Spring 2008 Religion and Development comp questions (Specialization exam)

Answer one of the questions in the following section:

1) Some scholars argue that religion and other cultural institutions influence economic development. Others contest this or leave religious/cultural factors out of their analysis altogether. Summarize some of the key arguments used to argue that religion/culture matters for economic development and critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments.

2) Much recent economic literature focuses on the importance of “good institutions” for long-term economic growth. The institutions economists often focus on are protection of private property rights, rule of law, low corruption, moderate regulation of the economy, and “efficient government” (a high level of provision of education, infrastructure and social services for the level of taxation). This research generally ignores both religion and the regulation of religious groups. What might a greater focus on religion contribute to this debate?

3) In developing countries, religious missionaries have played an important role not only in propagating religion, but in promoting community development. Considering different religious denominations and missionary orders are there detectable differences in the strategies used and in their impact on local communities. Develop your answer in terms of particular countries and pay attention to both rural and urban activities.

Answer two of the following questions:

4) Since Weber there has been significant debate about the impact of religion on what we often label “modernity.” Pick one “non-economic” aspect of “modernity” such as science, 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 the role of religion or ignore the role of religion.

5) A substantial literature looks at religion and health in North America and Europe (where religious people are predominantly Christian and where research subjects are often wealthy by world standards). To what extent does this research generalize to other areas of the world? Through which mechanisms might religion influence health outcomes in the Global South (i.e., areas outside Europe and North America where GDP per capita is relatively low).

6) Imagine you are making a presentation to the IMF or World Bank about the importance of religion in “development.” Pay attention to issues broader than GDP per capita (although this may be important as well). What would you say to convince them that they should pay attention to religion/religious groups/religious liberty? What policy recommendations would you make?
7) There has been considerable discussion about the concept of social capital and its utility as a means of promoting development in developing countries. One of the major issues is whether the promotion of social capital acts to divide populations as much as it acts to unite them in common action. Using the appropriate literature, discuss the arguments over social capital, paying particular attention to the role of religion in generating social capital.

8) Please select two or three religious traditions and analyze them in terms of the following issues in terms of their beliefs, rituals, and institutions:
(a) strategies regarding access to power, human rights, and justice that have been related with those traditions;
(b) the tension between legitimating and confronting the status quo
(c) their use of violent and/or nonviolent methods to bring about change; and
(c) relationships with the rule of law and various institutions supporting or challenging it.