Religion and Non-Religion
The religious dimension in human history

identify the following expressions of the religious dimension in human history: - animism, polytheism and monotheism

- Animism
  - the belief that all natural objects (people, animals, landforms etc.) possess a soul
  - every part of creation must treat every other part of creation with respect
  - engages spiritually with the natural world
  - sacrifices served to control the physical environment
  - e.g. Native American, Aboriginal Australian and Polynesian

- Polytheism
  - the worship of multiple gods or deities
  - many polytheistic deities resemble human beings (own personalities, personal history etc.) and are assigned jurisdictional powers linked to their particular skill/talent
  - e.g. Hinduism, Egyptian and Aztec

- Monotheism
  - the belief in one God/divine being only
  - god is usually depicted as an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being and is credited with the creation of the universe and humankind
  - e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam

evaluate the place of the religious dimension in human history to provide: - meaning and purpose for the individual, social cohesion, social transformation

- Meaning and Purpose for the Individual
  - Religion provides answers to fundamental questions that relate to the origin, purpose and destiny of humankind which gives meaning and purpose
  - e.g. The Christian Creation and Jesus story
  - Provides a sense of belonging and community through the rituals and practices of a religion
  - e.g. Islamic daily prayer/Friday prayer and the Hajj
  - Provides pathways and marks the significance of important milestones in life
  - e.g. Aboriginal rites of initiation, Christian marriage and baptism, Jewish bar mitzvah
  - Establishes relationships and perspectives

- Social Cohesion
  - Establishes common stories, morality, code of ethics, perspectives through sacred texts and scared rituals
  - e.g. Christian ethics in the Bible
  - Reinforces the cultural identity of a group
  - e.g. underlying Christian principles in Australian society
  - Provides a sense of community as it serves to link the rapidly changing, complex modern society with a more traditional and stable past

- Social Transformation
  - Can be used as a tool for criticising/challenging structures, customs and beliefs of its own societies
  - the transfer and recontextualisation of traditional values into new and different situations as the world has changed throughout history
  - Religions work towards world peace, social justice and equality
  - e.g. Martin Luther King (Baptist fighting against racial inequality), the Dalai Lama (Buddhist working for interfaith dialogue in a globalised world), Christian charities (World Vision)
*investigate statistical data of the current global distribution of the five major religious traditions:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Tradition</th>
<th>Global Percentage</th>
<th>Highest Population of Adherents</th>
<th>Highest Percentage of Adherents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Vatican City (2nd Brazil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Israel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New religious expression

*recognise the reasons for the rise of new religious expressions as people: - search for personal fulfilment, seek ethical guidelines, seek to clarify their relationship with society*

- **New Religious expressions**
  - due to a growing secular and individualistic society
  - alternative spiritualities aiming to foster personal happiness, health and meaning in life
    - heterogenous movement of individuals
  - traditional religions are failing to resonate with modern people
  - traditional idea of community has changed (more individualistic)

- includes feng shui, tarot cards, astrology, meditation, holistic health, Scientology, philosophy
  - **Wiccans**
    - affirms the existence of supernatural power (as magic) in nature that emphasises ritual observance of seasonal and life cycles
    - worship mother goddess of the moon
    - balances free will with responsibility and rights with respect
    - statistically 25-34 yr olds, 76% females
    - 0.04% of Australian population

- **Search for Personal Fulfilment**
  - Traditional religious beliefs are often recognised as irrelevant, there is a strong need to find meaning and purpose in life’s journey
  - The most significant attraction of new age religions is that they offer personal fulfilment
  - Given diverse nature of new age religions, new age religions are well suited to offer personal fulfilment in a considerable variety of ways
    - e.g. transcendental meditation or visualisation exercises offer relaxation and empowerment

- **Seek Ethical Guidelines**
  - Traditional religious guidance is seen as meaningless and irrelevant
  - The postmodern nature of society means that there is a lack of moral certainty in society, and in its place is the notion of moral relativism
  - Because many people find it difficult to formulate their own ethical guidelines, they turn to new age religions for ethical guidelines
    - Strong emphasis on individual intuition and inner feelings
    - It is deemed extremely important to care for the environment (using environmentally friendly products, recycling, taking care of forests etc.)

- **Seek to Clarify their Relationship with Society**
  - Human beings are essentially social creatures, and few people will live happily without meaningful contact with others
    - Many people wish to have significant moments in their lives recognised by society
      - e.g. Sage burning cleansing rituals when moving into a new house or a baby’s naming ceremony
  - New Age spiritualities offer alternative rituals and celebrations that help followers feel part of society without being part of a ‘traditional’ religion
    - e.g. Mind Body Spirit Festival or other seminars

Sarah Jones
explain how the following have influenced the growth of new religious expressions and spiritualities: - the rise of materialism, scientific progress, growth of ecological awareness, disenchantment with 'traditional' religious practice and guidance

- New religious expressions have been growing since 1970s
  - spread by the media (magazines with astrology, Internet, television and books)

- The Rise of Materialism
  - Today, Australians are experiencing greater affluence and owning more material possessions
  - New Age religions which favour individual spirituality and personal fulfilment thrive in materialistic, individualistic societies

- Scientific Progress
  - Rapid growth of scientific knowledge has raised serious questions for some religious perspectives
    - Many followers feel disillusioned with Western medicine and instead seek holistic health techniques
      - e.g. acupuncture, reflexology, iridology
    - Others have abandoned traditional religious beliefs, in the belief that scientific discoveries have discredited such beliefs
      - Many new age religions have a pseudo-scientific basis e.g. numerology

- Growth of Ecological Awareness
  - The growth of ecological awareness in recent generations has made a scientific contribution to the awareness of the beauty and power of creation
  - New age spiritualities put much importance on taking care of the earth
    - Rainbow Power Company in Nimbin NSW (also advocates permaculture techniques) designs and installs renewable energy equipment
  - A number of new age religions are creation centred spiritualities which adopt animistic and ancient nature religions in response to rising environmental consciousness
    - focuses on the presence of spirituality in the landscape
    - Naturalism (system of thought focusing on attachment to what is natural)
  - Many people are attracted to new age religions because they feel that the closeness to the environment is a healing thing
    - e.g. The Church of All Worlds (in Australia) believe in “living in harmony’ and that “Mother Earth is a conscious, living entity”

- Disenchantment with ‘Traditional’ Religious Practice and Guidance
  - Many people feel that traditional religious practices do not provide a relevant and meaningful support system for them in the challenges they face in the modern world
  - Causes:
    - perceived hypocrisy
    - abuse of power
    - people no longer inherit a religious identification without question
    - patriarchal church structures
    - no religious affiliation has become more socially acceptable
      - e.g. 1947 Census = 0.3% No Religion and 2011 Census = 22.3% No Religion
    - growing secularism
  - New age religions are popular because there is still a longing for a spiritual dimension to life
Non-religious Worldviews

✴ outline the essential features of Atheism and Agnosticism:

• Atheism
  • The philosophy that actively asserts that there is no god, afterlife
    - The Atheist Society of Australia defines atheism as “the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural”
  • Specific beliefs can vary among atheists as there is no ‘sacred text’ or outline of what all atheists are expected to believe
  • Often hostile or highly critical of organised religion
  • Weak atheist position = Lacking belief in the existence of god/s (simple scepticism)
  • Strong atheist position = Explicit belief that gods do not (or cannot) exist
      - “We are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.”
    - e.g. Alain de Botton (2012 book, *Religion for Atheists*)
      - “… of course no religions are true in any God-given sense.”
    - e.g. Stephen Hawking
      - “there is no god. No one created our universe, and no one directs our fate.”

• Agnosticism
  • The philosophy that it is inherently impossible to prove or disprove the existence of deities, the afterlife and the supernatural therefore the truth value of claims is unknown
  • The term was coined by evolutionary theorist TH Huxley in 1869
    - someone who disclaimed atheism and theism and believed that the question of whether a higher power existed was unsolved

✴ outline the positions of: - Rational Humanism AND Scientific Humanism

• Humanism is the philosophy that emphasises the human spirit and the dignity of human beings
• Popular secular alternative to religion that functions as a source of social cohesion and social transformation
• Emphasises the intrinsic goodness of humanity as people are not born with a propensity for evil

• Rational Humanism
  • Emphasises human reason and rational human thought in providing answers to the questions of life
  • Asserts that humans are the highest form of intelligence in existence
  • Reject any belief based only on faith through ‘revelation’
  • Morality is linked to understandings of pleasure and pain (ethical naturalism) and human experiences
  • ‘The Ten Commandments of Rational Humanism’
    - “proclaim the dignity and inherent worth of all human beings”
    - “use neither lies, nor spiritual power… to dominate or exploit others”

• Scientific Humanism
  • An intellectual movement directed towards justice, equality and world peace
  • Proposes that the best way to understand the world is through scientific experimentation and research
  • Morality is viewed in context with evolution and human survival

Sarah Jones
• Emphasises the importance of the scientific method (including theories, observations and hypotheses) and the application of logic and technology to answer questions

**discuss how Agnosticism, Atheism and Humanism determine the aspirations and behaviour of individuals:**

**Behaviour**
- No absolute standards (sourced from religion/sacred texts) to guide behaviour
- It is the sole responsibility of the individual to control their behaviour and choices
- Conscience
  - based on ideas about pleasure, pain and guilt
- Logic
  - ‘common sense’
- Law
  - a foundation for guidance but can be open to interpretation and criticism

**Aspirations**
- encompasses the outcomes desired for oneself and the desires for the kind of world one wants to live in
  - ambitions or desires to achieve something
- **Agnosticism**
  - attempts to live in the best way possible due to the uncertainty of whether a divine being exists or not
- **Atheism**
  - since humanity is not guided by a divine force it is the responsibility of every person to look after themselves, others and the environment
- **Humanism**
  - since humanity is believed to be the highest life form, there is an emphasis on contributing to peace and justice
**The Difference Between Religious and Non-Religious Worldviews**

*compare the response of ONE religious and ONE non-religious belief system to: - the concept of the transcendent, the human person, social responsibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept of the Transcendent</th>
<th>CHRISTIANITY</th>
<th>HUMANISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God is a being who transcends the human experience but has entered humanity through the life of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>• Most humanists assert that humankind is the highest expression of life and there is no transcendent realm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Christian is able to have a personal relationship with God through prayer, worship and reading the Bible</td>
<td>• However some do have a concept of the divine that may be expressed in natural beauty, human kindness or human courage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)</td>
<td>• a philosophical approach rather than belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God promises salvation and eternal life beyond death</td>
<td>• They do not believe in an afterlife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is “pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passion” (Westminster Confession and Catechism)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Human Person</th>
<th>CHRISTIANITY</th>
<th>HUMANISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each human being is created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26)</td>
<td>• Attitudes and treatment of people is of utmost importance to humanists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each life is extremely precious (sanctity of life)</td>
<td>• The value of the human person and their responsibilities are derived from human experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every person was created to live in fellowship with God</td>
<td>• They believe that humans have thrived through their intelligent adaptation to the environment and their problem solving capabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism teaches that the human body is a vessel for the Holy Spirit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Corinthians 6:19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many people choose to identify themselves as Christians within society to embody their faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• e.g. Australian Teachers’ Christian Fellowship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Responsibility</th>
<th>CHRISTIANITY</th>
<th>HUMANISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong responsibility to family and the Church</td>
<td>• Social responsibility is central to humanists’ attitude towards life (world view)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen through Jesus’ example</td>
<td>• Material possessions should not be acquired at the expense of other people or the environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• e.g. parable of the Good Samaritan</td>
<td>• Personal development helps individuals and creates a better society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians believe that God calls them to make positive changes and be a strong influence on the world</td>
<td>• Strong involvement in civil rights movements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social justice issues</td>
<td>• gender and marriage equality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Love your neighbour” (Mark 12:31)</td>
<td>• Council of Australian Humanist Societies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>• lobbies the government/organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• e.g. Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• e.g. Christian Democratic Party, Australian Christian Lobby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>