4.3 Functionalist Definitions of Religion and Civil Religion: Test Pack

AQA 7192 · about 15 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For questions worth more than 1 mark, write in full sentences. Show sociological knowledge and, where asked, apply it to the item material. Time guidance: 15 minutes for the whole pack.

1 Which one of the following best describes a substantive, exclusivist definition of religion as used in sociology of religion?

- ☐ A) Religion consists of beliefs and practices relating to supernatural beings or powers
- ☐ B) Religion is any social institution that helps produce social solidarity
- ☐ C) Religion is whatever people in a particular community happen to label as a belief system
- ☐ D) Religion is simply a reflection of economic forces in a society

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Outline one difference between a functional definition of religion and a social-constructionist definition. Develop the comparison.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 State one empirical piece of evidence a sociologist might use to support the claim that religion promotes value consensus in society.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 Define Durkheim's distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' as used in sociological definitions of religion.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Identify and explain two features of Bellah's concept of 'civil religion' in the United States.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.3 Functionalist Definitions of Religion and Civil Religion: Test Pack

Question 1

A (substantive, exclusivist definition: religion is defined by supernatural content, excluding belief systems without that content) **B1**

Answer: A

Question 2

identifies one difference: a functional definition uses the roles religion performs as its criterion, whereas a social-constructionist definition examines what people label as religion **B1**

development, e.g. the functional approach can include non-supernatural belief systems that provide cohesion, while the social-constructionist approach asks whether people in a particular context regard them as religious **B1**

Answer: A functional definition identifies religion by what it does, whereas a social-constructionist definition examines what people label as religion. Functional definitions can be inclusivist because they can include non-supernatural belief systems that provide cohesion; social constructionists ask whether people in a particular context regard such systems as religious.

Question 3

identifies one appropriate example, e.g. surveys showing shared moral attitudes among members of a religious community **B1**

development, e.g. or historical examples where religious teachings shaped laws or social norms, such as prohibitions linked to religious moral codes **B1**

Answer: One example is survey evidence showing that members of a religious community share similar moral attitudes; historically, religious teachings have influenced laws and social norms, illustrating religion's role in promoting value consensus.

Question 4

identifies sacred as things set apart and treated with reverence, profane as ordinary everyday things **B1**

development, e.g. sacred symbols and rituals unite a group and carry collective meaning **B1**

Answer: The sacred are things set apart and treated with special respect or reverence, while the profane are ordinary, everyday things; sacred symbols and rituals unite a group and carry collective meaning.

Question 5

identifies that civil religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that unite a nation **B1**

development, e.g. examples include national ceremonies, references to God in public discourse, and shared sacred texts like the founding documents **B1**

identifies that civil religion sacralises the nation and its values **B1**

development, e.g. political leaders invoke civil religious language to create moral solidarity and legitimacy for the state **B1**

Answer: Bellah's civil religion consists of national beliefs, symbols and rituals that unite the nation, such as ceremonies and political references to God and sacred founding documents, and it sacralises the nation and its values, with leaders using civil religious language to build moral solidarity and legitimacy.

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