

**Stage 2 Religion Studies – 10 Credit**  
**Assessment Type 3: Investigation (30%)**

Select a religious or spiritual phenomenon or a religious issue linked to Australian or global society for investigation.

You should undertake preliminary background research into the phenomenon or issue before seeking more contemporary and contextual information through the use of, for example, interviews, questionnaires, and current media sources.

You will then collect, plan, and organise your materials to produce a comprehensive and integrated written report on your investigation.

**The report should be a maximum of 1000 words for a 10-credit subject, and a maximum of 2000 words for a 20-credit subject.**

Assessment Design Criteria
<b>Knowledge and Understanding</b> The specific features are as follows: KU1 Explanation of different religious beliefs, perspectives, and experiences within and across traditions. KU2 Knowledge and understanding of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.
<b>Investigation and Application</b> The specific features are as follows: IA1 Development and application of appropriate methods of investigation, including use of inquiry skills. IA2 Application of knowledge and understanding of religions and spiritualities in local and global contexts. IA3 Investigation and explanation of a range of religious and spiritual phenomena. IA4 Clarity of communication, including presentation of conclusions.
<b>Analysis and Evaluation</b> The specific features are as follows: AE1 Analysis of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources. AE2 Analysis of how religion and spirituality in Australia have an impact on, and are influenced by, sociocultural, historical, and/or political events and attitudes. AE3 Critical evaluation of definitions of religion and spirituality.
<b>Reflection</b> The specific features are as follows: R1 Reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies. R2 Consideration and explanation of the social significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies. R3 Exploration of the relevance of religions and spiritualities in contemporary Australia.

## **Are secular humanism and Catholic ethical beliefs compatible?**

Total Word Count: 902

### **Issue and definitions**

Secular humanism is an irreligious worldview stressing the need for empirical testing of one's beliefs. The concept was first proposed in 1851 by George Jacob Holyoake. As of 2006, there were just over three million secular humanists in Australia, although the number is growing faster than overall population. (Flynn 2002) By contrast, Catholicism is a Christian denomination, almost 2000 years old, with a strong focus on the application of the teachings of Jesus, believed to be the saviour of mankind, as outlined in the New Testament of the Bible. The roles of secular humanism, as one of the fastest-growing irreligious philosophies in Australia, and Catholicism, as one of Australia's biggest religions (see appendix A), in the ethical life of Australia ought to be examined. Will the transition from a largely Christian society to a multipolar society with greater variance in opinions on appropriate moral values be a smooth one?

### **Perspectives**

A prominent Australian social and cultural issue is that of the country's treatment of asylum seekers, the so-called 'boat people'. A wide range of opinions, often strongly held, exist on this divisive subject, but it is on this topic that Catholic and secular humanist beliefs are arguably best aligned. Both secular humanist organisations and the Catholic Church have taken a position that Australia's current approach to asylum seekers lacks compassion and have called for more humanitarian aid. The Catholic basis for these beliefs can be found in the concept of the inherent dignity of humans, made in the image of God, (Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis 2005) as well as a tradition of 'welcoming the stranger', as seen in the story of the Good Samaritan. The Catholic social justice principles of charity and solidarity also reinforce this. Secular humanist views on the matter, although very similar in substance to Catholic views, come from a moral basis of maximisation of human quality of life and reduction of suffering. Catholic views on *lex naturalis* also inform the Catholic response to the issue, believing that law that is fundamentally unjust is not law. (Bolin 2010) In contrast, secular humanist thought explicitly rejects the existence of this, holding legal positivism, in which man, and particularly the state, is the source of all law, to be true. Therefore, Catholic legal theory is an important aspect of the Catholic response to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, whereas other than some international law, secular humanists do not emphasise the role of law to the same extent in

regards to asylum seekers.

Another well-known ethical discussion taking place in contemporary Australian society is that regarding marriage between people of the same sex. A majority of Australians support same-sex marriage, according to polling conducted by Galaxy Research, one of Australia's three major polling firms, with 60 per cent of Australians overall agreeing that 'same-sex couples in Australia should be able to marry'. In South Australia, 83 per cent of people believe that same-sex marriage should be put to a conscience vote in Parliament. (Galaxy 2010) The secular humanist view is that no compelling moral reason to continue to prohibit same-sex marriage exists, and that it is in fact ethically wrong to do so, because it constitutes arbitrary discrimination, leading to a lower quality of life than is possible. (Heritage Foundation 2012; Frech 2007) In contrast, the position of the Catholic Church is that same sex marriage is forbidden by scripture, and that it should not be permitted. (Catholic News Service 2003). This highlights a major area of incompatibility between secular humanist and Catholic beliefs: while secular humanist ethics are based entirely on abstract principles that can be applied to practical situations, Catholic values are a combination of these and practical examples of moral living.

## **Conclusions**

Although many points of agreement exist between followers of Catholic and secular humanist World views in the specific, on a general level, the two cannot be reconciled. Secular humanist beliefs explicitly deny the possibility of a sacred or a mystery of faith, instead emphasising empirical testing and the responsibility for people to furnish their own lives with meaning. (Kurtz 1980) In contrast, the Catholic faith calls upon believers to invoke the sacred, God, in their lives so that they can live correctly, and outlines a moral code that should be followed in order to lead a good life. The core values are therefore diametrically opposed: Catholicism calls for the application of a moral code in order to live a good and ethical life, whereas secular humanist worldviews specifically preclude the application of any specific code of ethics by calling for adherents to empirically test their own beliefs and ethics. Thus, although it is entirely possible, as illustrated, for Catholics and secular humanists to wholeheartedly work towards the same ends in many important social issues, Catholicism and secular humanism have entirely different concepts of determining the morality of an act, and cannot be reconciled.

A satisfactory answer to the question posed, whether secular humanist and Catholic ethical values are sufficiently compatible to ensure a smooth transition in the cultural life of Australia, cannot be provided. While the practical substance of secular humanist and Catholic moral beliefs is in many cases identical, it must be recognised that the two worldviews have wildly varying underlying ethical principles, and that we cannot be sure that the largely similar views on many moral issues present today will continue to apply to the problems of tomorrow.

### **Secondary sources referenced**

*The benefits of marriage* 2012, Heritage Foundation, accessed 20 May 2012, <<http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/1/the-benefits-of-marriage>>.

Bolin, J 2010, *The search for universal ethics: a new look at natural law*, International Theological Commission, accessed 19 May 2012

<http://www.pathsoflove.com/universalethics/natural-law.html>>.

*The Catholic Church, Homosexuality, and Gay Marriage* 2003, Catholic News Service, accessed 2 May 2012, <<http://www.americancatholic.org/News/Homosexuality/default.asp>>.

Flynn, T 2002, *Defining secular humanism*, Council for Secular Humanism, accessed 13 April 2012, <[http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=main&page=sh\\_defined](http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=main&page=sh_defined)>.

Frech, A 2007, *Explaining the psychological benefits of marriage*, Ohio State University, accessed 22 May 2012, <<http://paa2007.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=71460>>.

Galaxy Research 2010, *Same-sex marriage study*, accessed 12 May 2012.

Kurtz, P 1980, *A secular humanist declaration*, Council for Secular Humanism, accessed 22 April 2012, <<http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?page=declaration&section=main>>.

Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis 2005, *Key principles of Catholic social teaching*, flyer, Catholic Action Network, St. Paul, Minnesota, United States.

### **Primary sources referenced**

ABS census data from 1991-2006 regarding religion in the City of \*\*\*\* local government area, ABS ref # 20680, in appendix A.

Correspondence with \*\*\*\*, member of the Atheist Secularist Humanist Society (UK) and contributor to its newspaper, in appendix B.

Correspondence with \*\*\*\*, senior demographer with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in appendix C.

## Assessment Comments

This Investigation is an A grade, and was used as a benchmark in 2012.

### Knowledge and Understanding

- KU1 Insightful explanation of different beliefs: each perspective is explained and referenced to credible sources, e.g. Catholic social justice principles and contemporary research.
- KU2 Perceptive understanding shown through the comparison of similarities and differences. This understanding is also demonstrated by linking the beliefs to each contemporary issue. A perceptive understanding of the development of the ethical belief is shown where referring to Scripture and legal theory. Perceptive understanding is also shown in paragraph 2 when explaining the origin of the religious ideas/issues.

### Investigation and Application

- IA1 Sustained and logical development is shown throughout the investigation, starting with definitions, leading to exploration of the beliefs/issues, and finishing with a conclusion.
- IA3 There are detailed explanations of each belief in the introduction and an in-depth explanation of why each holds its position (for example, see Catholic reliance on scripture in paragraph 3).
- IA4 Well-structured and clear communication.

### Analysis and Evaluation

- AE1 Perceptive and critical analysis of issues shown throughout the 'Perspectives' section. For example when comparing the Catholic and Humanist beliefs in terms of asylum seekers, the evidence shows critical analysis by explaining that although views are 'similar in substance' they have different origins in that one belief relies upon religious law, the other upon Humanist principles.
- AE2 Well-informed analysis of the ways in which religious beliefs have an impact on sociocultural events (in this case, the current debates used are asylum seekers and same-sex marriage). Multiple relevant sources are used, such as a member of the Humanist Society and the Catholic Office for Social Justice.

### Reflection

- R2 Perceptive consideration of the social significance of religions in contemporary society shown by linking the beliefs to contemporary society and relevant issues; this highlights the similarities/differences between the two beliefs. The issues are current in debate and have been clearly explained in terms of the background to the belief and the effect this has on societal decisions.
- R3 Well-informed and perceptive exploration shown in the conclusion. The two beliefs have different underlying ethical principles and the student shows an understanding that this may mean that the two stand-points may not continue to be compatible in the future. An example of this occurs in the conclusion where the student discusses how Catholics are called upon to adhere to a moral code, whereas humanists test their own beliefs/ethics without a specific code.

## Performance Standards for Stage 2 Religion Studies

	Knowledge and Understanding	Investigation and Application	Analysis and Evaluation	Reflection
<b>A</b>	<p>Insightful explanation of different religious beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, within and across traditions.</p> <p>Clear and in-depth knowledge and perceptive understanding of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p>	<p>Sustained and logical development and application of appropriate investigation methods, including highly productive use of inquiry skills.</p> <p>Insightful and appropriate application of knowledge and understanding of religions and spiritualities in local and global contexts.</p> <p>In-depth investigation and detailed explanation of a range of religious and spiritual phenomena.</p> <p>Well-informed, clear, and well-structured communication, and well-reasoned presentation of conclusions.</p>	<p>Perceptive and critical analysis of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p> <p>In-depth and well-informed analysis of the various ways in which religion and spirituality in Australia have an impact on, and are influenced by, sociocultural, historical, and/or political events and attitudes.</p> <p>Insightful and critical evaluation of definitions of religion and spirituality.</p>	<p>Insightful and critical reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Well-informed and perceptive consideration and explanation of the social significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Well-informed and perceptive exploration of the relevance of religions and spiritualities in contemporary Australia.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Well-considered explanation of different religious beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, within and across traditions.</p> <p>Mostly clear and detailed knowledge and well-informed understanding of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p>	<p>Clear development and application of appropriate investigation methods, including productive use of inquiry skills.</p> <p>Well-considered and appropriate application of knowledge and understanding of religions and spiritualities in local and global contexts.</p> <p>Some depth of investigation and accurate explanation of a range of religious and spiritual phenomena.</p> <p>Mostly well-informed, clear and structured communication, and reasoned presentation of conclusions.</p>	<p>Clear and critical analysis of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p> <p>Detailed and well-informed analysis of the various ways in which religion and spirituality in Australia have an impact on, and are influenced by, sociocultural, historical, and/or political events and attitudes.</p> <p>Considered and critical evaluation of definitions of religion and spirituality.</p>	<p>Thoughtful and critical reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Well-informed consideration and explanation of the social significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Well-informed exploration of the relevance of religions and spiritualities in contemporary Australia.</p>
<b>C</b>	<p>Some considered explanation of different religious beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, within and across traditions.</p> <p>Generally relevant knowledge and informed understanding of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p>	<p>Competent development and application of appropriate investigation methods, including generally productive use of inquiry skills.</p> <p>Appropriate application of knowledge and understanding of religions and spiritualities in local and global contexts.</p> <p>Competent investigation and explanation of a range of religious and spiritual phenomena. Explanation may include some inaccuracies.</p> <p>Generally informed, clear, and structured communication, with some reasoned conclusions.</p>	<p>Generally clear analysis of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources.</p> <p>Informed analysis of some of the ways in which religion and spirituality in Australia have an impact on, and are influenced by, sociocultural, historical, and/or political events and attitudes.</p> <p>Some critical evaluation of definitions of religion and spirituality, tending towards description.</p>	<p>Considered reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Generally informed consideration and explanation of the social significance of religions and spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Informed exploration of the relevance of religions or spiritualities in contemporary Australia.</p>
<b>D</b>	<p>Description of aspects of more than one religious belief, perspective, or experience, within or across traditions.</p> <p>Identification and some consideration of one or more religious and/or spiritual ideas, concepts, or issues in a selected source or sources.</p>	<p>Application of aspects of an investigation method, including inconsistent use of some inquiry skills.</p> <p>Application of some basic knowledge of religions or spiritualities in local and global contexts.</p> <p>Partial investigation and explanation of aspects of religious and spiritual phenomena, with limited detail and some inaccuracies.</p> <p>Disjointed and partly informed communication, with inclusion of some summary comments.</p>	<p>Description and some attempted analysis or consideration of aspects of religious or spiritual ideas, concepts and issues, with partial reference to sources.</p> <p>Description and some attempted analysis or consideration of one or more ways in which religion and spirituality in Australia have an impact on, and are influenced by, events or attitudes.</p> <p>Some recognition and description of definitions of religion or spirituality.</p>	<p>Some reflection on the personal significance of religions or spiritualities in traditional and contemporary societies.</p> <p>Some basic consideration and description of the social significance of a religion or spirituality in a traditional and contemporary society.</p> <p>Partial exploration of the relevance of religions or spiritualities in contemporary Australia.</p>
<b>E</b>	<p>Identification of one or more beliefs, perspectives, or experiences, in a religious tradition.</p> <p>Limited consideration of any religious or spiritual ideas, concepts, or issues in a selected source.</p>	<p>Attempted application of aspects of an investigation method, including identification of one or more sources of information.</p> <p>Attempted application of some emerging awareness of religions or spiritualities.</p> <p>Communication of some awareness of a religious phenomenon.</p> <p>Attempted communication of limited information.</p>	<p>Attempted description of a religious or spiritual idea, concept, or issue, with limited reference to any sources of information.</p> <p>Description of limited aspects of religion or spirituality in Australia.</p> <p>Listing of some definitions of religion or spirituality.</p>	<p>Recognition of the personal significance of an aspect of religion or spirituality in traditional or contemporary societies.</p> <p>Limited consideration of the social significance of religions or spiritualities in traditional or contemporary societies.</p> <p>Attempted exploration of an aspect of the relevance of religion or spirituality in contemporary Australia.</p>