



November 2014

## Book Review: *Anthony deMello: The Happy Wanderer.*

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### Recommended Citation

Gonsalves, Roselle M. (2014) "Book Review: *Anthony deMello: The Happy Wanderer.*," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 27, Article 18.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1590>

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and argues that a scholarly study of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in dialogue with science can make us appreciate (both practitioners and strangers) how close they actually are.

By showing that a fruitful dialogue with science has been possible with Abrahamic religions, and that it can be possible with Hinduism as well, Jonathan B. Edelman is not only contributing to the development of the

dialogue between science and religion, but also to the dialogue between religions. This book is definitely leaving a precedent for future attempts on building sturdy bridges between Hindu theologies and science.

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***Anthony deMello: The Happy Wanderer.* Bill deMello. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013. xxxvii + 264 pages.**

**GROWING** up, Anthony deMello's *Prayer of the Frog* was a bedtime favorite. This book of short *Aesop Fables*-type stories was simultaneously delightful and thought-provoking to an 8 year old. As a youngster, I came to know the work of Anthony deMello through my mother, a devout Catholic Goan for whom the late Jesuit was both superstar and best friend. It was with great delight, then, that I took the opportunity to review this book, written by Bill deMello, younger brother of Anthony deMello, hoping for some human insight into who Fr. deMello was beyond the mythical proportions of theological stardom endowed him by devotees.

Bill deMello's book *The Happy Wanderer* is divided into two distinct parts. The first of these is entitled 'The Journey to Sadhana'. In it, Bill deMello (the author) traces the deMello family background and narrates the story of Tony's life in great detail—from infancy onwards. deMello, being younger to Tony by a dozen years and having been only three years old when his elder brother left home to join the Jesuits, relies heavily on the memories of his elder sisters and on his own perception of his 'perfect big brother' in reconstructing the

narrative of Tony's early years. DeMello dons his ethnographer's hat readily, drawing on the accounts of several interlocutors to develop a picture of Tony as a young man journeying into the priesthood. Through correspondences with several Jesuits and former-Jesuits—some who knew Tony personally, and some who did not—deMello is able to paint an effective picture of Tony's years as a Jesuit novice and his early theological influences. He likewise conveys the impact that Tony's engagement with his faith had on those around him.

The detailed descriptions provided by several of Tony's peers from his years as a young priest in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) and its outskirts, impart a rather robust understanding of the circumstances and influences impacting Tony early in his Jesuit career; these would ultimately allow Tony to develop the rich theological and spiritual works for which he has become known. DeMello suggests that as a knowledge-hungry young man Tony was unable to simply rest on the laurels of the established Jesuit order. Rather, the instilled Jesuit love for learning and pursuit of knowledge would lead the young priest to

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question Catholic doctrine and modes of thought, leading him to seek a deeper, more personal understanding of Catholicism, spirituality, and human life. Of these early developments, deMello writes, “Tony must have had dreams of doing great things for Christ; [...] during his tenure as Rector of Vinay, I suggest, these dreams were beginning to form into something more than just dreams. Nebulous at first but becoming increasingly clear with the passing of the years in Vinay was a vision of a new kind of Society [of Jesus]—a Society responsive to a changing world” (109).

This vision of a new kind of Society—a uniquely Indian and Catholic response to the changing needs of the world around him—is what Tony would develop into his brand of theology, a theology he would call *sadhana*. Of course, in Sanskrit *sadhana* means ‘a way to accomplish something’. Tony deMello’s *sadhana* involved a series of spiritual exercises blending modern psychology, spiritual therapy, and drawing from both traditionally-Hindu and Catholic practices, to provide followers with a path for finding self-awareness and holistic living. This understanding of *sadhana* is the central focus of the book’s second section. Entitled ‘The Singer and His Song,’ it is an in-depth exploration of Tony’s life work. Once again, in order to paint a clearer picture of the philosophy and the man behind it, deMello draws on a rich collection of feedback from Tony’s colleagues, peers, and friends. Unfortunately, in places where these detailed pieces of ethnographic materials fall short, deMello is unable to expand, as he seems personally unfamiliar with the philosophies of *sadhana*. The author hazards many a guess as to the nature of Tony’s work and ministry—the only actual glimpse into his elder brother’s

works is offered simply through the words of those who knew Tony in greater depth. Through the words of his interlocutors, deMello weaves a picture of Tony’s work on the philosophies of *sadhana*. The reader is presented with an understanding of the Jesuit’s unique approach to attaining inner peace through engaging the body, the soul, the memory and the imagination. The author is told repeatedly by those who knew Tony and his work what a spectacular and special individual Tony was, and what an inspiration he and his works continue to be in the lives he touched.

What is apparent is that this book is a labor of love. In a quest to understand the brother who left home when the author was a toddler, and to find a connection to the legend that Tony deMello eventually became, the author takes on the roles of archivist, ethnographer, and historian. He presents us with rich data mined from several sources. Unfortunately, none of these sources were of the “intimate” or personal nature that the book’s back jacket promised. To the deMello who was 12 years Tony’s junior, the elder brother was always larger than life. Tony’s pious nature was solidified in deMello’s personal narrative from the start: Tony was the saint to Bill deMello’s mischievous sinner—a dichotomy the author seems unable to transcend. So the author presents the reader neither with Tony’s personality nor humanity. Rather, deMello represents the myth of the man. This shortcoming aside, the book excels in providing the details the author worked so painstakingly to compile, details about Tony deMello’s early days in training to become a Jesuit, the young priest’s affinity for teaching through contemporary and pertinent examples, his

emphasis on spirituality over doctrine. The voices of the author's informants run richly throughout the book, and strengthen his wistful assertion that Tony belonged to no single family and no single person, but to the thousands of people whose lives he had touched with his work. deMello writes of Tony: "He was and is truly universal" (201). Perhaps the lack of personal details from deMello to reveal the man behind the myth is simply a product of this purported universality—no one

person has claim to any greater part of the superstar Jesuit. However, it is within the voices of those who personally knew Fr. Anthony deMello, SJ during his life, that the reader is able to glimpse the man himself: motivated, worldly, humble, disciplined, intelligent, dedicated to his faith, passionate about learning, humorous, and compassionate.

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## Briefly Noted

***Gods in America: Religious Pluralism in the United States.* Charles L. Cohen and Ronald L. Numbers, eds. New York: OUP Press, 2013, xviii + 386 pages.**

*GODS in America* begins with a fascinating essay by Amanda Porterfield on the related development of "religious studies" in the United States and the more positive attitude toward religious diversity embodied by the term "pluralism". Indeed, one of the strengths of *Gods in America*, particularly relative to similar books, like Diana Eck's *A New Religious America* (HarperCollins 2002), is the critical attention it pays to this term ("pluralism"), and to how its development, meaning, and politics differed not only through time, but also in different geographical and religious contexts. The volume is also somewhat more up to date, compared to similar texts published earlier, on issues like the latest electoral results, important legal rulings, and polls indicating a rise in the number of religious "nones".

*Gods in America* is expansive in its coverage. After early essays describing the development

of pluralism in the United States from several different perspectives, later essays pay attention to pluralism in relation to Evangelicalism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and then to the theme in relation to women, African Americans, politics, foreign policy, law, and pop culture. Peter Williams's chapter on the last of these topics delightfully demonstrates that popular religion presents another important but often overlooked vector of religious diversity in America.

The volume's broad and diverse coverage is both a strength and a weakness. As a volume of essays, some quite general and others more focused, *Gods in America* does not cohere as well as Eck's *A New Religious America*, or John Corrigan and Lynn Neal's *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History* (UNC Press, 2010). Nor does it pay the attention these texts