



Amir Hussain is professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, the Jesuit university in Los Angeles, CA. His own particular speciality is the study of Islam, focusing on contemporary Muslim societies in North America. Although born in Pakistan, Hussain immigrated to Canada with his family when he was four years old. His academic degrees (BSc, MA, and PhD) are all from the University of Toronto, where he received a number of awards — including the university's highest award for alumni service.

Hussain has a deep commitment to students, and holds the distinction of being the only male to serve as Dean of Women at University College, University of Toronto. Before coming to California in 1997, he taught courses in religious studies at several universities in Canada. In 2008, Hussain was appointed as a fellow of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities.

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Prior to his appointment at Loyola Marymount University, Hussain taught at California State University, Northridge, from 1997 to 2005. He won a number of awards there, both for his teaching and research. In 2001, he was selected for the outstanding faculty award by the National Center on Deafness. For the academic year 2003-2004, Hussain was selected as the Jerome Richfield Memorial Scholar. In both 2008 and 2009, he was chosen by vote of Loyola Marymount University students as Professor of the Year.

RSN: Why are you willing to serve as JAAR Editor?

Hussain: I think the simple answer to that is one word: “service.” I have been an AAR member for twenty years and have been to every annual meeting since 1992. The AAR is my academic home, and JAAR is our journal of record. At the University of Toronto where I did my graduate work, I had the great privilege of being mentored by two AAR presidents, Jane Dammen McAuliffe and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. From them, I learned not just about scholarship, but about service. Editing JAAR gives me a chance to give something substantial back to the AAR.

RSN: What are the most interesting contributions to the wider field of the study of religion you see *JAAR* making during your editorship?

Hussain: When I joined the AAR, there were some seventy of us who specialized in Islam in the Study of Islam Section. Since that time, we have grown to several hundred members and have expanded to include Qur'an, Islamic mysticism, and contemporary Islam groups. This has also been the case for many other scholars of non-Christian religions, as well as for those scholars pushing the boundaries of traditional scholarship on Christianity. For many of us, the AAR is our primary academic group. I would like as well to see *JAAR* become for us even more fully the journal of record.

I have experience with departments of religion in large public state universities, as well as with a more theologically oriented department in a small private university. I believe that my abilities in both theology and the study of religion — I am a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, as well as a life member of the North American Association for the Study of Religion — would serve me well as the new *JAAR* Editor. My vision for the journal is to nurture the conversations between theologians and scholars of religion. My institutional location, my own conversation partners, as well as my various positions of scholar, teacher, adherent, and citizen, have made me sensitive to the multiple dimensions of the issues raised by those conversations.

RSN: Do you foresee any major changes in the journal during your term as Editor?

Hussain: *JAAR* is the flagship journal for the study of religion, and I certainly don't want to mess that up. There will be the usual changes to the Editorial Board and selection of a new Book Review Editor that come with any new Editor. I'm also hoping to learn as much as I can from the two previous Editors, Charles Mathewes and Glenn Yocum, who did a tremendous amount to establish the reputation of *JAAR*. Of course, as a good Canadian, I'll do my best to bring proper spelling and punctuation to *JAAR*, as well as a special hockey issue [laughs].

RSN: What are the major challenges before *JAAR* that need to be met during your term?

Hussain: I don't see it as a challenge, but one opportunity is to expand the role of technology in the editing and publication of *JAAR*. For many reasons (environmental, cost effectiveness in saving money on paper and postage, and time saved in not having to wait for manuscripts to arrive in the mail), I would like to work with authors, reviewers, and the Editorial Board online as much as possible. Also, it will be interesting to see how we can use technology in the publication of *JAAR*. By that, I mean it would be great to have links to audio, video, and websites in the online version of *JAAR*.

RSN: What do you see as the challenges for a field-wide journal in the contemporary academic and publishing environment?

Hussain: I would continue to make *JAAR* accessible to its broad audience, so that the very diverse subfields in the AAR might listen to each other in the journal. As Editor, I would insist that many specialist articles that could appear in more narrowly focused periodicals do not belong in *JAAR*. Also tied in is the issue of technology, to make *JAAR* as easily accessible as possible to subscribers.

RSN: The study of religion is expanding beyond the field of religious studies. Do you think the *JAAR* could contribute to that larger conversation? If so, how?

Hussain: I have been a mentor to young scholars, and see *JAAR* as a place where new scholars could express their voices alongside those of more senior scholars. As someone who lives and works in Los Angeles — at once the largest Catholic archdiocese and the most religiously diverse city in the world — I am keenly aware of issues of comparative religion and religious dialogue. I think that this would certainly help in increasing our conversations.