed at a meeting of R&P, Jim supported the idea in principle, primarily because it would allow *JBL* to publish more articles and thus have greater scholarly representation in the journal. He made clear, however, that he wanted to consider all of the potential ramifications carefully, since the decision would affect every reader of *JBL*, many of whom looked to the journal for book reviews and who might not feel comfortable reading them online. After the final decision was reached, Jim's attention turned to the best ways to communicate the new policy to subscribers. When the first *JBL* issue without reviews appeared, all of us on R&P waited for what we anticipated would be the inevitable round of emails from subscribers who missed their printed reviews. To our surprise (and relief), there were none—none—and much of the credit for the smooth transition can be attributed to Jim's leadership and his concern throughout the process for *JBL*'s standing and for its subscribers.

In his role as editor, Jim has maintained *JBL*'s position at the top of the biblical studies field. He has worked hard to make the editorial board of the journal reflect the demographics of the Society. Anyone who knows Jim has experienced his regard not simply for his own scholarly work, but for that of his students, colleagues and the field at large. His willingness to serve the Society generally and *JBL* in particular is an extension of this respect for and devotion to the enterprise in which we all participate. I was privileged to work with Jim in two different capacities on the same committee and to experience the quiet strength of his leadership. As a Society, we owe Jim our thanks for his service and for the time and energy he spent over the last eight years working to assure the scholarly excellence of what we publish and to make it accessible to as many people as possible.

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