

“Santa’s very own encyclical”), he wrote “If [anyone] proposes to remain a member, he accepts the decisions of its governing body. If he finds those decisions shocking to his conscience, he has the courage of his convictions and leaves the organisation.” When Santamaria became deeply unhappy with the directions the Church took after the Second Vatican Council, he set up the magazine *AD2000* to turn back the tide. Santamaria’s attitude resembles that of Pope Francis’s recent conservative critics: loyalty to the Pope is for when the Pope agrees with me.

One regrettable lacuna in the book is the story of why Santamaria and Henderson fell out, after working closely for some years around 1970. In general terms, the answer is obvious – they were both “I did it my way” personalities and no organization was going to be big enough for both of them. But the exact first-hand story of what happened would have been entertaining.

In researching the biography, Henderson did not have the cooperation of Santamaria’s family. His book is the last word on Santamaria on the evidence now available. It may not be the last word if the family releases more documents to a sympathetic biographer.

### **BOOK REVIEW**

#### *Australian Religious Thought*

Author: Wayne Hudson

Publisher: Monash University Publishing, 2016

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Paperback, 248 pages, \$22.95

Book review by James Franklin\*

This is an excellent and hugely informative book on its topic. But its topic is not exactly Australian religious thought. It is mainly about Australian semi-religious thought, or unorthodox religious thought, or original religious thought, or sometimes, hardly-at-all-religious thought. Most readers will be astonished at the inventiveness of the vast range of Australian religious thinkers that Hudson has dug up, and grateful for his mostly thumbnail

\*James Franklin is the author of *Corrupting the Youth: A history of philosophy in Australia* (Macleay Press, 2003).

## AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

WAYNE HUDSON



\*Learned and precise, this book shows what's wrong with the old boundary between secular and sacred in Australia. The implications for rethinking our past, present and future are enormous.

Alan Atkinson

sketches of what they said. But as one of the points of religion (in contrast to philosophy) is to think in fidelity with some tradition, the result is a strangely skewed view of what has been thought by religious people in Australia. Hudson seems inclined to think that if someone is orthodox they are merely parroting a party line and not really thinking. That underplays the ability of quite strict orthodoxies to have something new to say.

Hudson usefully distinguishes between “unbelief”, a lack of belief possibly accompanied by regret and some sympathy or nostalgia for religion, and “disbelief”, a positive anti-belief often accompanied by hostility to religion. While both have existed

in Australia, he points out that this country has lacked the violent hostility to religion common in Latin countries, possibly matching the lack of extreme views on the religious side. The Australian Catholic Church, a large and eventually the largest denomination and politically powerful, has shown no ambition to make Australia a confessional state. B.A. Santamaria had extensive, some would say overweening, political ambitions, but he did not want to become Franco.

On specifically Catholic themes, Hudson gives respectful treatment to the scholastic philosophy that underpinned seminary training, moral theory and apologetics from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. The poets Francis Webb, James McAuley and Les Murray are said to combine elements of faith and disbelief, as are the neurophysiologist Sir John Eccles and B.A. Santamaria. That is a reasonable view as those figures, even in periods of their lives when they claimed to be fully orthodox, remained independent-minded in ways that in other contexts might have attracted accusations of “cafeteria Catholicism”. Regrettably missing is any mention of the more definitely orthodox Archbishop Mannix and Arthur Calwell, whose reading of *Rerum Novarum* informed a particular theory of political action, one that provided an influential alternative and counterbalance to the Marxist vision that in the mid-twentieth century threatened to dominate left-wing politics. Also absent is the intellectual field in which Australian Catholic thought has probably been strongest, history. Patrick O’Farrell and other historians are not mentioned.

In the chapter on theology, where orthodoxy does have a higher profile than elsewhere in the book, evangelicals such as Broughton Knox are given more prominence than Catholics. However post-Vatican II Catholic theology is treated sympathetically, with its developments in the Trinity and Christology by such theologians as David Coffey, Anthony Kelly, Gerald O'Collins and Neil Ormerod.

Still, the main point of the book is its accounts not of institutionalised church-supported thinking but of, so to speak, DIY religion. Theosophy. Pantheism. Process theology. Spiritualism. Unitarianism. Pantheism. The union movement (“Trades unionism is a new and grand religion”: Henry Lawson). Personal “explorations” of the divine. You name it.

Interesting as these ideas often were, the outside observer may wonder if the whole project was getting anywhere. Unorthodox religious thinkers appear from this account to have been sincere and often intelligent seekers after the truth, and their complaints about the rigidities, narrowness and power obsessions of the institutional churches were often justified, but their alternatives are often hard to understand. A power beyond our ken, what does that mean? With a theology involving a personal God, we at least know where we are, but it is often hard to see what unorthodox thinkers believe the contents of the universe actually are. The Sydney process theologian and biologist Charles Birch, for example, is said to believe in a God as the “cosmic mind, or within of all things”, which “did not intervene in the world, but acted on all entities by persuasion and feeling”. Easy to say, but does the combination of words mean anything?

These trends also find it hard to match traditional religions in the institutional and social roles of religion. Not for want of trying, but the farcical results can be seen in the new “Beatitudes” devised for the Spiritualist Sunday Schools of Victoria in 1877 by the Spiritualists’ president, Alfred Deakin:

*Conductor.* – Blessed are the dutiful;

*Leaders.* – For they shall find the peace which cannot be bought and sold.

*Conductor.* – Blessed are the punctual.

*Children.* – For they have learned the lesson which the stars and planets teach ...

*Conductor.* – Blessed are the faithful, the dutiful, the punctual, the orderly, the innocent, the pure in heart;

*All.* – For theirs is the republic of heaven.

If you're going to have a religion, you might as well have a real one.