Fall 2007 Religion comp questions Day 1 (General exam)

Please answer one of the following questions (two hours recommended):

1. The debate over secularization theory has been clouded by disagreement and confusion over core issues, even among its proponents. Please identify the most significant variants of secularization theory. Note the key points of commonality and variation among them, with particular attention to (a) explicit or implicit definitions of religion; (b) views of the micro-processes underlying secularization; (c) types of evidence admitted as evidence in the debate; and any other issues you believe to be important. In your view, are there version(s) of secularization theory that are salvageable? If so, which ones, and why? Does secularization have a future in explaining patterns and trends on the US religious scene?

2. Measuring religiosity (and to an increasing extent, spirituality) is a perennial topic of interest among social scientists of religion. Describe in some detail what is known about: (a) key aspects of religiosity, drawing both on older and more recent findings; (b) developmental or “life course” variations in different aspects of religiosity, and explanations for these; and (c) identify at least three types of “secular” processes and social forces (besides age) that are thought to shape religiosity (and in what directions?). Conclude with a brief description of emerging debates about “selection effects” and “social desirability bias” in social scientific studies involving religion.

Please answer two of the following questions (one hour recommended):

3) There is a growing and somewhat controversial literature on the relationship between religious involvement and health and mortality outcomes in the United States. At present, what do you view as the key findings to date in this literature? What have been the key critiques of this literature? Do you see merit in such critiques? For this literature to develop significantly beyond what is present now, what are some of the key steps that should be taken - theoretically and methodologically?

4) Discuss the global spread of Christianity in the 19th and especially the mid- to late-20th century and what implications is has for theory and research in the sociology of religion.

5). Rational choice theorists have developed a significant body of research at the micro (individual), mezzo (organizational), and macro (cross-societal) levels. Please summarize the basic premises and the key conclusions reached by rational choice proponents at each level, and identify the most important contributions and the individuals responsible for them.

6) Since Weber there has been significant debate about the impact of religion on what we often label “modernity.” Pick one aspect of “modernity” such as science, capitalism, democracy, mass education, or mass printing/mass media. Discuss how some scholars argue that religion has shaped this aspect of modernity and how this relates to other theories that either argue against or ignore the role of religion.

7) Discuss the research on religion and delinquency/crime/recidivism/corruption/rule following behavior (you do not need to discuss each one of these words, just the general research area). To what extent (and possibly in which contexts) does religion or particular types of religion influence this type of “rule following behavior”?