34: Mixing religion (broad concept) with individual faith frameworks is probably not helpful. For religion or any faith to survive for 100's of years suggests that these construct offer considerable economic utility to adherents.

35 Often faith groups have been the motivation and force for social change

44 Levine: exactly so. religion describes a way that humans have to make sense of aspects of everyday life that are otherwise difficult to explain or manage. This is the utility of religion

43 fails to define religion in a useful manner. This wobble then permeates the rest of the text.

57: nurturing the free spaces. 100% right

58: there seems to be a tension between humans as a social/herd animal and humans as autonomous individuals.

174: Faiths underpin their own legal viewpoints. Sharia is as despicable in its thinking as the way in which Christian churches have treated sexual abuse by their clergy. Both place themselves apart from 'normal' secular law

178: The expression of theocracy almost inevitably requires some form of mediation to accommodate other types of ruling - democracy today or aristocracy as in England 1500's. Imams seem not yet to have conceded much to any other other rule. Western democracies are as yet largely unused to imposing control on faiths.

183: This multi-law approach presumably is only applicable if all parties involved in a case agree to the one version, with the secular version as the default. Even then this multi approach acts against cohesion in society.

213: Shift towards evidence & reason as these became more securely established. Thus the need for a religious framework was reduced and the theocrats lost power. Not always quietly.

216: scope for faith-based groups to form without much need for conformity to mainstream views. Sects are usually troublesome whether or not they are violent!

217: Islam may not generate militants but today there is a perception that Islam is (at best) medieval in its punishments and too-readily suicidal in its behaviours.

220: Note the tensions that are as much about land and property as about religion. this was/is apparent in N Ireland where peace walls are as much about preventing changes in property ownership and electoral balances as about violence control.

224: religion as a gap-filler. This seems to be the prime reason for religion existing and in fact persisting longer than many of its constituent faiths

243: Key (historic and continuing) role of religious groups in delivery of core social services.
250: cf Wesley "earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can" - work hard, be frugal, use surplus wisely [for others]

253/255: Good examples of the utility of religion in everyday economic terms

330: HUMAN RIGHTS often has adherents who are zealots in that cause in a near-religious way, one that tends to create conflict even in secular society never mind in one where the ethos is dominated by a faith that is (for example) highly God-led and male-hierarchical in form

342: final 2 sentences: it is not really helpful to stake this claim in this way. the devil is indeed in the detail. Rigorous enquiry into detail does indeed illuminate the path and is to be encouraged in all aspects of policy formation and implementation irrespective of which 'ologist' is involved.

362: Probably needs to say something about the para360 group recognising that faith groups operate in timescales of many decades, if not centuries. Therefore do not expect to see rapid change in sensitive areas - it may take 2 or more generations.
Rethinking Society for the 21st Century.

Under the aegis of an Advisory Committee chaired by Amartya Sen, the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP) brings together social scientists from all over the world. Their goal? Inspire the public to imagine answers to the challenges and transformations of our times.

Today, we (IPSP) are opening up the first draft of the IPSP report for comments from the public. For this purpose, we have set up a commenting platform at comment.ipsp.org.

Chapter 16 - Religions and social progress: Critical assessments and creative partnerships

Abstract
This chapter starts from the premise that some 80 percent of the world’s population affirms some kind of religious identification, a proportion that is growing rather than declining. Emphasizing the significance of belief and practice in everyday lives and local contexts, we analyze the impact of religion and its relevance to social progress in a wide variety of fields. These include the family, gender and sexuality; differences and diversity; democratic governance; violence and peace-making; health and economic well-being; and care for the earth. We argue that researchers and policy makers pursuing social progress will benefit from careful attention to the power of religious ideas to motivate, of religious practices to shape ways of life, of religious communities to mobilize and extend the reach of social change, and of religious leaders and symbols to legitimate calls to action. All of that, however, can be put to either good or ill, for which reason assessment of particular religions in specific contexts is essential.

Running through the chapter are five interconnected themes: the persistence of religion in the twenty-first century; the importance of context in discerning outcomes; the need for cultural competence relative to religion; the significance of religion in initiating change; and the benefits of well-judged partnerships. The continuing need for critical but appreciative assessment and the demonstrable benefits of creative partnerships are our standout findings.

Summary
This chapter has eight substantive sections and a short conclusion. Broadly speaking the sections expand in scale – from the family to the earth itself. Sections 3-5 are largely political; section 6 has an economic perspective; and section 7 deals with ecological issues.

Section 1 – the “Introduction” – sets out our overall goal, which is to determine the significance of religion for social progress across a wide variety of fields. We start from the assumption that religious aspirations are integral to the social lives of a vast portion of the world’s population and thus to social progress. Careful attention is paid to the clear definition of terms, including religion itself.

Section 2 on “Family, gender and sexuality” affirms that intimate human relationships have always been shaped by religious rules, rituals, and prohibitions. Here we offer tools for assessing both religious obstacles and the potential for partnership in the quest for progress in these most basic of social locations. Setting aside a lingering binary between secular progress and religious reaction is the first step. A burgeoning literature reveals both a strong defense of the nuclear heterosexual marital family by male leaders in many religious traditions, but also alternative religious movements and tactical uses of existing tradition in everyday practices.

Section 3 deals with “Differences and diversity,” recognizing that these terms mean different things in
different places. The goal however remains constant: to discover how religiously diverse people learn to flourish in each other’s company. Using a variety of case studies – Singapore, China, Europe and the USA – we argue that strategies for success will vary, but the need for informed policymaking is crucial in an increasingly fluid global context. Migration emerges as a critical subtheme.

25 Section 4, “Religion and democratic governance,” begins by examining the place of religion in one of the greatest global challenges of the twenty-first century: the development of governing structures that are accountable to and representative of their citizens. The evidence suggests that no religious tradition is either inherently democratic or anti-democratic. Case studies from India, China and Venezuela demonstrate the hugely varied relationships between religions and democratic regimes.

26 Section 5 is concerned with “Religion, conflict and peace.” A clear conclusion emerges: religion is neither inherently violent nor peaceful, but includes practices, beliefs, values, and institutions that can lead in either direction. A careful assessment of the particular context and the particular religions in play is the first step toward social progress. Close attention is paid to sites – geographical, political, and social – of potential and destructive violence.

27 Section 6 turns in a different direction to examine “Everyday wellbeing: Economy, education, health and development.” We argue that economic wellbeing, education, and healthcare are goals shared by religious groups and woven into religious worldviews. The Yoruba of Nigeria, for example, invoke “ire owo” (the blessing of wealth), “ire omo” (the blessing of children and growth), and “ire alafia” (the blessing of peace and long life) (Olupona 2014). That said there are many places where religious ideas and practices are at odds with secular norms. States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith communities, and religiously-infused local cultures all have a role to play in material wellbeing. Well-chosen partnerships are particularly effective in this field.

28 Section 7 is concerned with “Care for the earth” itself, recognizing that religious understandings of the earth and faith-based activism on behalf of the environment share much with secular groups. Effective partnerships enhance the capacities of the diverse players in this field. More profoundly, at least some faith communities assert a moral stance which contests the very framing of “environment-as-resource” in global capitalist society, challenging thereby entrenched systems of power, knowledge, and technology.

29 The relatively short Section 8 on “Religion and human rights” acts as a coda to the substantive sections of this chapter and introduces a cross-cutting theme. Running through our discussions of religion’s role in political and social life have been difficult questions about human rights and their relationship to religion. Here social progress is facilitated by the imagination of human rights advocates, who are willing to seek creative partnerships with religious leaders and religious organizations, who not only share but can “translate” their goals.

30 Each of the above sections ends with a short summary and a series of recommendations pertinent to the issue under review. Section 9, entitled “Themes and implications: An action toolkit” draws the threads of the chapter together in five interconnected themes: the persistence of religion in the twenty-first century; the importance of context in discerning outcomes – noting the role of social science in this; the need for education in its broadest sense to enhance cultural competence; the significance of religion in initiating change; and the benefits of well-judged partnerships. Each of these themes concludes with an action toolkit.

31 The continuing need for informed assessment and the demonstrable benefits of creative partnerships between religious and secular agencies are our standout findings.