1.2 Academic and devotional approaches

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS academic approach • devotional approach • insider • outsider • methodological agnosticism • phenomenology

Objective

Learn the difference between the **academic** study of religion and **devotional** writing, the **insider/outsider** / problem, and the main academic **methods** (historical, textual, sociological, anthropological, phenomenological).

You must be able to:

- distinguish academic and devotional approaches
- explain the insider/outsider problem
- name five academic methods and what each studies
- explain methodological agnosticism (bracketing)
- classify sources by approach

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Academic and devotional

	academic	**devotional**
aim	describe, compare and explain	deepen faith or practice
question	"What do adherents believe and why?"	"What should I believe and do?"
example	a scholar's study of a festival	a sermon, a prayer book

Methodological agnosticism (bracketing; from phenomenology): the scholar sets aside the question of whether a religion's claims are true, in order to describe it fairly.

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Insider and outsider

Insiders know the tradition from within: language, feeling, practice. **Outsiders** may see patterns insiders take for granted. Each can be biased: insiders toward their own branch; outsiders toward their own culture's categories. Kim Knott described a range of positions from complete participant to complete observer.

Methods

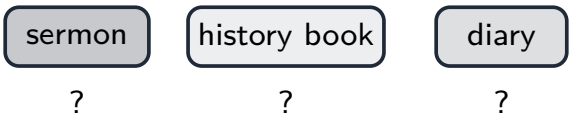
method	studies
historical	how a tradition developed over time
textual	sacred texts and their meanings
sociological	religion in groups and society (numbers, trends)
anthropological	lived religion through fieldwork
phenomenological	religious experience as adherents describe it

Worked classification. A temple's festival leaflet is devotional and primary; a survey of temple attendance by a university is academic, sociological and secondary.

2 Practice

2.1 Distinguish an **academic** from a **devotional** approach to religion. [2]

2.2 Classify each source as academic or devotional, and primary or secondary: (a) a mosque's Friday sermon; (b) a historian's book on the Reformation; (c) a pilgrim's diary of the Hajj. [3]



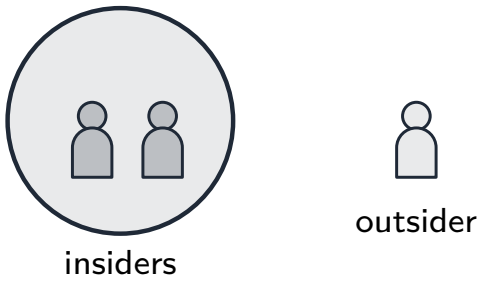
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2.3 Explain **methodological agnosticism**, and **one** advantage and **one** criticism of it. [4]

2.4 Explain the **insider/outsider** problem, and how a researcher can reduce bias from each position. [6]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 *(Preparation essay.)* "Only an insider can truly understand a religion." Discuss. [15]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

academic: describes, compares and explains religion without requiring belief; devotional: aims to deepen faith or guide practice within a tradition

2.2

(a) devotional, primary; (b) academic, secondary; (c) devotional or personal, primary (an insider's account)

2.3

the scholar sets aside whether religious claims are true while studying them; advantage: allows fair description of all traditions; criticism: believers may feel that bracketing truth misses what matters most to them; or full neutrality may be impossible

2.4

insiders have deep knowledge but may take their own branch as normal; outsiders see patterns but may misread meanings with their own categories; ways to reduce bias, e.g. use both insider and outsider sources; reflexivity; let adherents speak in their own words

3.1

Mark with the markbands: [13-15] clearly focused on the question, accurate knowledge of at least three traditions, the four concepts applied, different views and sources evaluated, well-developed critical analysis, different perspectives evaluated, a reasoned conclusion; [10-12] focused, mostly accurate knowledge, analysis with some evaluation; [7-9] some focus, relevant knowledge, mostly narrative or description with limited analysis; [4-6] little focus, limited knowledge, mostly narrative; [1-3] little understanding of the question. Points that may be included: explains insider and outsider; for: language, feeling and practice are learned from within; experience cannot be fully described to outsiders; against: outsiders can compare and see patterns; insiders disagree among themselves; methodological agnosticism and phenomenology; Knott's range of positions; examples from at least one tradition; the role of reflexivity; a reasoned conclusion