



## Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

**1 May, Martin Horlacher: "Spinoza: Was He the Prince of Philosophers?"**

Baruch Spinoza is widely considered one of the greatest rationalist philosophers not only of 17th-century Europe, but perhaps of all time, laying the groundwork for the 18th-century Enlightenment and modern biblical criticism, as well as modern conceptions of the self and the universe. His moral character and philosophical accomplishments throughout his 44 years of life have led one 20th-century philosopher to name him "the 'prince' of philosophers", and this talk will examine why.

**8 May, Rev Geoff Usher: "Mothers Day"**

Charles Simmons said: "If you would reform the world from its errors and vices, begin by enlisting the mothers." But there are some mothers who should not be enlisted. Let us not put mothers on a pedestal. Let us not idealise them to the point they become unreal, fondly sentimentalised paintings, rather than flesh and blood.

**15 May, Colin Whatmough: "Vietnam - the Sorrow of War"**

**22 May, Jan Tendys: 'How did Unitarian Universalism arrive at its Principles and Purposes?'**

This was part of the evolution of the American Unitarians (Christians but unconventional) to today's even more unconventional Unitarian Universalists where Christianity is one option among many.

**29 May Rev. Geoff Usher "Leisure and Bustle: A Contrast"**

In his poem "What is life ....?" W. H. Davies wrote:

*"What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.*

.....

*No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance,  
A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare."*

Even in our modern, busy, industrialised society, it is important to take time "to stand and stare".

# Book Review 1

## Australian Religious Thought

By Wayne Hudson | Monash University Publishing | \$39.95

When I was tutoring a philosophy of religion unit at my university, I often started the discussion by asking students if they believed in God. **Many said that they didn't believe in the God of the Bible but that they did believe in the existence of some kind of spiritual presence in the world.** It was hard to know whether their spirituality was an inconsequential residue left by the death of religion or a stubborn refusal to leave it behind.

From the perspective of the philosopher and historian Wayne Hudson, my students were groping their way towards ideas that belong in the realm of religious thought. The first of his two aims in Australian Religious Thought is to demonstrate that religious thinking has been more prevalent in Australia than most people think. He wants to refute the publisher who told him that a book on this subject would be very short. **His second aim is to argue that religious thought is not confined to the doctrines of churches or theological writings: it can be found in advocates of secularism, in the views of disbelievers and many social reformers, and in the beliefs of those who seek a spiritual path outside conventional religion.**

The themes into which Hudson divides his study are chosen to reveal the diverse material that makes up Australian religious thought. The first theme, disbelief, encompasses those who take a critical and sometimes condemnatory stance on religious tenets. By rejecting doctrines that they think are false or irrational, disbelievers distinguish themselves from unbelievers, who doubt what they would like to believe, and from nonbelievers, who have no interest in religious questions.

By including disbelief as a category of religious thought, Hudson might be accused of confusing religious thinking with thinking about religion. It would be odd to regard the militant atheist Richard Dawkins, for instance, as a religious thinker. But the disbelievers that Hudson features are people with a religious back-

ground or religious concerns who moved into disbelief as the result of dissatisfaction with religious dogma or ecclesiastic authority, or because they thought that the true meaning of religion was better pursued in an alternative framework.

The author Marcus Clarke, for example, thought that Christianity was moribund, and attacked official religion and conventional ideas of God in his best-known work, For the Term of His Natural Life; nevertheless, through most of his life he retained a belief in God and a hope that the true aim of religion could be achieved through the betterment of humankind. Ada Cambridge, a novelist and wife of a clergyman, wrestled with doubt and came to believe that organised religion got in the way of proper appreciation of earthly joy. Alfred Deakin, one of the fathers of the Australian Federation, became a spiritualist and a member of the Theosophical Society in his search for a religion compatible with science. Patrick White rejected conventional Christianity on aesthetic grounds but retained a belief in the sacred within ordinary life.

Hudson's second theme, sacral secularity, attempts to capture those thinkers who find a sacred mission in secular affairs. He is at pains to point out that the secular has had many different meanings in Australia, and that secularists don't necessarily exclude religion from the public realm. Some of those who advocate secular education do so because they think it best serves religious ends or because they don't want education to be dominated by the clergy of any church. Some sacral secularists dedicate themselves to political and social causes because they believe that service to others is the best, or only legitimate, manifestation of the religious impulse.

**Henry Lawson, for instance, thought that the essence of Christianity was humanism. A true Christian, he said, is "one who is sorry for most men and all women and tries to act to [this creed] to the best of his ability."** William Lane, a labour activist and the founder of a utopian community in Paraguay, regarded socialism as the true realisation of religion and believed that communism was "part of God's Law."

Some sacral secularists take a sociological view of religion as a force for binding people together in a community; others think that God's plan is working itself out in the secular world.

Sacral secularists are not generally interested in reforming religious doctrines or organisations. **Religious liberals, on the other hand, see the reformation of their religion as their objective. Some of them take issue with the doctrine of the trinity; some, like the novelist and feminist Catherine Helen Spence, doubt the divinity of Christ and argue for the existence of a non-supernatural religion. Some want to reform the church or supplant it with a different form of worship. Charles Strong, an influential minister in the Scots Church in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century, wanted to return to a primitive form of Christianity without hierarchy or dogma.**

While disbelievers, liberal reformers and sacral secularists often have philosophical or theological opinions, Hudson treats separately religious intellectuals for whom religious philosophy or theology was central. Among philosophers he singles out are William Ralph Boyce Gibson, a professor at Melbourne University who used Husserl's phenomenology to provide an account of the presence of God in human consciousness; Max Charlesworth, a Catholic intellectual influenced by existentialism; and Kevin Hart, who has used the philosophy of deconstruction to gesture towards a transcendent God who can't be represented in thought. Theologians in Australia have opinions on the role of the church, the reformation of church doctrines, the relation of Christianity to other religions, and the concerns of feminists.

Hudson uses his last theme, post-secular consciousness, to discuss thinkers who are secularists in rejecting conventional religion but who retain ideas of the sacred. **Some find the sacred in nature, some in the sensual and the passionate. Some draw an inspiration from process philosophy as a form of evolution that reaches towards a higher form of existence; others look to science or psychoanalysis for a new interpretation of the sacred.** Charles Birch pro-

moted the idea of a value-laden universe, and environmental philosophers like Richard Sylvan, Val Plumwood and Freya Mathews argue that nature has a value in its own right. Peter Read thinks that the value to Aborigines of their land is the key to a superior view of the sacred.

Hudson's survey proves his point: a lot of religious thinking has indeed taken place in Australia, and many Australians who are celebrated for their secular activities have been influenced by religious ideas. He gives some thinkers more attention than others. He has a lot to say about philosophers of religion and presents some of their theories in detail, but feminist theologians get only a passing glance. He is interesting and informative about those he labels disbelievers, but not so attentive to most of those in the post-secular camp.

**Hudson's conception of religious thought is inclusive but there are obvious gaps, the most glaring of which is his failure to include Aboriginal views about their law and land. Hudson is well aware of this deficiency but thinks that Aboriginal thought needs a separate treatment – one that challenges the very idea that it can be squeezed into a traditional conception of religion. He does discuss attempts by non-Aboriginal scholars to take account of Aboriginal spirituality, however, including the pioneering work of Max Charlesworth.**

Aside from his venture into post-secular ideas of the sacred, the religious thought that Hudson discusses is almost all Christian or critical responses to Christianity. Indeed, most of the religious thinkers he features were Protestants. This emphasis is partly explained by his focus on the development of religious thought among settlers and non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia up until the late twentieth century. These Australians came mostly from a Christian tradition, and Protestants of one kind or another were for a long time the dominant religious voices in the colonies. Up to the time of the Second Vatican Council, most Catholics adhered to doctrines laid down by the Church. Australian Jews, Hudson says, were not much inclined

to engage in religious thought – perhaps because of their more precarious existence as a minority group.

Hudson says that he is not interested in thought that merely reflects or applies conventional doctrines. This statement is intended to explain why he largely ignores the religious ideas of Jews, Muslims and Buddhists in Australia, and perhaps it also explains why he gives B.A. Santamaria, one of the most influential religious figures in Australian history, only a passing mention.

### ***Emphases by present editor, JT.***

The above is an extract from an article by **Janna Thompson**, Adjunct Professor at La Trobe University for Inside Story (a free online magazine). Thompson's research focuses on political and moral philosophy. Read more at:

<http://insidestory.org.au/believers-doubters-and-disbelievers>

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## **Found through Twitter**

### **I cannot vote for a pacifist as prime minister**

Posted in Comment on 03/27/2016 09:02 pm by **Stephen Tindale** (UK)

I am a member of the Labour Party . I go to my local branch meetings, and am working to get Sadiq Khan elected as Mayor of London. I plan to campaign hard to help Labour retain power in Camden in 2018 (unless I have been purged by then). However, if Jeremy Corbyn is still party leader at the 2020 General Election, I will not vote Labour – unless he has stated publicly that military force is sometimes justifiable, and given some real world examples of where it has been.

A Corbyn government would probably be better for the UK economy than continued Conservative rule. But on current trends it would be very bad for foreign policy, with potentially

disastrous consequences. Human beings are of equal value wherever they live. Being progressive means being internationalist.

Corbyn says that he is not a pacifist. But he is a de facto pacifist in that he has not yet, as far as I know (and I've looked quite hard), given an example of when he accepts that the use of force has been justified or would be justified. In a radio interview he was asked if he could name a conflict in which the use of force had been justified. His reply was that he couldn't think of one.

While I was at Greenpeace and campaigning against the invasion of Iraq I was often asked this question, and always said the Second World War. Not exactly controversial to say that force was necessary and justified to defeat Hitler and end the Holocaust. Peaceful negotiations – which Corbyn says he favours – had been tried with the Nazis, and had failed. (They are nowadays known as appeasement.) But, as John Rentoul wrote following a recent interview with our would-be prime minister:

“he respects conscientious objectors to the Second World War, without saying that he recognises that it was a just war.”

(<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/daily-catch-up-jeremy-corbyn-not-sure-if-hes-a-pacifist-but-never-wrong-a6753961.html>)

Daesh will not be more open to peaceful negotiation than the Nazis were. Yes, every situation is different; Syria in 2015 is not Germany in 1939. And air strikes may not be the way to combat Daesh. The three Labour MPs whose campaigns I was involved in last year, Wes Streeting, Catherine West and Keir Starmer, all of whom I respect, voted against air strikes in Syria. Hilary Benn, who I also respect greatly, voted in favour. What concerns me about Corbyn's approach is not his line on Syrian air strikes but his refusal to accept that force is ever necessary.

The Second World War was not the only, or even most recent, just and necessary war. NATO's involvement in Bosnia Herzegovina was another. So was NATO's involvement in

Kosovo. I have recently been re-reading John Kampfner's excellent book Blair's Wars, and highly recommend this to anyone trying to make sense of Labour and foreign policy.

Corbyn's line on Kosovo is appalling. He says that peaceful negotiations should have been tried. They were. He says that UN authorisation should have been sought. But, as Kampfner records, the US, UK and others had been told by the Russians that they would veto any UN resolution, out of solidarity with their Serbian ally, but that they would not take any practical measures against NATO operations in Kosovo. So, instead of spending valuable time going through motions at the UN, NATO went in and helped the Kosovar.

Yes, NATO bombs killed some civilians. Some tactics, such as the use of cluster bombs, see

[https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200.htm#P37\\_987](https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/nato/Natbm200.htm#P37_987)

were wrong. But the intervention was right; it helped prevent mass killing and ethnic cleansing turning into total genocide. Over 13,000 people (civilians and soldiers) were killed or went missing in 1998-2000 in Kosovo,,see

<http://balkanwitness.glypx.com/KosovoCasualties.htm>

But without NATO intervention it would have been even worse. The German Foreign Minister at the time was Green Party leader Joschka Fischer. The Greens have a very strong pacifist tendency, but Fischer supported German involvement in Kosovo, saying to his party colleagues:

"You say never again war. I say never again Auschwitz."

Jeremy Corbyn does not see it quite that way. In 2004 he signed an Early Day Motion about "a 'genocide' that never really existed in Kosovo", see

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2004-05/392>

He may have changed his mind since then. If so, he has ample opportunity to say so.

If Corbyn does state publicly that military force is sometimes justifiable, I will vote Labour in 2020. If not, and if he is still leader, I will not.

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***Comment by Jan Tendys: Responses to the above welcome. A "Blair war" to which most Unitarians around the world strongly objected was the 2003 invasion of Iraq after the destruction of the twin towers in New York. It may be said we were pacifists with respect to that particular war.***

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**Book Review 2**

**September, 2003**, "The Guardian" (originally published in "The Observer")

Blair's Wars

by John Kampfner

Free Press £17.99, pp384

Why did Tony Blair support George W. Bush and authorise the use of force in Iraq? The question becomes even more difficult to answer plausibly in light of the apparent failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the material now available from the Hutton inquiry.

John Kampfner's understated, careful and illuminating book may provide some of the answers. He takes us chronologically through Blair's five 'wars', beginning with the air strikes in Iraq (1998) through the Kosovo war (1999), and then on to the dispatch of British troops to Sierra Leone (2000) and the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001). But the major part of the book deals with Iraq, up to July of this year. Kampfner leads us to a set of compelling conclusions that will not inspire confidence.

The story of the Iraq war describes a process of governmental decision-making that is presidential and solitary in character, apparently involving only a very small coterie of high-level political appointments and civil servants. It is a process that allows only a mar-

ginal role for the Cabinet and collective decisions, mostly rubber-stamping.

The Prime Minister's foreign and military policy, such as it is, is developed on the basis of secretive intelligence, an overarching and passionate commitment to the 'special relationship' with the United States (on the basis of shared values) and an emerging commitment to some vague concept of 'international community' (which presumes to allow a small group of countries to act pre-emptively for the benefit of humankind as a whole).

Wikipedia



**Whim and hope are added for good measure. And all of this driven by the personality of a Prime Minister described as a combination of 'naivety and hubris' and 'self-confidence and fear', informed by an almost evangelic commitment to right and wrong and a belief in his personal powers of persuasion.**

This book disabuses us of any sense that there was, in relation to Iraq, some sort of coherent long-term plan. By this account, there is no room for reference to the experiences of Iraqi or Middle Eastern history, or the real prospects or implications for long-term government in a Shia-dominated Iraq, or a sanguine assessment for the implications for stability in the region. Nor is there any place for careful consideration of the implications for Britain's relations in Europe, or the United Nations system and the rules of international law for which Britain has agitated over many years.

Indeed, one of the most disturbing themes that runs through the book is Number 10's consistent and complete sidelining of the Foreign Office. As early as April 2002, the Prime Minister had privately assured President Bush of his support. But in order to proceed, Mr Blair needed political, diplomatic and legal cover. This meant Security Council authorisation by resolution, since it could not reasonably be argued that Iraq's actions entitled the UK to use force by way of self-defence.

Mindful of concerns as to legality and in the face of growing backbench pressure, the Prime Minister obtained from the Attorney General a legal opinion apparently justifying the use of force by reference to the original 1991 Security Council resolution authorising force to liberate Kuwait. According to Kampfner, the Attorney General's judgment provided a political 'lifeline'.

The opinion may have persuaded some Labour MPs, but it did not persuade many states. Britain was unable to persuade any of the undecided member states to come on board and other neutral states, such as Switzerland, decided they were free to maintain a neutral status on the grounds that the Security Council had not authorised the use of force.

Complying with international rules may seem pedantic, but it is important for Britain's overall interests in a globalising system. The support for the Iraq war without good or lawful foundation undermines those long-term interests. Kampfner confirms a widely held sentiment that, for all his good intentions, Tony Blair has been a handmaiden to a US administration which is hell-bent on destroying the rules-based multilateral system that the Anglo-American alliance created in 1945.

**And it is not clear what Britain has obtained in return. Unstinting support seems to have made not a jot of a difference to the Bush administration's position on the Kyoto protocol, the International Criminal Court and the rights of the Guantanamo Bay detainees.**

(Present editor's emphases)

The article from which the extract above was taken was written by **Philippe Sands**.  
Read more:

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/sep/28/politicalbooks.politics>

**Note: The most famous pacifist associated with Unitarianism is Bertrand Russell (he attended a Unitarian Church till age 18, although he later said he had ceased to be a believer in even the unconventional Christianity of Unitarianism of the time by age 14). According to Wikipedia: "In 1943 Russell called his stance towards warfare 'relative political pacifism' - he held that war was always a great evil, but in some particularly extreme circumstances (such as when Adolf Hitler threatened to take over Europe) it might be a lesser of multiple evils. In the years leading to World War II, he supported the policy of appeasement; but by 1940 he acknowledged that in order to preserve democracy, Hitler had to be defeated. This same reluctant value compromise was shared by his acquaintance A.A. Milne."**  
**JT**

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## Rescuing Jesus From The Bible

<http://www.atheists-for-jesus.com/>

**Ken Schei, the principal writer on this site, is an invited speaker in some UU Churches.**

Hello and welcome to "Atheists for Jesus." The main purpose of this site is to provide a place for religious and non-religious people of good will to come together to discuss various subjects relating to the life and teaching's of Jesus of Nazareth. As you can see by the title of the current discussion: "Rescuing Jesus from the Bible," we will not shy away from controversial subjects.

Over the past couple of years, I have been speaking and writing on the subject of "Rescuing Jesus (and America) from the Religious Right" (which was the subject of the "Rescuing Jesus" podcasts [which can be found on iTunes or linked to from this site]).

As evidenced by the 2008 elections, we have made some progress toward that goal. The enormous influence that the Religious Right has wielded for the last eight years has, indeed, waned considerably. However, we still have a very long way to go before we can even begin to think about lowering our guard.

One of the major problems that we face going forward, is that many moderate and liberal Christians are unsure about how they should deal with the fact that almost all of the positions that are held by the Religious Right (positions that the moderate and liberal Christians oppose) can find support in the Christian Bible. The 2004 Senate campaign between Barack Obama and Alan Keyes is an excellent example of this problem.

Here is an excerpt from Barack Obama's book, "The Audacity of Hope":

*"Alan Keyes presented the essential vision of the religious right in this country, shorn of all compromise. Within its own terms, it was entirely coherent, and provided Mr. Keyes with the certainty and fluency of an Old Testament prophet. And while I found it simple enough to dispose of his constitutional and policy arguments, his readings of Scripture put me on the defensive."*

"His readings of Scripture put me on the defensive." President Obama is an excellent example of a moderate or liberal Christian, while Alan Keyes is the quintessential representative of the Religious Right. The ability of Alan Keyes to put Barack Obama on the defensive in this manner, presents us with a very serious problem. The ability of the Religious Right to back up their positions with quotations from the Bible gives them a perceived legitimacy in the eyes of moderate and liberal Christians that I do not believe that they deserve.

President Obama continued in his book:

*"What could I say? That a literal reading of the Bible was folly? Unwilling to go there, I answered with the usual liberal response in such debates--that we live in a pluralistic society, that I can't impose my religious views on another, that I was running to be a U.S.*



*senator from Illinois and not the minister of Illinois. But even as I answered, I was mindful of Mr. Keyes's implicit accusation--that I remained steeped in doubt, that my faith was adulterated, that I was not a true Christian."*

It is my intention to demonstrate that the defensiveness that is described by President Obama in his book and that is likewise felt by numerous liberal and moderate Christians, is both unnecessary and harmful.

There are currently two vastly different versions of Christianity being practiced in the United States. One version stresses the "Born Again" experience (the acceptance of Jesus Christ as a personal Lord and Savior) and is practiced by such people as Pat Robertson and Sarah Palin. The other version stresses what has come to be known as the "Social Gospel" and is supported by, among others, Bishop John Shelby Spong and Barack Obama. The first group believes that the way to get to heaven is through a belief in the sacrificial death and supposed resurrection of Jesus the Christ, while the second group believes that the proper path is defined by the admonition to "Love your neighbor as yourself" as presented by Jesus of Nazareth. It is commonly held that these differences are the result of differing interpretations of the same religion. It is my contention, however, that these differences are the result of two completely different religions being inappropriately thrown together in what we now call the New Testament. In conversations that I held with Dr. Carl Sagan, he expressed this idea very eloquently:

*"My longtime view about Christianity is that it represents an amalgam of two seemingly immiscible parts: the religion of Jesus and the religion of Paul. Thomas Jefferson attempted to excise the Pauline parts of the New Testament. There wasn't much left when he was done, but it was an inspiring document." (A letter from Dr. Sagan to myself.)*

The document that Dr. Sagan referred to has become known as the "Jefferson Bible."

***Ken Schei goes on to elaborate the differences between Pauline Christianity and what he discerns as being the religion of those apostles who knew Jesus.***

***Contributed by Caroline Donnelly***

### **Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?**

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** Full membership \$50 concession \$20 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org) . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings for an application form at the Sunday service.

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.***

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: jantendys@yahoo.com.au or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical nature that you would like to share with the congregation?*** As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**