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## Book Review: *Gods in America: Religious Pluralism in the United States.*

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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

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do to instances of religious intolerance and violence in American history. In addition, in chronicling the history of increasing religious diversity in America, *Gods in America* does not far surpass Eck's work, or Thomas Tweed's *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (University of California Press, 1997). For these reasons, it may not work as well as some other texts as a

general resource in the undergraduate classroom. But individual chapters will no doubt be of great interest to researchers whose needs are more specific.

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***Religious Understandings of a Good Death in Hospice and Palliative Care.***  
Edited by Harold Coward and Kelli I. Stajduhar. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012, vii. + 340 pp.

THE hospice model founded by Cicely Saunders in the 1960s addresses three dimensions of death and dying: pain control, family, and spirituality; but in practice, the specific religious factors involved in "spirituality" have been underdeveloped. This volume helps to fill the gap. Part I surveys visions of the "good death" in Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Chinese religious traditions. Anantanand Rambachan's chapter on Hinduism emphasizes practices, such as hearing sacred texts, which help Hindus to overcome the fear of death and fix their minds on God. Janet Soskice's chapter on Christianity notes the relative absence of obligatory rituals relating to death and points instead to core beliefs, such as the creation of every person in the image of God and the resurrection of the dead. While the reader might wonder whether such brief surveys can do justice to the internal diversity of traditions, the essays in this section make judicious use of mini case studies to show the importance of understanding particular

situations within a broader religious framework. Part II offers extended case studies from particular geographical and cultural locations (Tibetan Buddhist, Ugandan, Punjabi, and Indigenous/Canadian) as well as essays addressing the care of children and interfaith chaplaincy. These chapters drive home the point that globalization, gender, culture, the influence of multiple religions, and other factors can play complex roles in particular situations (Kamala Elizabeth Nayar's examination of one Punjabi family is excellent in this regard). This book is an important resource not only for members of hospice and palliative care teams but also for residents in Clinical Pastoral Education programs and anyone engaged in interfaith chaplaincy. Readers will look forward to a projected second volume on atheist, agnostic, and spirituality-based hospice care.

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