Spring 2008 Religion comp questions (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) Discuss the global spread of Christianity since the 19th century and what implications is has for theory and research in the sociology of religion.

4) Religious practice in "the West" is markedly different in a number of ways from religious practice elsewhere in world. Please describe in some detail the major religious trends in a region of your choice, comparing it broadly to developments in the West. Does the term "religion" as an analytic category even fit in that country? If not, why not? How are religious trends in that region sensitive to issues of population such as fertility, migration, and mortality?

5) Much of the current research in the sociology of religion focuses on Europe and North America. How might attention to other regions of the world (e.g., Latin America) modify important theories/paradigms/generalizations in the sociology of religion. Because this is a broad question, it may help if you focused on one sub-field of the sociology of religion.

6) Account for the relative success of Protestant churches in some predominantly Catholic countries. Take your examples from Latin America or elsewhere in the developing world. Balance explanations that emphasize processes such as urbanization and modernization with those that look at organizational and institutional features of the Churches.

7) Please identify the main characteristics of the development of Christianity in former colonies. Characterize the goals of Protestant and Catholic missionaries and the implications and consequences of these goals. Pay particular attention to (a) dialog/confrontation with native cultures; (b) support of social movements; (c) social and historical consequences.