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

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1 Coordinating Lead Authors:[1]

Grace Davie

Nancy T. Ammerman

2 Lead Authors:[2]

Samia Huq

Lucian N. Leustean

Tarek Masoud

Suzanne Moon

Jacob K. Olupona

Vineeta Sinha

David A. Smilde

Linda Woodhead
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 policy-making is crucial in an increasingly fluid global context. Migration emerges as a critical subtheme.

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.

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.

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
Well-chosen partnerships are particularly effective in this field.

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.

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.

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.

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

1. Introduction

Around the globe, the pursuit of social progress and human flourishing is often intertwined with religious ideas and practices. Well over 80 percent of the world’s population is connected to some
sort of religion, a proportion, moreover, that is growing rather than declining.[4] The consequences of those connections are, however, enormously varied. Not all religious identifications have significant impact on individual and social life, but many do. Progressives seeking greater human flourishing will very likely encounter religion in one form or another. They may encounter religious authorities who block needed change, or even religiously-based violent extremism that defies every dimension of social progress. Progressive leaders may just as likely find religiously-based organizational partners eager to join the cause. Indeed, the advocates and supporters of progressive change may very well be motivated by religious commitments and mobilized by religious communities. It is that range of engagement that we will explore in this chapter.

34 We will begin with the observation that most religious adherents see their religious traditions as bearers of beneficence for their followers. Even if they place a great deal of emphasis on otherworldly rewards (which not all do), participating in religious rituals and communities is expected to bring worldly blessing. A critical, empathetic understanding of how blessing is understood will often be a necessary step towards understanding how progress can be pursued. Attention to religious ideas and practices means, however, encountering myriad and ever-evolving forms, with complex social impacts. Neither good nor ill can be assumed at the outset. Analyzing existing evidence regarding the conditions and consequences of specific religious configurations will be a primary task of this chapter.

35 We will argue that religions can play a distinctive role in reaching and mobilizing portions of the population not always well-resourced by governmental or educational institutions. Thus the pervasive grassroots presence of religious leaders and collectivities is a critical resource for those seeking change. This observation is paired with a second theme that will run through this chapter. The goals and methods of secular change agents may not always match perfectly with the goals and methods of religious organizations, a fact that must be recognized from the start. But in most contexts there are areas where creative partnerships are possible, many of which can be highly productive.

36 We begin this introductory section by thinking carefully about the nature of religion. Assumptions in this respect have too often been shaped by a narrow focus on doctrine and membership, a focus that does not fit the current circumstances, especially beyond Europe and North America. Looking seriously at everyday religious life in much of the world calls into question the perceived links between modernization and secularization, and the pervasive assumption that in the demise of religion lies the singular pathway to social progress.
1.1. Defining religion and its relation to social progress

One of the most challenging tasks in addressing the question of religion and social progress is establishing the terms of the conversation. Social progress, as previous chapters have argued, must be disentangled from its Enlightenment presumptions in order to encompass a broader understanding of movement toward human flourishing. Once we leave aside the premise that every part of the world will develop along universal lines set out by Western Europe’s history, we also have to leave aside premises about the relationship between religion and secular society. And once we leave aside a narrow focus on Europe and North America, we discover that our very ways of recognizing religion are often insufficient.

1.1.1 Expanding definitions of religion

The existing social science literature depends to a large extent on research methods developed in North America and Europe. At their best, these encompass some of the complexity that characterizes the religious dimensions of society. Among them, sophisticated survey-based measures are often very useful for producing a broad snapshot, but as Figure 1.1 demonstrates, they can also produce widely varying pictures of the same place.

Figure 1.1 Measuring Religion
Measuring Religion Quantitatively

Different strategies of measurement can provide very different assessments on which to base an understanding of the role of religion in a society.

(1) Affiliation. Religious affiliation refers to membership in or attachment to a particular organized religion, typically by means of having one’s name on an official record or indicating membership on a census or survey. This may indicate a measure of religious social identification.

(2) Attendance. This is a popular survey measure for analyzing the strength of religion in a particular country. Usually the question is worded something similar to, “Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?” This may indicate social interaction with a religious group.

(3) Salience. This construct attempts to measure how important religion is in the lives of respondents, usually on a scale from “not at all important” to “very important”. Sometimes the question is presented to respondents as how “religious” of a person they perceive themselves to be, on a scale from “extremely religious” to “extremely non-religious”.

(4) Belief. There are a range of specific beliefs that survey respondents can be asked about, but since each tradition’s beliefs vary, these measures are hard to compare. Belief in God or a higher power is perhaps the most widely used, but religious people in some traditions would not answer “yes”.

(5) Practice. Like belief, there are many different ways of measuring religious practice, such as giving money, praying, attendance at activities besides regular services, private devotion, scripture reading, holiday observance, and obeying dietary restrictions.

Case Study: New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Worship Attendance</th>
<th>Salience of Religion</th>
<th>Belief in God</th>
<th>Practice of Prayer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times a week</th>
<th>% who attend more than once</th>
<th>% who attend once a week</th>
<th>% who attend once a month</th>
<th>% who attend never</th>
<th>% who attend daily</th>
<th>% who attend several times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>% very important, rather important</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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Case Study: Jordan

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<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Worship Attendance</th>
<th>Salience of Religion</th>
<th>Belief in God</th>
<th>Practice of Prayer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<th>% very important, rather important</th>
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Circles represent all survey respondents; all religions

In this chapter, when we say “religion,” we will have in mind both the very broad range of institutions and beliefs that constitute the domain social scientists have typically assessed as religion and the much larger cultural domain that includes the beliefs and practices of everyday life. This means that the particular contexts and the particular challenges of lived experience matter. Religions have their impact as a part of the life projects of individuals and groups. This has several effects on how we look at religion. It means that we expect both religious professionals and laity to appropriate particular emphases, both orthodox and otherwise, which help them respond to the demands of their particular personal and institutional context (McGuire 2008). Religious ideas and practices are situated. As new people enter that context through migration or new ideas are encountered through media, theologians and ordinary practitioners alike engage religion in active ways. They are not simply enacting established beliefs, rituals, and practices but, through their action, they are contributing to the ongoing creation and re-creation of them (Bender 2010).

Religion as it is lived is also a matter of material places and bodies, not just spirits and visions. Thinking in terms of embodied religion moves us beyond a focus on religion as an abstract philosophical system (Vasquez 2010). We argue here that religious and moral precepts are intimately involved with this-worldly goals ranging from overcoming substance abuse to seeking justice, from socializing children to escaping violence (Smilde 2007a). Daniel Levine captures well this sense of religious practice. “The lived experience of religion,” he writes, “is closely linked to ways of managing ordinary life.” As a result, “it is not just that religious beliefs spill over from neatly confined church spaces to infuse action in other parts of life. On close inspection, the distinction between otherworldly and this-worldly, between committed and spiritual, does not hold up very well” (Levine 2012: 8). In Singapore, for instance, Thai Buddhist talismans are simultaneously objects of supernatural power and objects of lucrative economic trade (Yee 1996). In places like Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, as well, religion is often located in the midst of the global marketplace. It is not only material objects, but also blessings, merit, and religion itself that can be subjected to commodifying tactics (Kitiasa 2008).

Religion is, then, more than beliefs, texts, and cognition – more than a matter of the mind. Such an idea-based focus would poorly explain most religious traditions beyond Protestantism (and much of Protestantism itself) (Smilde and May 2015). In contrast, an embodied perspective includes rituals, spaces, and emotion (Brenneman 2012; Vasquez 2010). People do not just live their religion by thinking and believing; rather, they feel and act as embodied social beings. Religion is one way that individuals situate
themselves, both socially and physically (Vasquez 2010). Indeed, we will see that much religious conflict has to do precisely with conflict over sacred spaces.

Our study of religion in this chapter begins, then, by recognizing the pervasiveness of spiritual sensibilities, in forms that are in constant flux and negotiation, which interact with the political, economic, social and cultural structures through which progress is pursued. While the understanding of religious traditions and institutions is essential for the analysis of religion’s relationship to social progress, this chapter will introduce a wider lens that will encompass the grassroots organizations and religious ways of everyday life that are equally consequential for human flourishing.

1.1.2 Religion and secularity

At the beginning of the 20th century, Émile Durkheim postulated that the “sacred” is the realm of human experience that is clearly and unambiguously “set apart” from the world of secular, everyday routine activities, and inspires awe and reverence (Durkheim 1912[1995]). In the modern social sciences that followed, it seemed natural to speak of religion and secularity as occupying separate domains. Religions, moreover, were primarily understood as systems of belief based on supernatural assumptions and organized into major systems of authority and power. These were seen as standing in natural opposition to empirical, scientific, and political ways of understanding and ordering the world. This opposition and the gradual triumph of science and expertise were theorized as secularization, in which the forces of the modern world would eventually remove the necessity for supernatural explanations. Those who still believed in forces beyond this world, in Peter Berger’s elegant 1960s statement of the theory, could either hold those beliefs as privatized opinions or gather in “sheltering enclaves” with fellow believers. Religion itself would lose its ability to be a powerful force shaping the secular public world (Berger 1969).

Even Berger himself has renounced much of the theory that bore his imprint, noting not only the robust presence of religious affiliation around the world, and the visibility of religiously-inspired political movements, but also the persistence of the most dramatically supernatural forms of religion alongside modern ways of knowing (Berger 2014). A number of conceptual models deem this situation – namely the continuing presence of religion and its role beyond private life – a “resurgence.” That is not our position. Rather, we will argue that the religions of everyday life in much of the world have never operated with a public-private distinction and are neither more nor less significant today – but are merely more noticed. We will also argue that it is essential to take into account variation from
one context to another in whether it makes sense to talk about a secular world at all, and where the line between secular and sacred should or could be drawn.

This is a point made well by Talal Asad (2003). He observes that “religion” and “secular” are not fixed categories, but depend on each other. Asad contends that secularism is much more than the functional and institutional separation of religion and state. ”Secularism” is an outlook that carries important implications for how the religious domain itself has been constituted and conceptualized. Given the historical and religious-cultural grounding of the concept, critics have argued that “secularism” is ethnocentric and have suggested that the various meanings attributed to it may not be relevant, especially to non-Western, non-Christian contexts.

Some scholars have come to speak of a “post-secular age,” not so much rejecting the idea of secularity, but pointing to the decline of the assumption of religion’s eventual disappearance and the presumed need for it to be banished from public space (Gorski, Kim, Torpey, and Van Antwerpen 2012). The term originated with the public discussion between philosopher Jürgen Habermas and Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2004 on the potential of religion to contribute to the revitalization of democratic discussion and governance in an age of economic globalization, societal indifference and depoliticization (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006). Others – notably David Martin (2011) and James Beckford (2012) – have questioned this approach in a debate that is far from finished. The crucial point, however, remains clear: scholars of many disciplines are agreed in challenging the theoretical and practical assumptions of older secularization theories.

“Secularity” may be fruitfully analyzed, however, if it is recognized as highly variable (Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr 2013). It can be thought of as a particular belief system, emerging from Western modernity but with variations elsewhere. It can also simply be descriptive of domains of life in which there are no perceived transcendent dimensions. For example, advanced Western countries usually define economic transactions as quintessentially secular, but in many other cultures they have important religious significance. National constitutions often attempt to set legal boundaries between secular and religious domains, but those boundaries vary widely, both in law and in practice. And of course there can be great variation between individuals and groups even within a given culture regarding what is treated as religious and what is secular.

In short, neither secularity nor religion has a natural domain or function. Religion should rather be understood as a set of beliefs and practices that are oriented toward supernatural or transcendent
sources. Virtually anything humans do or create or confront can potentially be given religious meaning. Conversely, since anything can potentially be religious—symbolically linked to something sacred—there is nothing that is inherently and always “secular.” This does not mean that everything is religious, only that many things can be. It is still the case that humanity’s “limiting conditions” – death, suffering, injustice – are especially likely to be confronted and explained in religious terms. Equally, religious practices may be invoked in a range of this-worldly challenges, including survival in violent contexts and demands for basic rights (Rubin, Smilde, and Junge 2014). It is also the case, however, that the most mundane decisions and everyday objects can be seen through a sacred lens (Ammerman 2013). And in many contexts, religious practices become central to the most common of biographical and social achievements—family, community, work, and psychological well-being.

These supernatural sources beyond the everyday human world do not have to be theistic. A widely popular range of rituals, pilgrimages, shrines, and practices characterize a milieu of “spirituality” that is present even in European and North American societies, for example (Heelas and Woodhead 2004). Some of those who participate are also active members of established religions, but many seek to connect with something beyond themselves without naming that something in theistic terms. Across the world, beliefs and practices that are spiritual are linked in myriad ways to social life beyond official religious doctrines and institutions.

Denaturalizing the religious/secular divide is especially important for scholars who aim to understand religiosity outside “the West.” Scholars from the North Atlantic region are often too quick to dismiss as instrumental and insincere the religious practices of people whose basic necessities are not satisfied by markets or states and who address their problems through religious practices. Careful attention to those practices, and to the religious communities in which they are lived, can often yield important new insight.

1.1.3 Religion and social progress

As set out in Chapter 2, for many humans, religion is in itself a cultural good, and in that sense, social progress must include nurturing free spaces in which individuals and collectivities can be free to pursue religious ends. This chapter will go on to argue that religious communities can be spaces of valued solidarity and mutual esteem, partners in providing for the wellbeing of the community, as well as agents of beneficence and generosity. They can, in fact, be critical spaces in which the very parameters of progress can be debated and given moral grounding.
Religions can also be impediments to basic principles of equal dignity in myriad ways, for example, when they stand in the way of women or limit freedom of expression or participation in democratic governing. Indeed, the same mechanisms that create religious solidarities can also limit toleration or restrict educational exploration. As we have already noted, religion must be understood in its local, embodied particularity in order to assess the possible ways it may or may not enable human flourishing.

Just as we need a wide lens to recognize the presence and effects of religion in society, this project also seeks a multidimensional “compass” for assessing progress. That compass makes clear that progress and religious tradition are not of necessity antithetical. In various cultural contexts and in varying religious views of the world, we will see multiple models for both the goals and the process for obtaining them.

This can be illustrated by thinking about social progress in African contexts (Olupona 2012, 2014). At the center of many African cosmologies is the lifelong quest for a good life that is engaged together by individuals and communities. From birth to death, one should enjoy the blessings of long life, wealth, and children. The fulfillment of these blessings is viewed as one’s destiny, with rites of passage, socialization processes, festivals and ceremonies, ensuring that this quest is accomplished within a lifetime. There are also expectations about how these goals are balanced. For example, in most communities, it is said that it is better to die young with dignity than to live to an old age in poverty and want. Thus the blessings of health and long life, wealth, and children are intended to strengthen and support communal structures, and any person who seeks to acquire such blessings without embedding them within the larger society is condemned. For which reasons both individual and social fulfillment are intimately connected to the ritual life of society.

When we speak about movement toward human flourishing what we say will ring true in distinct ways across cultures. That said, the African example has much to teach us. We can, for instance, speak of sufficient wealth to live a long life without degradation. We can speak of peace and tranquility among neighbors. We can speak of participation in a community of respect and fairness and accountability. We can speak of being in healthy harmony with the earth itself. At the same time, we can recognize the degree to which these values often depend on ritual reinforcement that is provided in the religious practices of everyday life.

Social progress requires a society to engage in moral deliberation and moral judgments. It is not simply a matter of finding the right technological formulae. Imagining what a society could become
requires reaching beyond oneself, beyond the mundane everyday world. Progress implies a sense of meaning and purpose that has, even if unstated, moral valence. There are many ways such moral deliberation and transcendent imagination can be fostered, but for much of the world’s population religious communities and religious rituals are the spaces in which humans are called to the work of this-worldly transformation.

The moral deliberation and ritual reinforcement that take place in religious communities are, as we will see, sometimes at odds with ideas about social progress that come from outside experts. Religious traditions and religious authorities can and do block needed changes that would increase the larger flourishing of a community. This chapter will assess both those conflicts and the often-overlooked ways in which religious institutions, beliefs, and practices are partners and facilitators of the work of social progress.

1.2. Outline of the chapter

Themes sounded in previous chapters will recur here, with specific attention to the ways in which religions – as we have broadly defined them – may facilitate or impede progress toward human flourishing. Throughout this volume researchers have pointed to questions of equity and fair treatment as central to a better social world. It has also been clear that definitions of equity are almost as difficult to specify, as are the strategies for seeking it. That is especially true in matters of gender and sexuality. Women’s rights are central to most goals for progress, and gender discrimination and violence are among the pervasive ills to be addressed. In Section two, the relation of religion to women’s wellbeing will be taken up, examining the evidence in the context of demographic realities that have placed gender and family at the center of so much conflict within and beyond religious traditions.

Human societies in the 21st century are increasingly communities of communities, where diverse cultures enrich each other, but often also collide. New ways of living together across these divides are among the most salient challenges for social progress today. That religious differences are often at the heart of the challenge is hardly a surprise. Section three takes up the question of religious diversity and the many ways it is managed around the world. The modern aspirations of universal agreement and/or a secular common ground may still resonate in some places, but progress toward human flourishing in the future may require new understandings of the roles religiously diverse citizens will play.
Citizenship will be defined by each society’s modes of political governance. Section four addresses arguments about the potential for religion – or any specific religion – to encourage or inhibit democracy. It will examine the ways in which religions play a role in both enlarging and constricting the space for participation and debate, and how they establish mechanisms for activism beyond the official channels of the state.

Among the most fundamental obstacles in the way of social progress are the conflicts that too often result in destructive violence and severe social disruption. Progress of any sort is impossible when basic safety and trust are threatened. Conflict among religions and conflict motivated by religion are critical issues to understand. For example, it is as important to disentangle apparently religious sources from political, ethnic, and economic ones as it is to recognize the reality of religious beliefs and practices that spark and amplify conflict. At the same time, religious resources have been put to work in peace-making and reconciliation. Section five will address the full range of religious sources of both conflict and peace.

A primary goal for good governance and conflict resolution is the basic wellbeing of the citizenry. International goals for development and sustainability can only be met, however, if all the sectors of society are engaged, including religion. In less-developed countries economic, educational, and health needs are often critical, marking lives far from realizing the capacities they have. In postindustrial societies, material needs are nevertheless still present. In Section six, we will examine the rapidly emerging research that addresses the role of religion in relation to health, development, and material wellbeing.

In Section seven, we place what we have seen about the role of religion in social progress in the context of the very future of our planet. Religions have long provided ways to understand and live with the natural environment, some of which are more sustainable than others. Religious beliefs can encourage exploitation of resources, but they can also establish communities and practices that sacralize the earth. The physical spaces we inhabit, both natural and constructed, constitute the home within which human flourishing will be pursued.

A cross-cutting theme running through these sections is the question of religion’s relationship to human rights. Section eight introduces a brief “coda,” allowing us to raise those issues to the surface.

Throughout the sections that follow, then, we will analyze both possibilities and constraints, looking for the ways in which religions may be partners in the pursuit of social progress, but also arguing
that religion is an aspect of human society that must be understood and not ignored. Each section concludes with a summary and recommendations. At the end of the chapter, a series of crosscutting themes are brought together, along with a set of implications that should guide the work of researchers, policy makers, and activists. Religious ways of life are integral to the social lives of a vast portion of the world’s population. Beliefs and practices that transcend what is calculable cannot and need not be pushed to the side.

2. Family, gender, and sexuality

Intimate human relationships have always been shaped and surrounded by religious rules, rituals, and prohibitions. In the modern period religions’ focus on issues of family, gender, and sexuality have, if anything, grown relative to other areas of their influence in society. As societies around the world have sought greater freedom and wellbeing, more just and equitable human relationships, a host of conflicting values have come into play, and a range of social institutions have emerged as critical to progress. Here we offer tools for assessing religious obstacles and the potential for partnership in the quest for progress in how human beings live together in these most basic of social settings.

A social scientific approach to this topic has been hampered by a lingering binary between secular progress and religious reaction – the former considered automatically positive for the wellbeing of women, children, and gay people; the latter negative. Since the 1980s this view has been challenged by the burgeoning multi-disciplinary study of religion and gender, which has revealed a picture of much greater complexity. Scholars working on religion and gender have been among the leaders in turning attention to religion in practice, including in their purview not just male-led, hierarchically-organized forms of “official” religion, but also everyday lived religion, in which women, men, and young people seek to change or reform religion, make tactical uses of it, or bypass its official forms altogether (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008; Woodhead 2014). This approach has led to new findings, insights, and recommendations about religion’s past, present, and future social impact.

2.1 Religion and the modern family
Historically, religion has been associated with every form of family, and almost every imaginable form of sexual and gendered relation. The Bible, for example, variously supports concubinage, polygamy, monogamy, singleness and celibacy, and even discusses child sacrifice and murder.

In the modern period, however, the nuclear heterosexual marital family (see the chapter on “Family” in this volume) came to dominate the religious as well as the secular imagination. Official forms of religion and their male leaders played an important role in shaping the ideal. In the West the Protestant Reformers led the way by criticizing celibacy – including all-female religious orders – and sacralizing the patriarchal family unit (Roper 1992). In modern industrial societies, religious leaders endorsed the idea of dominant paternal responsibility for worldly affairs, exalting women’s domestic responsibilities, and affirming strong parental authority over children. By the later twentieth century, most male-led official religions had come to accept the permissibility of women’s paid work outside the home, but continued to endorse some version of a doctrine of the “complementary” but essentially different roles of men and women.

Since the 1970s, there has been a concerted attempt to defend the heterosexual marital family on the part of most male-led official religions. The family unit is presented as a God-given norm with clear boundaries which must be vigorously defended. It is attributed a sacred status, with anything which threatens it categorized as profane – including sexual infidelity, “secular” state policies, egalitarian gender ideologies, feminism, and homosexuality. Such nuclear-family-defense is particularly evident in ongoing official religious opposition to homosexual practice, to feminism and women’s equality (above all, equality in religious organizations themselves), and to gender fluidity. In Roman Catholicism, for example, the “theology of the body” developed by Pope John Paul II has become central to the official teaching and self-understanding of the Church.

Although it is most associated with the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, a sacralized nuclear family model finds religious defenders worldwide. It is supported by all the modern, male-dominated, religious movements that are labeled “fundamentalist,” although a few also allow polygamy. It also has links with nation-building projects, both colonial and postcolonial. For example, the rise of an educated, post-colonial middle-class Indian womanhood has been premised on a distinction between public and private where women occupy the “domestic and spiritual realm” (Chatterjee 1989: 239). Certain religious nationalisms in India such
as that associated with the ideal of Hindutva built on this separation to create an ideal of the nation refracted through the trope of the ideal Hindu wife (Menon 2010; Sarkar 2001).

Away from official religious teachings and pronouncements, however, the lived realities of religious families often look very different. Religious people are by no means immune to the changes which have led, since the 1970s, to the increasing pluralization of family forms documented in this volume’s chapter on Families. In many cases, official religious strictures are simply ignored. The Catholic Church’s condemnation of contraception, homosexual relations, and remarriage after divorce is, for example, more often flouted by Catholics than obeyed (Clague 2014). Alternative religious teachings, ideals and ideas about intimate relations are presented in both official and unofficial forms, as well as in everyday practice. There are, for example, LGBTi movements in most religions, as well as liberal religious majorities in some countries who disagree with official church teachings on topics like women’s roles and same-sex marriage. There is also evident change and pluralization of family forms within religions, sometimes with official sanction as, for example, the development of plural forms of Muslim marriage.[5]

Clashes between different family ideals, or between ideals and realities, more often run through religions and societies than between them. It is even possible to think in terms of a global culture war over the family which spills over national boundaries, and which gives rise to unexpected alliances, such as coalitions in defense of the traditional family which cross previously sharp religious and theological boundaries. In addition, the politics of sexuality and gender can become entangled with other political fissures. In contemporary East Africa, for example, homosexuality is often linked to the perceived ills and injustices of western colonial societies, and is tied in much Christian and Muslim teaching to threats against religion, nationhood, and African masculinity (Ward 2002).

There are currently many “hot” conflict points where family- and gender-related ideals clash violently, including abortion clinics, reproductive health legislation, legalization of same-sex marriage, and women’s dress. The clash is most vivid when fundamentalist forms of religion oppose what they see as modern forms of sexual “decadence.” The results can be murderous, as in fundamentalist forms of Islamic terrorism targeted at gay clubs and “decadent” Western cultural venues.

### 2.2 Religion and gender
Questions about family relations are intertwined with questions about the nature of gender, and here, too, religion is a key variable at play. Women are not universally more religious than men, but expressions of religion often vary by gender. In each tradition and context, service attendance, religious practice, and piety figure differently in the lives of women and men (Pew Research Center 2016).

2.2.1 Conservative religion

A rich stream of sociological and ethnographic literature since the late 1980s has considered the relations between gender identities and religions of many kinds. Feminism gave this work its impetus, and early studies often concentrated on the question of how and why women inhabited gender-conservative forms of religion. These studies have since been supplemented by a wider range of approaches, and greater attention has been given to masculinities and gender relations.

The first tranche of studies of women in conservative religious groups discovered a variety of ways in which they benefited from, and sometimes subverted, masculine-dominated forms of religious organization. In her pioneering study of a North American fundamentalist Christian community, Nancy Ammerman discovered that “most women learn to influence family decision-making while still deferring to their husband's authority” and “find ways to live with the tension between fundamentalist norms for family structure and modern norms of individuality and equality” (Ammerman 1987: 146). Other studies, like those of Bernice Martin (2001), find that women can benefit by appealing to religious norms to tame machismo and domesticate their menfolk, turning them into better fathers and husbands. Davidman (1991), looking at women in Orthodox Judaism, finds that women benefit from the way in which the tradition sacralizes women’s roles as wives and mothers in stable family units, a conclusion also supported by studies of the burgeoning ultra-orthodox movement in Judaism (e.g. Heilman 1999).

In relation to Islam, recent anthropological studies in Egypt and the Middle East take account of the postcolonial context in assessing the situation of women in conservative religious movements. Saba Mahmood’s (2005) study of women in a piety movement in Egypt considers the rise of an intense kind of religious engagement, which uses interpretations of Islam to allow women to enter previously male-only spaces, such as the mosque, and to become agents of change in their households and communities. Mahmood finds that practices of piety create a worthy and responsible self and an ability to endure. Lara Deeb’s (2006) work on women in the suburbs of Beirut argues that pious, urban and cosmopolitan women engage...
with religion and modernity to produce an “enchanted modern.” She shows how the “Western woman” is invoked both as foil and impetus to create an authentically Islamic modern in which pious selves are fashioned.\[6\] Samia Huq’s (2011) work on the cultivation of piety among educated, urban Bangladeshis shows how women engage with Islam to assert a form of agency that refashions them as “different” wives and homemakers than was permitted by their earlier secular disposition. While women remain attached to traditional families headed by men, they exercise greater individualistic reflection, both in relation to the domestic sphere and the cultural and economic conditions which have historically rendered women and wives subservient through a projection of their sexual appeal.

What many of these studies suggest is that change and empowerment can be enhanced through access to religiously-legitimated social spaces where women can gather with other women. The opportunity for collective reflection is intensified when women perceive that their grievances and their choices have religious importance.

The “bargains” struck with official pious and conservative modes of femininity and family (Kandiyoti 1988) do not, however, eliminate risks, costs, and violence for women. R. Marie Griffith’s (1997) study of the charismatic-evangelical Christian “Women’s Aglow” movement found, for example, that although it provided a safe space in which some women could speak to one another about violence and abuse within the pious household, the remedy was limited: “If, in certain ways, prayer and testimony seem to create possibilities for the liberation and transformation worshippers claim to experience, they may just as readily work to opposite ends, further institutionalizing the roles and boundaries that constrict women’s space” (1997: 210).

There is no large-scale, systematic study of the prevalence of gender-based violence across different religious groups. Work on domestic violence in Christian groups in North America (e.g. Sevcik, Rothery, Nason-Clark, and Pynn 2015) suggests that it is not significantly higher than outside such contexts, though remedies need to be different. Studies of clerical abuse in Ireland (e.g. Keenan 2012) reveal an interlocking system of inequalities in which religion was just one factor. Inequalities of clerical status, gender, age, and class were all important factors in the abuse. Close religion-state relations also played a role in collusion, and failures to deal appropriately with the sexual violence and degradation. The extreme examples of religiously-legitimated male domination and violence against women in extremist fundamentalist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram is only just beginning to be studied (e.g., Stern and Berger 2016). In sum
religious violence against women and children is clearly not the norm, but it is nevertheless an issue standing in the way of the wellbeing of many communities worldwide.

2.2.2 Liberal and reform movements

Gender equity and women’s wellbeing have gained powerful ideological support via religious symbols and narratives, along with powerful organizational platforms for progressive reform. Internal religious critiques of sexism date back at least to the nineteenth century (e.g. Florence Nightingale’s writings, or the creation of the “Women’s Bible” by Cady Stanton and her team). Worldwide, effective calls for equal human dignity have often taken religious as well as secular forms. Fresh energy was poured into religious movements for progressive change from the 1970s onward. In the wake of the Iranian revolution of 1979, for example, an epistemological and theoretical shift took place in Islamic thought which involved the historical contextualization of Islam and women’s roles and responsibilities in Muslim societies (e.g. Ahmed 1992; Mernissi 1991). This fed into an ongoing attempt to dissociate Islam from structural inequalities and cultural practices sanctioning discrimination against women (Barlas 2002; Moghadem 2005; Najmabadi 2005).

In Christianity a great deal of effort was injected into campaigns for women’s ordination as priests, which proved successful in most Protestant denominations between the 1920s and 1990s, but not in the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches (Chaves 1997). These campaigns were accompanied by the development of “feminist theology,” in which Christian doctrines, ethics, and liturgy were read and reinterpreted through an explicitly feminist lens (Parsons 2010). In Buddhism, there were successful efforts to revive orders of Buddhist nuns (Kawanami 2013, Mohr and Tsedroen 2009). Female religious orders remain important in several religions, including Roman Catholic Christianity, where they focus women’s collective energy and often work actively for greater equality – sometimes against the wishes of male authority.

In Islam, recent reform movements include Musawah, initiated in Kuala Lumpur and currently headquartered in Rabat. Musawah aims to reform Muslim family law, working with legal experts, Islamic clergy and scholars, as well as anthropologists and historians. By highlighting the diversity of legitimate Islamic juristic opinion, it seeks to shift the construction of marriage from one in which women are obedient and subjugated to one more compatible with scriptural injunctions to love and mercy, and to equal respect for both genders (Anwar 2009). In 2012 Musawah launched a “global lifestories” project with the intention of grounding activism in the realities of
Muslim women’s lives and families across different contexts (Mir-Hosseini, Al-Sharmani, and Rumminger 2015). Musawah continues to advocate reform in family laws in many parts of the world and has had some notable successes, for example in legal reform in Morocco.

Such initiatives are not without critique from other Muslims, however. Lila Abu Lughod (2015) argues that initiatives such as Musawah and the Global Muslim Women’s Shura Council resort to a human rights model and separate Muslim women from their own cultures, also obscuring the structural, political and economic factors—played out at a global level and in the everyday—that contribute to women’s suffering. Saba Mahmood (2006) similarly argues that an imperialist logic is at play when Islamic cultural practices such as veiling or “honor killings” are held up for remedy in ways which justify Western military and other kinds of intervention in Muslim societies. Outside agents seeking progressive change will do well to listen carefully to the everyday narratives of women’s lives, mindful that religious organizations themselves are often sites for such careful assessment.

Internal movements for religious reform have generally focused on women and femininities, and less attention has been paid to men, masculinities and gender relations in a broader sense. Where there has been explicit attention to masculinity, it has often been in order to defend a patriarchal family model. In the wake of feminism, such defense in conservative Christian circles is often couched in terms of the support of strong but “responsible” forms of male headship. Van Klinken’s (2013) study of African Christian masculinities in the context of AIDS, found a strongly heterosexual, masculinist Protestant Christian mode of male headship, but also a gentler Catholic one which is “queered” by devotion to Mary and the general use of more feminine imaginary.

2.3 Sexuality

Modern religious and secular defenses of the heterosexual married family often obscured alternative images within religious traditions. The pluralization of family forms, on the other hand, has prompted re-readings of traditions which have recovered a diversity and fluidity in relation to gender and sexual identities. For example, the story of the Prophet Lut/Lot and the City of Sodom which is present in the Quran as well as the Bible can and has been read not as a condemnation of “sodomy,” but as a story of oppressive power, miserliness, inhospitality, and arrogance where male sex acts are vilified for the abuse of power they represent in that particular context.
In his study of *Homosexuality in Islam* Kugle (2003) argues that the traditional religious exegetical repertoire does not provide much description or analysis of concepts such as sexuality or sexual orientation. Taking a lead from the Quran where humanity is asked to respect and celebrate diversity, Kugle shows how later commentaries highlighted the existence of hermaphrodites (a third gender). The Sunna (sayings and examples of the Prophet Muhammad) also mention men who are akin to women and men who are not attracted to women, without elaborating on the reason for their lack of desire. Such traditional resources can provide a bridge between religious populations and secular reformers.

LGBTi movements are now found within all religious traditions, sometimes pressing for reform of official religion, and sometimes setting up alternative religious communities and networks. A recent study of the religious and sexual identities of young people across many religious traditions (Yip and Page 2013) found that those in conservative religious groups generally found their faith a support in helping them defend their identity in wider society, claiming, “If God made me like this, this is who I am meant to be.”

Such movements and the issues they represent are often major conflict points within religions, as well as in secular societies. The global Anglican communion of churches, for example, has become internally riven over the legitimacy of homosexual practice and same-sex marriage (Hassett 2007). In Islam, organizations like the UK-based Imaan and the Safra Project for women, and the US-origin Al-Fatiha Foundation, are similarly controversial. The latter, founded in 1998, offers a platform for believing and practicing LGBTi Muslims transnationally, with several chapters in the United States and offices in Canada, UK, Spain, and South Africa. However, an international Islamic group called Al-Mouhajiroun, which seeks an Islamic Caliphate, declared in 2001 that members of Al-Fatiha are apostate. In spite of these pressures, a handful of mosques in the United States and South Africa have openly gay Imams. They remain marginal, however, and are strongly opposed by many well-respected contemporary voices of Islamic authority.[7]

### 2.4 Alternative religions and spiritualities

Religious movements alternative to the mainstream often serve as incubators for wider social change, and over the course of history there have been religious communities which have experimented with various forms of sexual, gender, and family relations – including promiscuity, polygamy, polygyny, communal childrearing, and of course, various forms of celibacy.
Religions run chiefly by women – and often for women – have been rare (Sered 1994), but their relative weight and importance in the religious landscape has increased in modern times. Some are self-consciously new, but most involve at least a partial revival of indigenous traditions. Today they include goddess movements, Wicca, various forms of ecologically-oriented “holistic” spirituality, and movements focused on healing of “body, mind and spirit” (e.g., Reiki, Yoga, mindfulness). Some are focused on individual wellbeing; others combine this with political activism.

Nineteenth-century movements founded and dominated by women such as Theosophy and Christian Science were largely eclipsed by a second wave which, starting with Wicca in the 1940s, saw the rise of a plethora of new groups and movements. Charismatic figures like Starhawk (1979), the Jewish-background activist and witch, offered new rituals and practices which women and men could adapt to their own lives, relationships, and socio-sexual situations. A study of alternative spiritualities in Britain in the early 21st century found that 80 percent of their leaders and participants were women (Heelas and Woodhead 2004).

From being counter-cultural in the first half of the 20th century, the “alternative” spiritual milieu has expanded its influence to become increasingly part of the mainstream. Its spread has been assisted by its easy relations with new media and the entertainment, leisure, healthcare and wellbeing industries, and the opportunities opened by entrepreneurial consumer capitalism (Lofton 2010). Non-denominational “spirituality” is now found in everyday education, healthcare, and popular culture throughout Europe and North America. It involves a quiet but effective shift away from male religious authorities and official forms of religion to authority located in the conscience of each individual, in connection with one another, tapping the “energy” of the cosmos. Typically, such spirituality takes an appreciative and affirming view of equal gender relations and encourages the pluralization of family forms and intimate relations.

2.5 Summary and recommendations

Although official teachings of male-dominated “world religions” in modern times generally legitimate the exclusive validity of the heterosexual married family unit, often in a patriarchal form, the lived realities of religion can serve to soften, undermine, or contradict this approach. Woodhead (2007) summarizes the main religious stances and orientations to gender difference and equality as “Consolidating” (legitimating existing inequality), “Tactical” (working within existing constraints to subvert them), “Questing” (working with alternative gender paradigms for personal benefit rather than structural change), and “Counter-cultural” (working for
Pursuing social progress on behalf of families and children, working to end discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, and seeking to enhance the wellbeing of women, children and LGBTI people will require both critical assessments and creative partnerships.

- Critical assessment begins by recognizing and fairly representing the full diversity of stances within and between religions, along with more nuanced measurement of opinions and practices among the full range of religious people.

- Critical assessment also requires that researchers cease treating “official,” male-dominated forms of religion, their teachings and scriptural interpretations, as the only legitimate forms. Reform movements, new religions, groups of religious women, and everyday practice may well provide resources for change.

- Creative partnerships can be forged with religious leaders, groups, and movements which are working to end discrimination and engender greater wellbeing, equality, and opportunity for more people, as well as those aimed at exposing and countering abuses within religious communities.

- Above all, creative partnerships require rejecting a simplistic blanket distinction between progressive secularism and reactive religion, an assumption which has the effect of reinforcing the sort of reactionary reflex it condemns (Juergensmeyer 2015).

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### 3. Differences and diversity

As set out in Chapter 2 of this volume, social progress throughout the world depends on establishing civil societies where people of diverse heritage can work and live together. Diversity, it is clear, can come in many forms and mean many things. We would argue, however, that religious diversity is distinctive, for which reason it is inadvisable to think of religious identities simply as one among other cultural
preferences. Differences in religious belief and practice, for example, are likely to strike more foundational chords than differences in taste or style.

But even on its own terms, religious diversity has widely varying connotations in different global regions. As David Martin (2013: 185) reminds us:

The big contrast on the global scale is between transnational voluntarism, and those forms of religion based on a closed market, which regard certain territories as their peculiar and sacred preserve, and assume an isomorphic relation between kin, ethnicity and faith. The principle of the transnational voluntary organisation competes globally with the religions of place and ethnicity. To convert from these religions to another is to to this or that extent to break with family, as well as with tribe or nation, and to opt out of the nexus and ethos of local culture. The sanctions against the exercise of choice through conversion run along a scale from mild disapproval to symbolic death or death itself. The global variations run along a scale from North America, where it is normal, to Western Europe and Australasia, where it is accepted but not all that frequent, to the Arabian Peninsula, which is by definition Islamic territory where even foreigners cannot establish their own sacred buildings (D. Martin 2013: 185).

Thus religious difference can be a critical point of rupture making other progressive change irrelevant or impossible, but it can also be a key site for establishing productive patterns of toleration – noting that most places in the modern world lie between the two extremes and that each society must find a way forward within the parameters set by its past. Progress will look different in different places. It is equally clear that nominal religious identifications should not themselves be essentialized. Diversities can be found within as well as between faiths. Indeed “liberals” from different faiths may well have more in common with each other than they do with their respective, rather more “conservative” co-religionists.

James Beckford (2003; see also Wuthnow 2004) underlines an additional point: religious diversity (a state of affairs) is to be distinguished from religious pluralism (a normative term implying the acceptance or otherwise of diversity). The descriptive and the normative are all too often confused in the literature. Beckford also separates out societal, organizational, and individual levels of understanding, reflecting the fact that religious diversity presents differently in different domains: state, politics, civil society, culture, inter-personal relations, and so on. It follows that individuals may
welcome diversity within societies or polities that do not, and vice versa. Some groups may, in fact, advocate for societal toleration so as to protect their own exclusivist beliefs (Yang 2014).

Keeping this range of possibilities in mind, this section will begin by considering what religious diversity looks like on the ground across a range of the world’s societies and regions, asking what factors must be taken into account if we are to understand its presence and possible futures. That done, we will draw on the social scientific literature to ask which institutions and groups are engaged in the management of religious diversity and for what reasons? Through the lens of a series of case studies, we will foreground the relationship between diversity and social progress. Is religious difference a problem or an advantage in this respect and for whom? The overall goal can be easily stated: it is to discover how religiously diverse people learn not only to live together but to flourish in each other’s company.

3.1 Religious diversity in the modern world

The extent of religious diversity varies across the globe (Grim 2015). In some cases diversity is growing, in other cases declining, and in still others it remains relatively stable. The following examples illustrate these patterns along with the wide variety of reasons for both growth and decline. Each illustration uses a measure of change that covers the period 1970-2015 and draws on the material brought together in Johnson, Grim, and Zurlo (2015).[8]

Southeast Asia, the first example, has exhibited very little religious change over this period (Figure 3.1). What might be called “constitutive” diversity is nothing new; it has been there for a very long time, but continues to evolve. Colonialism altered the religious ecology in ways that can still be seen. Migration moves religious traditions with the people, and repression often propels the migration in the first place.

Figure 3.1 Religious diversity in South-East Asia, 1970 and 2015
The second example encompasses a large swathe of Africa (Figure 3.2) and depicts decreasing diversity due to a “modernizing” process that encourages adherence to “world” religions rather than to a plethora of local traditional faiths. That said, careful attention should be paid to the detail of each country – they are far from uniform.

Figure 3.2 Religious diversity in East Africa, 1970 and 2015
The third example is the Middle East, which is characterized by decreasing diversity, due in this case to conflict and dispersion (Figure 3.3). The displacement of historic religious communities, long at home in the region, is a recent phenomenon.

**Figure 3.3 Religious diversity in the Middle East, 1970 and 2015**

Europe (Figure 3.4), in contrast, illustrates increasing diversity brought about by immigration, a process in which religious, ethnic, political, and national forces are intricately intertwined.

**Figure 3.4 Religious diversity in Southern, Western and Northern Europe, 1970 and 2015**
A great deal depends, however, on the definition of the “region” in question. Europe is a case in point. Former West Europe displays not only increasing diversity but increasing secularity – notably a rise in the proportion of people indicating no religion (Figure 3.4). This is particularly the case in the Protestant parts of the continent. The former communist countries further east, including Russia, indicate a rather different trend (Figure 3.5) – the re-establishment of Christianity, mostly in its Orthodox forms, after significant (but varying) periods of official atheism.

Figure 3.5 Religious diversity in Eastern Europe, 1970 and 2015
What emerges overall is the constantly generative nature of religious diversity in the 21st century. As political, social, economic and natural forces push populations from one place to another, some parts of the world will become more religiously diverse, while others will become more homogeneous. Within each society, there will also be shifts produced by changes internal to the population. Individual religious change is equally part of the story. But as Martin observed (above), changing or leaving one’s religion is a possibility understood differently in different global regions and can by no means be taken for granted. The tension between universal rights to free religious choice and local pressures toward societal and political loyalty is explored further in the case studies set out below.

3.2 Religious diversity and migration

As these population assessments illustrate, religious diversity must be considered a major factor (both push and pull) in mobility and migration. Just as migration can be propelled by a faltering economy or civil unrest, it can be spurred by political and cultural persecution of a religious group. And just as migration can remake families and cultures, it also remakes religious traditions. A large body of research exists in this field. Beckford’s (2016) two-volume collection offers an excellent starting point, introducing work on different periods of history, different regions of the world and different traditions of faith. Both local and global features are examined. One theme stands out: the links between religion(s) and migration constitute a two-way flow. Religions inspire, manage, and benefit from the migration process, but at the same time beliefs, identities, and practices are shaped by the associated dislocating of populations. Take, for example, the evolution of religions that are “traditionally” linked to particular global regions or national contexts. What happens when members of a religious majority have to learn to live as a minority in a new place, in a context in which culture and religion are no longer interrelated? What new forms of organization and leadership may emerge? And what eventually feeds back into the country of origin and with what effects on the host community?[9]

The role of religion in the reception of migrants is the subject of Part V of Beckford’s first volume. A particularly instructive example can be found in Margarita Mooney’s (2013) study of Haitian immigrants in three very different places: Miami, Montreal, and Paris. Mooney notes that the differentiation between religion and the state in the US (a structural variable) assists the relatively successful incorporation of individual Haitians into Miami, mediated by religious community organizations. Less positive are the outcomes in Quebec (characterized by secular nationalism) and France (dominated by a more assertive secularism), each of which discourages organizations based on religious or ethnic
identifications. Clearly the greater scope for action allowed to the primarily religious mediating organizations established by the Haitian community in Miami more effectively assisted the reception of newcomers. Thus macro, meso and micro levels are brought together in the understanding of religion as a crucial variable in the successful resettlement of migrants.

It is also clear that diversity does not always depend on the physical movement of people. Religious differences can exist “virtually” as well as on the ground. Modern means of communication make us aware of religious practices other than our own and connect communities across distance. Exactly what happens in this respect will vary considerably, given the huge range of “media” on offer, and allowing for the fact that representations of religion are seldom neutral (Knott and Poole 2013). That said the growing use of media technologies in the portrayal of and the communication between religions is a vital element in the management of religious differences. It will also play a role in the constant reconstructions of the religious field per se.

3.3 Religious diversity and social progress

This section presents four contrasting cases, chosen to illustrate more and less successful approaches to the governance of diversity and how these change and adapt over time.

3.3.1 “Religious education” in Southeast Asia: Insights from Singapore

Like other multi-religious societies Singapore has had to learn how to “manage” its tensions (Eng 2008).[10] Eugene Tan’s pertinent observation about ethnicity applies equally to religion: “Ethnicity is a Janus-faced creature in Singapore, simultaneously portrayed as a threat and a source of cultural ballast.” (Tan 2004: 88). It follows that religion is a valued resource even as it is viewed as a hazard. Sinha (2005) develops this point, arguing that the state has accepted that Singapore society must be religiously plural, but is wary of the possibility of conflict inherent in this diversity. How is this approach implemented? The state’s adoption of secularism is a partial answer, bearing in mind that the state is itself heavily involved in encouraging harmony. Latterly a greater appreciation of religious difference has been encouraged through a combination of (a) formal religious instruction and (b) informal mechanisms for learning about the religions of others. We use the term “religious education” to include both approaches.
From its inception as a modern nation-state, Singapore's leaders have actively engaged the management of a religiously and ethnically plural citizenry. For the most part, the preference has been for institutional and legislative measures. By and large, these safeguards have prevented the irresponsible expression of communal tensions, though the latter may be present. From this point of view, the measures – many of which are punitive (such as warnings, fines, and imprisonment) – have served their purpose.

Recent events, however, have raised questions (even at government level) regarding the adequacy of such an approach. Critical in this respect is a shifting emphasis away from institutional mechanisms (which still remain) and towards everyday actions, which forge interpersonal ties and increased interaction amongst members of different religions. A more informed understanding of other religions is able to develop alongside an awareness that multi-religiosity is not merely the listing and counting of discrete religious communities. The process must include the mutual respect and non-judgmental understanding of one community for another.

It is equally clear that after some 50 years of multicultural nation building, policies for managing the continuing racial and religious diversity on the island are likely to evolve further. This is a work in progress.

3.3.2 Accommodating new forms of religion: Chinese dilemmas

The Chinese case is very different due to the historical legacies of both the Chinese dynasties and Communist rule (Yang 2012). Since the late 19th century, Chinese elites have attempted to modernize China. Immediately after the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic (1912), the cultural elites – influenced by the French Enlightenment – campaigned to reject religion in favor of science and democracy, accusing traditional religions (i.e. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) of holding back the modernization process, and seeing Christianity as a tool of Western imperialism. Following the Communist revolution in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China attempted to eradicate all religions in the course of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

From the late 1970s, China has permitted five religions to operate legally, including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity (Protestantism), Daoism, and Islam, seeing these as conventional religions with large numbers of believers in China. The Communist Party (CCP) has, however, retained atheism as its formal ideology, which therefore infuses the entire education system from elementary school to graduate level. Thus the current tolerance
toward the five religions is maintained for pragmatic reasons only. The CCP insists that religion will eventually die out. That said, the PRC seeks acceptance as a modern nation that follows the principles of the United Nations in its Charter and various covenants. For this reason, the PRC Constitution protects individual “freedom of religious belief.” This UN norm, along with more open-minded cultural and political elites, makes possible limited social space for religion in Chinese society.

In reality, a number of religions are thriving in China. Hundreds of millions of people believe and practice Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religion. Tens of millions of ethnic minorities adhere to Islam. The rapid increase of Christian conversions in the 21st century is especially striking, and puzzling to political and cultural elites. So much so that in recent years, the Chinese authorities, unwilling to adopt Western models, have brought back earlier forms of control, favoring traditional Chinese religions while suppressing others, especially the so-called “foreign” religions of Christianity and Islam.

In understanding these shifts, it is important to note Fenggang Yang’s insistence that social scientific approaches applicable in Western contexts cannot simply be transposed to China (or indeed anywhere else). Conceptual adjustments are necessary if we are to grasp what is happening. Yang’s own analysis of the Chinese case contrasts three types of responses to religious regulation: a red (official) market, a black (prohibited) market, and a gray (rather more mixed) market. The three together generate a distinctive dynamic, leading Yang to the following conclusion: “Under heavy regulation, the gray market is likely to be volatile and unsettled, making religious regulation an arduous task and impossible to enforce by the government superstructure” (Yang 2012: 177).

In contrast to the Communist dilemma in its management of religious diversity in mainland China, the Republic of China on Taiwan began in 1987 to implement the constitutional separation of religion and the state and the protection of religious freedom, first inscribed in the Republic of China Constitution in 1946 (a document suspended for decades). Religious pluralism has become an accepted cultural norm in today’s Taiwan, where diverse religions coexist and compete peacefully in an open market (Clart and Jones 2003; Kuo 2013; Laliberté 2009). The contrast between Taiwan and mainland China indicates that social, legal, and political arrangements are more important than culture, whether traditional or modern, in constructing a society with harmonious relations between a variety of religions and secularisms.

3.3.3 Post-war changes in Europe
For the purposes of this chapter, the European “story” begins in the post-war period,[11] when Britain, France, the Netherlands and (then) West Germany looked for sources of labor to support their expanding economies. The first three turned to their former colonies; Germany looked primarily to Turkey – hence growing religious diversity in all four countries, but differently constituted in each case. This phase came to an end in the 1970s as the global economy faltered. Some two decades later in-migration into Europe once again gathered speed, but this time the receiving societies included both the Nordic and the Mediterranean countries. The enlargements of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 stimulated a rather different movement, this time from East to West Europe, bearing in mind that inflows from whatever direction were significantly curtailed following the financial crash in 2008. A final phase can be seen in the current (2015 on) “migrant crisis” largely brought about by the conflict in the Middle East.

Very little of this movement of people can be considered religiously motivated, with the possible exception of Christians fleeing war or persecution in the Middle East.[12] For the huge majority of incomers the primary reason for moving has been economic. The consequences for religion are, however, immense as an increasingly secular Europe is obliged to come to terms with the re-emergence of religion in public life. The trigger has been the arrival of other significant faith communities, among which Muslims are by far the largest.

Despite the negativity of media accounts it is important to acknowledge the capacities of (West) European societies to absorb considerable numbers of Muslims, enabling them to establish effective communities in different parts of the continent (Joppke and Morawska 2014; Joppke and Torpey 2013). The election in 2016 of a practicing Muslim as mayor of London (the largest city in Europe) symbolizes this “success.” That said, a series of incidents across Europe testify to continuing difficulties. These include the Rushdie controversy in Britain (1989 on), the affaire du foulard in France (1989 on); the murders of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and Theo van Gogh (2004) in the Netherlands; the furor over the cartoons of Mohammed published by a Danish newspaper (2005), a debate that subsequently spread to Sweden (2007); the challenge to the legality of minarets in a Swiss referendum (2009); the banning of the burqa or niqab in public in some parts of Europe (2014); and religiously-motivated violence in Paris (2015) and Belgium (2016). Each of these raises issues that pertain to the country in question. The underlying concerns are, however, common: they reflect the willingness (or not) of European societies to accommodate a minority whose religious assumptions challenge the status quo, and the capacities of that minority to live in diaspora.
It is important to recall the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the management of this agenda. Article 9 of the ECHR has two clauses. Article 9(1) ensures an absolute right to hold a religion or belief and a qualified right to manifest this in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Article 9(2) states that the freedom to manifest a religion or belief is subject to “necessary” limitations.[13] This distinction is key. Equally important is the jurisprudence emanating from the ECtHR in religion-related cases, which are growing in number. Growing religious diversity is a matter of on-going negotiation on the part of national and international legal systems. Foblets, Alidadi, Nielsen, and Yanasmayan (2014) bring together much of the literature on belief, law, and politics in Europe.[14]

3.3.4 A history of religious diversity in the United States

The US story starts in a very different place – specifically when 17th century religious “pilgrims” seek freedom to practice religious beliefs for which they faced persecution in Europe. It continues through the enshrining of religious liberty in the First Amendment of the American Constitution. The realities, of course, are not so neat. The religions of the indigenous populations were routinely suppressed and the freedom-seeking pilgrims routinely expelled religious dissidents from their midst.

That said, the impulse to allow free religious expression to the individual, and not to establish any single privileged religious group, has resulted in a nation whose range of resident religious traditions is vast. No definitive religious census of the population exists, but in 2010 the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies gathered data on the number of congregations (344,894) and their adherents (150,596,792) in almost 250 distinct religious groups (Statisticians of American Religious Bodies 2010). Until the 1960s, that diversity still existed within a Protestant Christian hegemony, although cultural power had begun to expand to include Jews and Catholics. Changes in immigration law (enacted in 1965) brought Christians from outside the North Atlantic and significant numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and especially Muslims into the mix (Prothero 2006). Cultural shifts in the early 21st century have increased the number of people without religious affiliation (the “nones”) (Pew Research Center 2015). Protestants, meanwhile, have lost their majority position, even as their historical shaping of the culture remains visible.

Conflicts among these religious groups are ubiquitous but rarely overwhelming. They vary in intensity from moments of interpersonal awkwardness to occasional violent encounters resulting in death and destruction. In general everyday interactions, lines of religious
difference are moderated by norms of privacy and respect, as they are in Europe. And as in other modern nation-states a de facto multiculturalism prevails (Joppke and Morawska 2014). The American pattern of voluntarily organizing local religious communities allows minorities legal spaces for cultural expression. And, as Putnam and Campbell (2010) have argued, Americans are likely to have friends, co-workers, and even family members who are religiously different. A variety of social mechanisms, then, mitigate what might otherwise be a constant level of contentiousness.

Sorting out permissible boundaries in public is handled by appeal to a combination of Constitutional rights, bureaucratic mechanisms, and a continuous stream of legal challenges that test the limits of both “free exercise” and “separation,” that is limits on the state’s interference in religious affairs (Greenawalt 2009). Has the state intruded on religious liberty, for instance, by requiring a governmental official to execute or enforce a law that that official finds personally religiously offensive? Should contributions to Scientology be tax deductible? Should Santeria animal sacrifice or Native American peyote smoking be exempt from laws that would otherwise apply? Americans may not always agree on the answers, but they generally agree on the procedures for settling the matter.

None of this means that Americans are immune from religious bigotry or appeals for punitive religious restrictions. From “witch trials” in the 17th century, to anti-Catholic riots in the 19th, to anti-Muslim political rhetoric in the 21st, minority religious groups have had to face incidents of persecution and violence. Even as norms of religious tolerance are deeply engrained in the society, people who have exclusivist religious beliefs sometimes doubt that religious diversity is good for the country. In a post-9/11 context of fear, religious restrictions, insults, and even violence are more likely. Even as generational cohort replacement and political history would predict an increasingly open and tolerant country, the shape of immigrant trends and the global sense of threat are undermining those norms. The cultural, bureaucratic, and legal mechanisms that have largely kept religious diversity from erupting into major conflict are being tested – just as they are in Europe.

3.4. Summary and recommendations

A linking theme emerges from these examples: religion is a crucially important factor in understanding diversity across the globe but it never stands alone. As we saw at the outset, it is part of a bigger picture which must be approached contextually. At the same time, boundaries – and their implications for centers and peripheries, majorities and minorities – are in constant flux. Societies that
support human flourishing must take these changes into account. Strategies for success will vary, but the effort is crucial in an increasingly fluid global context.

- Multi-culturalism,[15] and pluralism are viable norms in some places, but they will present differently in different environments, as indeed will secular alternatives. The latter can shift between neutrality and hostility towards religion.

- Many different actors at every level of society have a role to play: these include the state, the law, the market, education, civil society, and individual citizens.

- Greater mutual knowledge is fundamental to success, but “street level ecumenism” (working side by side) is often more effective than a dialogue between elites. Critical assessment of shared goals can lead to creative partnerships.

- Not least diverse societies must recognize the role of religious organizations and the myriad ordinary individuals within them as actors in their own right. They, as much as anyone, can foster – or impede – social progress in the form of mutual flourishing.

4. Religion and democratic governance

Questions surrounding the management of religious diversity pave the way for the discussion of democracy per se. How will societies develop structures that foster the thriving of diverse populations? One of the greatest global challenges of the 21st century is that of developing governing structures that are accountable to and representative of their citizens, and respectful of their autonomy, equality, and bodily integrity. Or, to put it more crudely: the challenge of the 21st century is how to get democracy where it doesn’t exist and to keep it where it does. It is a question in which religion is deeply implicated. The IPSP project as a whole attends in detail to questions of law and justice, equality, and participation in forms of governance that are accountable to their populations. The question for this section is: under what conditions does religion enable or inhibit democracy?

We begin with an overview of the history and current contexts in which that question must be understood, and we expand on those answers in three case studies, each of which demonstrates points where religions may promote or impede progress toward democratic
goals. The first considers India – the world’s largest democracy – and asks whether the state of a huge country teeming with different forms of religion can ever be truly secular. We pay special attention to the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its implications for democratic governance. The second example draws from little known aspects of Chinese political history to demonstrate how a tiny minority can make a material difference in a hegemonic and aggressively secular state. Christians are often overlooked in this context but have played a crucial role on three occasions. The third example turns to Venezuela to demonstrate the complex alignments that emerge in this part of the world. In so doing it warns against any easy elision between forms of religion and political movements – the lines run through rather than between both Catholic and Protestant populations.

4.1 Under what conditions does religion enable or inhibit democracy?

Different religious traditions have at different times been identified as either providing the foundations for democratic governance or constituting impediments to it. For instance, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that Catholics “constitute the most republican and the most democratic class of citizens which exists in the United States.” The reason for this, he argued, was Catholicism’s emphasis on equality: “[T]he Catholic faith places all human capacities upon the same level; it subjects the wise and ignorant, the man of genius and the vulgar crowd, to the details of the same creed; it imposes the same observances upon the rich and needy, it inflicts the same austerities upon the strong and the weak, it listens to no compromise with mortal man, but, reducing all the human race to the same standard, it confounds all the distinctions of society at the foot of the same altar…” (de Tocqueville 1835[2012]: 469).

More than 100 years later, sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset came to a diametrically opposed conclusion regarding the compatibility of Catholicism and democracy. Lipset argued that democracy “requires a universalistic political belief system in the sense that it legitimates different ideologies” and that “universalistic” religions “will be more compatible with democracy than those which assume that they have the only truth” (Lipset 1959: 93). Catholicism, he contended, was especially prone – in comparison with other Christian denominations – to assuming a monopoly on truth, rendering it inhospitable to the kind of compromise and pluralism that is at the heart of democracy.

Temporal and spatial variation in the democratic fortunes of Catholic-majority countries in Latin America, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southern Europe demonstrate that both de Tocqueville and Lipset were wrong in assigning either democratic or
anti-democratic essences to the Catholic faith. However, similar arguments continue to be invoked with respect to other religions—most notably, Islam. Here the record is primarily a negative one, with thinkers over several generations arguing that Islam is inherently inhospitable to democratic government. For instance, Montesquieu declared that “The moderate government is better suited to the Christian religion, and despotic government to Mohammedanism,” on account of “gentleness so recommended in the gospel,” which he contrasted to the “despotic fury” that allegedly characterized the behavior of “Mohammedan princes” (Montesquieu 1748[2001]: 468). More recently, political historian Elie Kedourie wrote that, “[T]he ideas of the secularity of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating, autonomous groups and associations—all these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition” (Kedourie 1992: 6). Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington invoked Islam itself to explain why few Muslim-majority countries transitioned to democracy during the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization that began in the 1970s. “To the extent that governmental legitimacy and policy flow from religious doctrine and religious expertise,” he wrote, “Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics” (Huntington 1991a: 28).

Although several Muslim countries have been able to get and keep democracy—including Indonesia, Senegal, Turkey, and most recently, Tunisia—arguments about the incompatibility of Islam and democracy continue to carry influence. Here the evidence requires careful scrutiny. Cross-national, country-level statistical analyses continue to reveal a positive correlation between the proportion of a country’s population that is Muslim and its propensity toward authoritarianism (see for example, Fish 2002; Donno and Russet 2004); however more fine-grained studies carried out at the individual level have failed to validate the skepticism towards Islam’s democratic prospects.

For instance, in a study of mass attitudes toward religion and democracy in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and the Palestinian territories in the 1980s and 1990s, Marc Tessler (2002: 350) found that “Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some western and other scholars allege it to be.” And in a thorough analysis of cross-national data from the World Values Survey, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2011: 134) find that “surprisingly similar attitudes toward democracy are found in the West and the Islamic world.” Similarly, Amaney Jamal (2006: 59), analyzing a subset of these survey data from Egypt and Jordan, argues that “the dichotomization of Islam and democracy is a false construct,” as evidenced by the fact that “the vast majority of respondents in both Egypt and Jordan demonstrate simultaneous support for both Islam and democracy.” More recently,
a study of attitudes toward democracy in ten Muslim-majority countries conducted by Sabri Ciftci (2010: 1460) found that greater adherence to Islamic precepts is unrelated to support for democracy, which “is remarkably high, and […] independent of ‘sectarian’ or theological traditions across the Muslim world.” Similar findings have been recorded by Hoffman (2004) and Stepan and Robertson (2003).

Moving beyond specific religious traditions, scholars have attempted to explore whether religion itself is conducive or unconducive to democracy. On the one side are scholars who believe that religions inculcate intolerance toward alternative weltanschauungen and instill in their followers norms of obedience and deference to authority, rendering them inhospitable to democracy and individual liberty. We have seen variants of this view above in arguments about Islam and Catholicism. On the other side are scholars who identify religious social institutions as schools for the “the development of civic skills and norms that can have a positive effect on support for democracy” (Bloom and Arikan 2013). Political scholarship in the American context has revealed how religious organizations can channel individuals into democratic politics (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012; R. L. Wood 2002). In a study of more than 60,000 survey respondents in 54 countries, Bloom and Arikan (2013) try to adjudicate between these two views and instead find support for both of them. Religious values appear to instill unfavorable attitudes toward democracy, while participation in religious social networks appears to be positively associated with some forms of support for democracy. As we argue throughout this chapter, “religion” has multiple dimensions, and attention to ground-level practices may reveal a different picture from the view at the level of ideas and theologies.

The overwhelming impression conveyed by these studies is that religions (or religion in general) are neither inherently pro- nor anti-democratic. Rather, it is important to move beyond the level of individual values and examine the role that religious groups play in enabling or inhibiting the emergence of democratic political orders. For example, Toft, Philpott, and Shah (2011) have argued that democracy is more likely to emerge and survive when religious actors are included in transition processes, instead of being viewed as hostile forces to be contained. In the Arab context, recent scholarship has shown that so-called Islamist parties – previously thought to be opposed to democracy and individual liberty – have emerged as some of the region’s foremost exponents of democratic political arrangements (Wickham 2013), even as the space for such arrangements has constricted in recent years. In the Latin American case, the Catholic Church’s development of “liberation theology” was accompanied by the practice of organizing “base Christian communities” where local citizens articulated their daily life
concerns and organized to advocate for change (Gill 1988; Roelofs 1988; Smilde 2003). Such practices became a powerful force for the development of democracy in that part of the world.

As we will see in the cases to follow, religious organizations, as well as religious ideas and leaders can be important factors in either building or impeding the capacity for democratic governance. A critical assessment of these factors, placed in particular local and national contexts, can enable advocates to forge pragmatic partnerships with religious constituencies that share their democratic goals and practices.

4.2 India: The world’s largest democracy

India – with a population exceeding 1.2 billion – defines itself unequivocally as a secular state. But it has a population that is far from secularized. According to the 2011 Census, Hindus constitute about 80 percent of the population followed by Muslims at 14 percent, and smaller numbers of Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Less than 1 percent of the population declares itself to have "no religion." The Constitution is the supreme authority and articulates both the fundamental right of the individual citizen to religious freedom (Articles 15 and 25) and the right of religious communities to manage their own affairs (Article 26) – with the caveat that the state has the right to intervene in the religious domain in the preservation of national interests or if communal harmony is disrupted. The Indian state’s legitimacy rests on its declared equality of treatment of all its citizens. Above all an articulated secularism allows the state to locate its political authority outside and beyond all other interests, such that it cannot be held hostage to the interests of any group, religious or otherwise. Against this background, two interrelated points demand attention: the notion of secularism as such and the threat to democracy constituted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Given its historical and religio-cultural grounding, critics have asked whether or not "secularism" is relevant to non-Western, non-Christian, post-colonial states. The question has provoked an extensive literature on a variety of Asian contexts.[16] In India itself, political and social scientists vigorously debate the applicability of secularism to the subcontinent.[17] One point is abundantly clear in this discussion: the notion of “secularism” has become politicized in the Indian context. Some parties, for instance, hold the view that the state is not secular enough in its adherence to the requirement to be rigorously neutral among contesting religious groups. The Indian legal system is a case in point: it accommodates different personal laws for different religious communities. Religion-specific laws apply in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance.
Undoubtedly the co-presence of personal family law for Muslims, and the existence of both religion-specific legislation and institutions complicate the state’s claim to be secular. Indeed Nikki Keddie (2003: 242) goes further still, arguing that: “[N]o state yet seen has been purely secular, whether the word is used to mean state separation from religion or state control of religion.”

The larger challenge in the Indian case comes from the link between national identity and a particular religion – Hinduism. *Hindutva* refers to Hindu principles or a Hindu way of life and has been interpreted as a form of Hindu nationalism which privileges a cultural notion of “Hindu.” As a political force, this is a banner under which the Hindu right in India fights for state power; it has been critical of the policies of the Indian state under Congress rule. It is, moreover, avowedly anti-Muslim and increasingly anti-Christian. The *Sangh Parivar* (family of organizations) is made up of: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is a paramilitary, non-party Hindu nationalist organization founded in 1925 – an efficient and effective organizer; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the electoral wing of the RSS, founded in 1980 – a religious nationalist party which is currently in power under the premiership of Narendra Modi; and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP – World Hindu Council) which mobilizes religious institutions and personages both in India and abroad for what it sees as Hindu causes.

The BJP represents a Hindu consciousness as much as a *nation state* consciousness and asserts a deep affinity between Hindus and the nation state of India, with the aim of creating and monopolizing political space and limiting the civic participation of religious minorities. In 2013, the General Secretary of the BJP declared that, if elected, the BJP would institute anti-conversion laws across the Indian nation. The BJP did indeed achieve a resounding victory in May 2013 but to date no such law has been enacted nation-wide. That said, numerous incidents across the nation suggest that Hindutva forces have been emboldened – sentiments expressed in a rising tide of intolerance, including the marginalization of non-Hindu minorities. Continuing Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian tensions, and the silence and ineffective law enforcement of the central government regarding harassment, violence, and discriminatory practices, are challenging the secular foundations of the Indian state.

It is true that the Indian Constitution grants nominal protection to religious minorities, and that there are mechanisms in place charged with enforcing that protection. The *Ministry of Minority Affairs* was established in 2006; the *National Commission for Minorities* and *National Human Rights Commission* of India were established earlier, in 1992 and 1993 respectively. These bodies function to investigate religious discrimination and persecution and
to make recommendations for recourse to the local state-level authorities. However, incidents of persecution of Muslims and Christians are regularly reported, and given the structure of federalism and state-level legislation, law enforcement at the local level has often failed to protect such groups, undermining – once again – the Indian state’s claim to be a secular democracy. Religious minorities have neither the political nor cultural space to participate as full citizens in this “largest democracy.”

4.3 Religion and democratization in recent Chinese history

Political democratization in China since the early twentieth century has been uneven, to say the least. In legal documents such as the Constitution, democracy has been inscribed since the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. Institutional development, however, has lagged behind. Religious groups have rarely played a significant role either for or against democracy, but in three important transitions a tiny Christian minority made a material difference.

In 1911 the Republican Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty which led a year later to the establishment of the Republic of China. The leader of the Republican Revolution and the founding father of the Republic of China (ROC), Dr. Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), was a Christian convert, baptized at the age of 18. Throughout his political career, Dr. Sun rallied support for the revolution from all walks of life, including believers from different religions. Among his comrades in the armed uprisings, were a high proportion of Christians, despite the fact that Christians as such constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In his will, Sun reaffirmed that his life-long political activism was driven by a sense of divine calling.

The second transition was the democratization of the ROC on Taiwan in the late twentieth century. Political dissidents questioned the regime in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the following decade, a small number of Christian leaders and churches joined with secular forces to challenge autocratic rule. Most believers, including the majority of Christians, were not actively engaged. Christians (about 5% of the population) were, however, overrepresented among the activists. Particularly notable was the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) which made three public pronouncements (1971, 1975 and 1977), calling for the government to implement constitutional democracy and respect human rights. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the new regime lifted martial law and allowed the formation of political parties, PCT leaders were active in organizing protest marches and other gatherings.
That said, a number of Christians also held high positions in the old party-state, for example Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui. As the democracy movement gathered steam, these Guomindang rulers cracked down on dissidents who were often their co-religionists. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987 and full implementation of the ROC Constitution, the ROC on Taiwan became an exemplar of third-wave democratization, moving peacefully from authoritarianism to constitutional democracy under the rule of law (Huntington 1991b). Groups across Taiwan's diverse religions – Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian – actively supported this transition to a more accountable and participatory democracy (Madsen 2007).

The third moment came as the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong called for genuine universal suffrage in the Special Administrative Region under the PRC. Here Christians comprise a larger minority (15 to 20%) of the Hong Kong population (Cheng 2014), but once again most of the movement leaders were Christian, including a Baptist pastor, a law professor, and a social scientist. The most prominent student leader, Joshua Wong, is active both in churches and in Christian student organizations; at a more senior level, Catholic Cardinal Emeritus Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun has been outspoken for democracy and human rights.

In short, Christians have been leading campaigners for democratization at key moments in recent Chinese history. Religious leaders have helped to mobilize movements, and grassroots and student organizations have provided seedbeds. Still, minority status and the strength of the regime leave these efforts uncertain.

4.4 Religious mobilization, polarization, and democracy in Venezuela

One of the ironies of the increasing electoral enfranchisement across the globe in the past thirty years is that long-marginalized majorities have been able to express their wills at the ballot box and frequently challenge existing regimes long controlled by minorities. While to suggest we are in a “world on fire” (Chua 2002) seems overstated, processes of political polarization in democratic contexts have become increasingly common, from Turkey to Nepal to Venezuela; and religious parties, leaders, and organizations have often been drawn into the fray. In Venezuela, for example, the “democratic revolution” started by the election of Hugo Chávez Frias in 1998 has generated widespread debates on democracy, and the ensuing discussions have involved Christian groups of different kinds. As a result, both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical movement have suffered internal polarization.
From the time of his initial campaign in 1998, Hugo Chávez reached out to Evangelicals. And once in office he continued to court them – setting up links to public institutions and their associated resources. He allowed Evangelicals to teach religious education in public schools, just like their Catholic counterparts, and oriented some of the funds the Catholic Church gets for its role in education and other social services to Evangelicals. Faced with this situation, the main Evangelical associations proceeded with caution, concerned about being coopted. They particularly hesitated when the government tried to bring them into the “Bolivarian Religious Parliament” along with groups they reject, such as spiritists and practitioners of the faith Maria Lionza.

However, Evangelicals are diverse, and Neo-Pentecostal groups readily embraced these opportunities, receiving funds from the Chávez government to carry out social services. One pastor gained a spot for religious programs on state television. Another coalition organized Evangelical rallies in favor of Chávez before the August 2004 recall referendum, which Chávez eventually defeated. Indeed Neo-Pentecostal “dominion theology,” which suggests Christians need to prepare the world for the return of Jesus Christ, grafted easily onto Chávez’s anti-imperialist nationalism (Smilde and Pagan 2011).

That said, all Evangelical collaboration with the Chávez government waned when the government banished the New Tribes Missions, which for decades had evangelized in Venezuela’s Amazon region. After years of popular objections to their work, the “Day of Indigenous Resistance” in October 2006, marked the government’s prohibition of this US based group working in Venezuela (Smilde 2007b). Even Neo-Pentecostal groups had a hard time assimilating this banishment and cooled their relations with the government.

The Catholic trajectory provides an interesting comparison. From the first year of the Chávez government, the Catholic Church emerged as its most important critic, bristling at the revolutionary, third-worldist rhetoric that portrayed existing institutions, including the Church, as the bulwarks of an unequal society. Distrust peaked after 2002 when the Catholic hierarchy appeared to take an important role in the coup that pushed Chávez from power for 36 hours. Cardinal Ignacio Velasco was among those who signed the decree forming a short-lived transition government.

However, in those same events, alternative Catholic movements were crucial in frustrating the coup. The Jesuit network of “Fe y Alegría” community radio stations were key in breaking the media silence surrounding the coup and in showing the growing discontent in the streets. That was important in accelerating the movement that
brought Chávez back to power (Smilde and Pagan 2011). Indeed, throughout the Chávez period, many foreign priests worked directly with communities, avoiding the authority of the Venezuelan Church, and actively supported the government and its various participatory projects (Smilde 2013). In the second term of the Chávez presidency the Church as a whole took on a more conciliatory stance.

In the post-Chavez years, the Vatican itself has attempted to facilitate democratic progress. They sponsored, along with the Union of Southern Nations (UNASUR), the 2014 dialogues between the government and opposition, the first in ten years, although no tangible agreements were reached. Observers have long speculated that the Vatican, under the leadership of the first Latin American Pope, could take a larger role in the region. Pope Francis played a key role in the diplomatic breakthrough between the United States and Cuba, and the Vatican’s foreign minister Pietro Parolin was the Nuncio in Venezuela before joining Francis in Rome. What is more, the Jesuits (Francis’s order) are the most politically influential religious order in Venezuela and much of the region. There are, that is, important organizational links that may allow elements of the Catholic Church to play a constructive role in strengthening democracy.

That role is not without complications, however. Venezuela’s Cardinal Jorge Urosa Sabino has been unhappy with Pope Francis’s reforms to Catholic moral teachings – accepting communion for those who are divorced, acceptance in the faith of the children of unmarried parents, and greater recognition of homosexuals. His unhappiness over these internal Church affairs has reduced the space for collaboration between the Vatican and Venezuela’s national hierarchy (Alonzo 2015).

In short there is no clear direction to religion’s engagement with democracy in this region. Beyond the broad tendencies measurable with large scale opinion polls, religious meaning systems, practices, institutions and leaders have their own logic that sometimes generates support for “democratization” and sometimes not. After the New Tribes Missions were expelled in 2006, Evangelicals largely withdrew their support for the Chávez and now Maduro governments. The Vatican’s potential role in the Venezuelan conflict is sidelined by disagreements with the Venezuelan hierarchy over moral issues. Those internal religious logics must be critically assessed as efforts at democratic expansion seek possible religious partners.

4.5 Summary and recommendations
Religion as such is neither a necessary impediment to democratic governance, nor a necessary support for it. While there is some evidence that certain religious values and selected forms of specific religions have authoritarian (thus anti-democratic) tendencies, concrete cases across the world demonstrate hugely varied relationships between religions and democratic regimes. Outcomes, moreover, are not always as expected. The BJP embraces policies that at times are at variance with the secular nature of the Indian Constitution. The BJP, however, came to power in a democratic election; indeed it was overwhelmingly endorsed by a vast electorate. In China, tiny minorities of Christians have had critical leadership roles in supporting democracy, but those roles are highly contingent on access to other political resources. And in Venezuela, shifting internal interests, ideologies and resources can affect the likelihood that either Catholic or Evangelical leaders and communities can form alliances with political actors and what direction these might take. For the most part, religion is not the key factor in struggles for democracy. It can, however, be a decisive factor in either preventing or facilitating a democratic breakthrough.

In assessing the roles religions might play, a range of factors should be considered.

- Religion puts temporal social situations into supernatural or transcendental context and has the power both to reify social equilibriums and to upset them, in ways that the configuration of social actors and structures by themselves would not suggest.
- Religion can provide safe spaces where democratic organizing can take place in authoritarian contexts.
- Many (but not all) religious organizations provide opportunities for participants to exercise practical democratic skills. Where such groups exist, they may also be arenas in which social goals are articulated and through which networks can be mobilized.
- There are likely to be important religious differences within a given tradition, as well as between traditions. Assuming that there is a single authoritative religious position that shapes the political action of a population will result in many missed opportunities.
- Caution is in order. Democracy may empower religious majorities in ways that are detrimental to religious minorities.
- The potential for religious solutions to break through political stalemates can be facilitated by the reach and legitimacy of international religious leaders such as Pope Francis.
5. Religion, conflict and peace

Across the globe, social progress is all too often halted and reversed by violence and aggression that deprive individuals and communities of the necessary conditions for seeking just, equitable, and peaceful ways of life. Conflicts over resources and power are often intertwined with conflicts over values and identity, and religions are often visibly implicated, exacerbating the passions. The rise of brutal violence both in the Middle East and on the streets of Western capitals is but the most recent evidence. At the same time, religious groups are themselves victims of violence and persecution, and – more positively – religious leaders are often key players in negotiating terms of post-conflict reconciliation, transitional justice, and even gang intervention. Thus the relationship between religion and violence is a multifaceted one. All world religions encompass representations and rituals of both peace-making and violence. As Christian Smith (1996a: 1) argues, religion has a “disruptive, defiant [and] unruly face.” It can break with existing social configurations and alter existing equilibriums. We should expect therefore that just as religion can often be a key factor in turning social and political tensions into violent struggle, it can also facilitate negotiation and coexistence in seemingly hopeless situations. Critical assessment of the potential for both good and ill can lay the foundation for fruitful collaborations.

In what follows we look first at religion as a source of conflict and violence, scrutinizing complex evidence and paying particular attention to the sites or conditions in which a negative outcome is likely. We then consider the very real ways in which religions and religious organizations contribute to reconciliation and peace-making both formally and less formally.

5.1 Religion as a source of conflict and violence

Following the Cold War, an intrinsic link between religion and violence was hypothesized as one of the main factors affecting the international world order. Samuel Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations (1996) argued that the “fault lines” between civilizations indicated future lines of conflict. The ideological conflict of the communist period would be replaced, he predicted, by religious and ethnic differences which drew on long standing animosities accumulated during previous centuries. Religion, in this view, was prone to inducing violent conflicts due to both historical tensions and the emergence of new international identities. Mark Juergensmeyer made a prediction similar to Huntington’s, but in a somewhat different direction. He argued that the post-1989 period would see
“A New Cold War” pitting religious nationalism against the secular state. Furthermore, “Even though virtually all religions preach the virtues of non-violence, it is their ability to sanction violence that gives them political power” (1993: 164).

These recent speculations about religion and violence have emerged in the midst of vast global and political change, but have their roots much earlier. Scott Montgomery and Daniel Chirot (2015: 6) claim that that the circulation of ideas after the Enlightenment form a constitutive part of the ways in which societies engage with violence. Specifically, “If earlier upheavals of the social order sought their legitimacy in theology, law, and tradition, from the eighteenth century onward such changes were powered by ideas that were secular and that looked to found society and its institutions on concepts presumably anchored in an evidence-based, reason-led ‘scientific’ understanding of man and the universe.” Michael Barnett (2015: 19) takes a similar view: namely that the Western social science literature has systematically built on the assumption that “religion is a principal source of violence and instability.” The post-Westphalian world system is assumed to be secular at the expense of religion, which has been regarded as the root of state violence (Juergensmeyer 2011). Barnett (2015: 26) goes on to note the Enlightenment belief that liberalism would tame “the religious beast.”

The reality, however, is that secular states and ideologies have carried out as much or more violence than the “religious beast” in recent centuries. Analyses of state conflicts since 1900 demonstrate that political (and secular) ideologies and modern nationalisms have been more widely implicated in violent conflicts than have religions. Monica Duffy Toft (Philpott 2013; 2007) identified 44 out of 135 wars (33%) fought between 1940 and 2000 that involved religion. Still, religious violence stands out because it does not have the same claim to legitimacy that secular violence appears to have. Indeed, the dominant social scientific narratives regarding religion and violence are Eurocentric insofar as they give states the benefit of the doubt while regarding religious groups guilty until proven innocent. The international system which emerged after the 1648 Peace of Westphalia endorsed the state as the main actor. As a result the use of violence has been interpreted differently for religions and secular states as they interact in the international arena.

Other studies confirm that religion can be an important cause of conflict, but hardly uniquely so. Jonathan Fox used the State Failure Dataset to examine 161 countries and their involvement in religious conflicts between 1950 and 1996. He demonstrated that although they “[occurred] less often than other types of conflicts, religious conflicts have increased [during this period], and are more intense
than nonreligious conflicts” (Fox 2004). A similar conclusion was reached by Susanna Pearce (2005) who examined 278 “territorial conflict phases” between 1946 and 2001 documented in the Armed Conflict Dataset available at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. Pearce pointed out that “religious conflicts are more intense than other types of conflicts,” but only, “under specific conditions,” suggesting that education, eschatological perceptions of the world (expecting an imminent cataclysmic end), and identity crises could all affect levels of violence. Taken together, this evidence indicates that religious passions are often mobilized in situations of violent conflict, but careful assessment is necessary in order to discern exactly how religions are involved.

Nor should that assessment begin with assumptions that any one religion has more capacity for violence than others. The employment of violence either symbolically or physically has been present in all world religions and across many historical periods (Cavanaugh 2009; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Girard 1979; Juergensmeyer, Kitts, and Jerryson 2013; Leustean 2014; Ross 2011). In some cases – such as anti-Muslim violence by Hindus in India or Buddhists in Myanmar – religious majorities foment violence against rival religious groups. In many other cases – for example the Lord’s Resistance Army (a quasi-Christian cult in northern Uganda and surrounding states) or Boko Haram (an Islamicist group in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin) – radical offshoots take up arms in ways deemed heretical by more mainstream religious adherents. But in using their own powerful mix of ritual and ideology, they wreak havoc in the name of their god. The range of religious combatants and victims is broad indeed.

A more systematic assessment of this range of religious conflict has led Jonathan Fox (2000: 15) to declare that “there is little evidence here to support the argument that Islam, or any religion for that matter, makes ethnoreligious minorities more conflict prone.” Using T.R. Gurr’s Minorities at Risk Phase 3 Dataset, Fox identifies 105 “ethnoreligious minorities,” namely ethnic communities which embrace different religions. The data indicate that the widespread perception that some religions (especially Islam) always endorse violence is incorrect. From this perspective, although religious values matter in Islamic societies, “there is insufficient evidence to support the stereotype of the Islamic militant” (16).

5.1.1 Sites of potential religious tension

If violence is not an inherent consequence of religion, it becomes important to ask about the particular sites in which destructive violence may arise. Contestation over the built environment and sacred spaces is one of those. It can involve multiple layers of
religious and secular conflict, often with deep historical roots. Long histories of physical segregation can divide communities along lines of faith, class, or ethnicity, increasing the likelihood of mutual distrust. Consider, for example, attacks on Christian churches in Indonesia, most recently in the region of Aceh. Muslim opponents threatened to burn down a church because, they argue, these churches were built without legal permits. The threat of violence (and it is worth noting that the threat is violent, even if the purported cause seems drily legalistic) has been effective in many places in Indonesia causing numerous churches to be shut down. Such strategies have also been used to marginalize Christians in the Middle East.

In the Indonesian case, there are clear connections to recent religious politics, but there is a deeper context to keep in mind, reflecting a colonial history of religious segregation. Dutch authorities, acting as secular powers, designated areas according to religion, and most importantly forbade Christian proselytization in Muslim areas (Birchok 2016). Thus the appearance of Christian churches outside their “permitted” areas fuels a sense of righteous indignation among Muslims that for some justifies threats of violence. Similarly, the desecration and re-appropriation of religious spaces in the Middle East indicates that the symbolism of centuries-old churches and monasteries remains a potent flashpoint.

Likewise, nationalist politics were deeply intertwined in the reconstruction of religious spaces in Herzegovina. Incompatible nationalist views clashed: one promoting the equality of all traditional faiths in the region, and the other asserting a form of Catholic nationalism through aggressive claims on sacred spaces (Sells 2003). In other cases, relatively recent processes of religious or ethnoreligious segregation (often pursued by secular national authorities) disrupt access by some to previously shared resources like water, physical space, healthcare, or political representation (Appadurai 2000; Baird 2009; Parks 2012). In these cases sacred spaces become material representations not only of religious difference, but also of wider social inequities predicated on that difference, and thus develop into flashpoints for violent action.

The regulation of religious diversity is yet another political sector where conflict can become violent. Grim and Finke (Grim and Finke 2011: 222) suggest that, as a general pattern, countries which suppress religious freedom have witnessed an increase in conflict, persecution and organized violence, whereas states which encourage freedom of religious expression are most successful in addressing organized violence. These authors analyzed patterns of religious persecution across the world, using data provided by the International Religious Freedom Reports issued by the US State
Department. Their review shows that religious persecution is on the increase. Contrary to widespread perception that only a minority of countries engage in suppressing religious freedom, they found religious persecution in 86 percent of the cases. Between 2000 and 2007, 123 out of 143 countries had at least one documented case of a person “physically abused or displaced from their homes because of a lack of religious freedom” (Grim and Finke 2011: 18).

All of this suggests that high levels of violence in a society are likely to involve an interaction of political and religious forces. Fox (2000) argues that it is not militant “Islam,” but autocratic governments (which are disproportionately present in Islamic countries) that complicate the picture of Islam’s relation to violent conflict. Saba Mahmood points to similar political and religious processes in post-colonial Egypt: here “secular governance has contributed to the exacerbation of religious tensions […] hardening interfaith boundaries and polarizing religious differences” (2016: 1).

Situations of autocratic governance and religious repression are seedbeds for religious tension, but so are secular states that fail to provide practical and cultural foundations for viable everyday life. Scholars have long argued that religious organizations are likely players in filling the gap left by states that do not provide for their citizens. In many cases that provision is beneficent, but it can also be brutally violent, as the examples of Daesh and Boko Haram make clear. When secular projects fail, some of the alternatives that appear will inevitably be religious (G. Wood 2015). With a monopoly on the use of force and no competition for means of governing, a violent religious movement can establish itself in territory otherwise neglected.

5.1.2 Summing up the evidence

Broad and essentialized statements about “religion and violence” or about any particular religion’s culpability are less than helpful. As we have seen, there are ample symbolic resources within all religions to justify violence, and there is ample historic and contemporary evidence that violence can have a religious dimension. The question is not “does religion cause violence,” but under what circumstances and in what ways? Religion is not an outside force that impinges upon secular social dynamics. Rather it is integrally and historically implicated in existing social configurations and their changes over time. As David Martin (2014) argues, the general perception within the academic and policy-making world is that politics is rational while religion draws on the irrational and, thus, is “prone to violence.” This is not helpful; nor is the tendency to place all forms of religious violence under the same umbrella.
A careful assessment of the particular religious ideas, symbols, rituals, and collectivities in play will help to identify particular points of danger. As we have seen, contestation over physical spaces is one such point, as is the repressive management of diverse religious populations. An excess of regulation can easily spill over into the kind of social and cultural conflict that erupts into violence either by or against religious minorities. At the same time state-centered efforts at protecting religious rights can, ironically, make religious differences a matter of law (Shakman Hurd 2015). Finally, situations of weak or failed secular states leave the door open for violent, religious, and authoritarian efforts to establish order. Thus assessing both vulnerable sites and the particular religious ideas and leaders arising from them is a critical preventive practice with respect to social progress.

5.2 Religion as a resource for peace and reconciliation

Religion has not only an important role in processes of conflict and violence, but also plays a role in peace and reconciliation. Marc Gopin (1997) suggests that religion can often bring together conflictual parties by drawing on widely-shared religious values that provide the starting point towards peace negotiation. Religion is a prime marker not only in group identity but also in legitimating the pursuit of peace (Appleby 2000). Concepts of “justice,” “righteousness” and “tolerance” are shared by many religions either at institutional or individual levels (Llewellyn and Philpott 2014; Torrance 2006).

A wide range of religious and secular organizations are involved in organized peace and reconciliation programs (Little 2007), with deep expertise residing in the World Council of Churches; the Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding Program at the United States Institute of Peace; the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at the US State Department; the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in Washington, DC; and the Iraq Inter-Religious Congress, a faith-based initiative for national reconciliation. The engagement of religious actors ranges from participating in group discussion to a more visible public presence in conflict zones. During the 1989 violent demonstrations against the communist regime in Romania, religious symbols displayed in both private and public spaces supported the demonstrators; and during the Euromaidan demonstrations in Kiev, clergymen placed themselves between the police and protesters. Christian Smith (1996b) has shown how, in the 1980s, faith-based communities built transnational networks to work for peace in Central America.

Religious contributions to peace-building are often quite local and concrete. And just as sacred spaces can be sites of conflict, they can also become powerful sites for peaceful interaction. Shrines and
pilgrimage sites can be shared by multiple faith communities (Albera and Couroucli 2012; Emmett 1997), even if that peaceful sharing may not always reflect perfectly harmonious relationships. Negotiating cultural differences about the appropriate use of sacred space requires considerable effort, but it can produce what DeBernardi (2009) calls syncretic amity, including the co-celebration of religious events. The visibility of sacred spaces in multi-religious environments over the long term can do much to counter social division and fears by making religion and its practices visible and understandable to those outside the spiritual community itself. Similarly, sacred spaces can become sites of interfaith solidarity in response to terrorism. In 2011, for example, Muslims made a human chain around a Coptic Christian church to protect worshippers during Christmas Mass, and Egyptian Christians took similar action to protect Muslims at prayer. Flourishing societies in the future must take lessons from these public and visible opportunities to honor sacred spaces and communities across lines of difference.

In post-conflict situations, religious actors have also played a role in transitional justice efforts. As civil society and political actors come together to deal with past violations of human rights, religious organizations have played significant roles in Chile (the Christian Churches’ Foundation for Social Assistance) (Ferrara 2015: 171) and in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Sitze 2013). Likewise a wide range of local religious actors played a role in Northern Ireland (Wells 2010) and a third party religious community, Sant’ Egidio, brokered the 1992 peace accord in Mozambique (Anouilh 2005).

The role of religion in reconciliation can be seen in much more micro contexts as well. In Latin America, where an unabated crime wave has resulted in levels of violence as high as countries in civil war, religion has become one of the principle means by which people confront the associated challenges. Much of Latin America’s violence now takes the form of street crime, with young men involved in small-scale drug dealing and gang activity. Escaping the complex of substance abuse, crime, and violence is one of the most important factors generating the growth of evangelical Protestantism throughout the region. Evangelicalism provides young men with a cultural logic of transformation that allows them to side-step the alternative logic of vendetta and to navigate contexts of extreme violence (Burdick 1993; Smilde 2007a). More recent research has demonstrated the direct involvement of Evangelical groups in gang-exit in Central America. In Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, gangs are almost impossible to exit alive. Those who try are hunted down and killed by gang members. But a convincing religious conversion is one of the few mechanisms that allow young men to
leave gangs. Some Evangelical ministries also provide tangible services such as tattoo removal and relocation for former gang members in order to facilitate exit (Brenneman 2012).

The effectiveness of Evangelical groups in gang prevention has, of course, been noticed by states and other actors charged with ensuring citizen security – and has therefore spurred multiple forms of “faith-based” initiatives. These have been criticized by some scholars who suggest that Pentecostal rehabilitation practices “ultimately silence structural forces while laying blame on individual action,” thereby justifying neoliberal reforms (O’Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela 2015: 75; see also Pine 2009). These tensions between micro-level transformations and the need for macro-level reform are echoed in the range of religious organizations and practices themselves. In Central America Catholic organizations focus more on gang prevention than exit, and see conversion and transformation as relatively superficial compared to structural changes, such as access to education and jobs that need to take place (Brenneman 2012). Nor is religious practice always benign. “Our Lady of the Holy Death” or La Santa Muerte in Mexico is venerated to give strength and faith to those who need it to carry out crimes and violence, just as much as by those who seek to confront the chaos (Roush 2014). The same has been shown of Evangelicalism in contexts such as Jamaica and Brazil. In all of these cases, religious practices can provide strength to confront danger, whichever side of it you are on (Arias 2014).

Religious practices, ideas, and organizations can, then, be valuable resources in seeking more peaceful societies, but careful and critical assessment remains key. While religious values can be brought into strategies of conflict resolution, understanding either peace-making or the conflicts themselves through the lens of religion is a culture-driven process that demands extensive local knowledge. Each group will see gestures of goodwill through its own system of symbols, which may be at odds with each other (Gopin 2003). Nor can religious symbols and practices overcome the absence of adequate economic structures and a trustworthy state. A generalized reliance on external peace-building formulas, whether or not they involve religious actors, will falter in local contexts such as Congo, Kosovo, Sudan, and Rwanda (Autesserre 2014). Just as “religion” is not a generalized cause of violence, neither is it a universal panacea.

5.3 Summary and recommendations

In a speech at Rice University in April 2016, John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, summarized the contemporary tension between religion, conflict, and peace:
Religion today remains deeply consequential, affecting the values, the actions, the choices, the worldview of people in every walk of life on every continent [...] It is a part of what drives some to initiate war, others to pursue peace; some to organize for change, others to cling desperately to old ways, resist modernity; some to reach eagerly across the borders of nation and creed, and others to build higher and higher walls separating one group from the next (Kerry 2016).

His words resonate with the research reported in this chapter. Religion is an aspect of human society that is not going to disappear anytime soon. It is neither inherently violent nor peaceful, but includes practices, beliefs, values, and institutions that can lead in either direction. Assessment of the particular context and the particular religions in play is the first step toward social progress.

Our evidenced-based review of the relationship between religion and violence reveals the necessary complexity of any attempt to move past religious violence and engage religious strengths toward building a more peaceful world.

- We can no longer assume that states will refrain from the violent projection of a particular religion outside their borders. New forms of religiously-based violence challenge the monopoly of nation-states as global actors.
- Particular danger points for religious violence include contested sacred spaces, authoritarian regulation and persecution of religious minorities, and situations where states are especially weak.
- Religious practices, beliefs, and leaders can exacerbate tensions, but they are almost always intertwined with economic and political grievances. Understanding the complexity of local conflicts is essential.
- Processes of peace-building can profitably draw on the grassroots presence and legitimacy of religious organizations, as well as on the symbols and values present in religious understandings of the world.
- Collaborations between secular and religious actors are essential for addressing the full range of sources of any conflict, and that in turn rests on opportunities to build mutual knowledge and trust.
6. Everyday wellbeing: Economy, education, health and development

Structures of just and effective governance, along with the absence of violent conflict, are essential to social progress. Among the intended fruits of such structural change is the everyday wellbeing of populations – food and shelter, health and education, and the capacity to produce and share in economic goods for the sake of living in ways that are individually and communally valued (Sen 1999 [1987]). These broader questions are explored in depth in other chapters in this volume, but here we turn our attention to the multifaceted question of religion’s role in this sphere. The wellbeing of persons and communities lies at the heart of much religious practice and aspiration, even as the range of belief and practice makes adjudication of differences and partnership with secular actors challenging. But given their widespread institutional presence in healthcare, education, and welfare provision, religious groups are well-placed to be critical partners in the pursuit of social progress.

This is an area of rapidly emerging research that comes late to fields that long assumed either that religion would disappear or that religious beliefs and practices represented the vestiges of underdevelopment to be overcome. Just as modernization and development were mutually implicated, secularization was a process to be expected and fostered (Rakodi 2015). As those assumptions have proven unfounded, recent research has increasingly included attention to religion.

Some researchers have attempted to develop standardized indicators of religion that can be added to the statistical models that dominate discussion of economic capacity and well-being. Barro and McCleary (2003), for instance, find that higher levels of belief in hell and lower levels of church attendance correlate with a country’s economic growth rate. Their macro level explanation suggests that attendance indicates too many human resources being absorbed by the religion sector. The absence of a meaningful explanation for the effect of believing in hell (especially when that is not a prevalent belief in much of the world) points to the limits of such standardized quantifying of religion’s role. A more local and institutional approach holds greater promise.

Much of our current knowledge comes, in fact, from relatively small case studies, findings that are now being collated in a clutch of excellent edited collections.[18] While such localized findings pose
challenges for generalization, they nevertheless reflect the reality of the range of particularities relevant to the relationship between religion and material wellbeing.

6.1 Religion and economic progress in less developed countries

A society seemingly dominated by supernatural powers can seem like an insurmountable obstacle to secular social change agents who wish to introduce new economic possibilities, but it is important to remember that religions contain cultural resources that may shape the everyday wellbeing of populations. From creation myths to harvest prayers and fertility rituals, human spirituality has long linked human flourishing to the supernatural. At its most basic, wellbeing is often understood in terms of this-worldly blessing stemming from divine favor. A century ago, Max Weber introduced a more complex possibility, arguing that specific religious beliefs lead to ways of life with unintended, but nevertheless dramatic, economic consequences, namely the establishment of capitalist economies (Weber 1905[1958]). He expected, however, that as science and technology took hold, the sense of divine imperative would disappear. In many societies around the world, however, technological pragmatism exists in more or less comfortable tandem with holistic spiritual concerns. Economic development seems not—or not necessarily—to require secular modernization.

Outside of advanced industrialized contexts, religious practice is especially likely to be oriented towards this-worldly concerns of social life. Among the most rapidly growing religious groups, for example, are those that espouse a “prosperity gospel” that links spiritual and material blessings (Miller, Sargeant, and Flory 2013). Part of the larger family of groups dubbed Pentecostal, their emphasis on spiritual gifts and otherworldly rewards would seem to predict the opposite of economic or social activism. Rather than channeling followers toward this-worldly progress, they seem merely to assuage the pains of the neoliberal market with otherworldly promises. Like Barro and McCleary (2003), Woodberry (2006) suggests that the emphasis on attending multiple religious services and giving significant sums to the work of the church are opportunity costs that may weigh against more productive forms of time and money investment and diminish wealth accumulation.

Other observers have pointed to a more Weberian interpretation, looking for the indirect effects of participation. They claim that the “born again” experience introduces a sense of rupture with the past that often allows a range of new behaviors and relationships to emerge (Droogers 2001). Individuals who choose a new religious loyalty are exercising the kind of agency and independence from traditional communities required in modern economies. Economic
success may also be facilitated by the lifestyle practices often encouraged in Pentecostal communities – abstaining from alcohol, devotion to a monogamous family, hard work, financial planning so as to be able to contribute to the religious community, and the like (Brusco 1986; D. Martin 1990). Similar patterns of individual ethical transformation can also be seen in Islamic spiritual reform programs in Indonesia (Rudnyckyj 2015). These reported effects have drawn widespread skepticism and have only recently been put to systematic tests – with mixed results (Freeman 2012; Woodberry 2006).

Whatever the indirect connections to economic change, religious communities and religious practices are very often directly involved in providing material assistance to their participants. Such practices are often misunderstood by social scientists as an “instrumentalization” of religion, since such scientists often expect religion to be about otherworldly salvation in the afterlife. But in contexts in which people cannot count on their basic necessities being satisfied, “salvation” often refers to being saved from struggles in this world. Rubin, Smilde, and Junge (2014), for example, describe the many roles of religion in Latin America’s “zones of crisis,” which they define as, “spaces of material deprivation, exclusion, violence, and environmental destruction.” The empirical studies they brought together examine religious beliefs, practices, leaders, and institutions that have become part of the strategies that people construct to confront zones of crisis. From strategies for dealing with violence, oppression, and sickness, to strategies for forming social movements or reforming patriarchal gender relations, religion is implicated in the tactics individuals and collectivities put together to confront the difficulties of their everyday lives.

Still, we need to avoid reifying the “global South” as something essentially different from the industrialized North. Global markets and global communication link both material challenges and religious strategies across all regions of the world. Energetic new religious expressions developed in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are now part of the religious landscapes of Europe and North America, carried by migrants, missionaries, and media (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; D. Martin 2002; Olupona and Gemignani 2007). Advanced industrialized countries have their own extensive zones of crisis, not only in global cities like New York and London, but in forgotten rural areas such as Appalachia and the Canadian Maritime Provinces. Ethnographic research in the United States, moreover, shows many of the same strategies linking spiritual life with material wellbeing and health, not only among immigrant communities (Warner and Wittner 1998) but among well-educated and privileged populations (Ammerman 2013; McGuire 1988).
These religious phenomena, then, direct attention towards both Weberian-style disciplined religious behavior, and the strategies of comfort and coping that Marx would have predicted, along with concrete and direct material support. In his study of two Pentecostal groups in Tanzania, Hasu (2012) describes two very different, but equally relevant relations between economic and religious life. At Glory of Christ Tanzania Church, the poorest of the rural migrants to the city bear testimony to the Spirit’s ability to resurrect them from the bewitching spells cast by powerful older kin in the communities they left behind. They find in this church both meaningful explanations and means of coping in a bruising economic world. At Efatha Church, also in Dar es Salaam, a "prosperity" version of Pentecostalism appeals to and helps to create more middle class followers. They hear about positive thinking, African pride, empowerment, education, hard work and planning; and they see the vast business and institutional enterprises supported by church leaders as evidence and inspiration. Even within similar religious belief systems, the spiritual world is intertwined in economic lives in different ways, patterns that must be understood if the wellbeing of those communities is to be addressed.

The same careful analysis must accompany attempts to understand the role of religion in restricting women’s educational and economic activities. As we have argued in Section 2 of this chapter, conservative beliefs in virtually all religious traditions can be mobilized to keep women in subservient positions, and spectacular tragedies such as the shooting of Malala Yousafzai reinforce the reality of the threats to women in many parts of the world. Economic and social progress is unlikely when women are kept from education, healthcare, and productive contributions to their communities. Thus, movements to advance the rights of women have often existed in adversarial relationships with conservative religious movements and leaders (e.g., Bradley and Kirmani 2015).

What rights movements often hear and reject in this respect is the patriarchal rhetoric of conservative religions, but there is a pragmatic reality beyond the rhetoric. For example, Gooren’s research in Guatemala demonstrates that Evangelical churches often provide women with opportunities for leadership, new networks of support for entrepreneurship, and more economically-productive and attentive husbands (Gooren 2011). It is, then, both the specific religious beliefs in question and the particular religious networks in which they are embedded that need to be taken into account when assessing the role of religion in women’s wellbeing. Standing in the way of that careful assessment are myriad assumptions and misunderstandings. The largely-secular development community is often seen as irrelevant by the very women it presumes to represent. As Chowdhury (2009) demonstrates in Bangladesh, the NGOs, the
Building bridges across that cultural and religious divide is a necessary task if outside support is to be effective in enabling women to participate in building the economic strength of their communities. Across the economic and social landscape, theological arguments and religious officials may be important, but it is often religion-in-practice that provides significant points of convergence with human rights and economic assistance agendas (ter Haar 2011a). Local religious leaders can, in fact, be development allies -- even interpreting and translating new technologies -- if they are included in the conversation. Bompani and Smith (2013) document the role of local Catholic leaders in the adoption of new agricultural technologies in Kenya, for instance.

Access to finance is a further economic indicator that requires careful assessment and an eye toward pragmatic compromise. Finance is critical to participation in the global economy, and religious beliefs are sometimes at the root of self-exclusion from this form of participation. Mohseni-Cheraghlou (2015) shows, for example, that Muslim-dominant countries in the Middle East and North Africa have the highest rates (10%) of citing religious reasons for avoiding formal banking institutions. What his research also shows, however, is that higher concentrations of Sharia-compliant financial services increase overall participation in banking. A religious obstacle may also have a religious solution.

6.2 Religion and NGOs: Pathways to partnerships

Critical reflection on the relationship between less-developed and economically-dominant parts of the world inevitably raises the ongoing realities of colonialism. It has often been noted that the colonial sword was accompanied by the cross, with today's postcolonial world still bearing the religious imprint of that earlier era. As programs of "development" and "aid" emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, that missionary impulse was explicitly rejected. Religion was relegated to the realm of private individual preferences, irrelevant to economic and political agendas (Tomalin 2013). As a result, Marshall claims, in spite of "much overlap and many synergies, the two worlds (development and faith) have largely operated in separate universes" (Marshall 2012: 193). The result is a de facto secularizing agenda that accompanies the work of most of the world’s agencies of economic development, an agenda that is often experienced as alien to the lives of the people whose wellbeing is at stake. Without genuine embeddedness in local cultures,
including the religious ways of those cultures, efforts at changes in economic, health, and educational patterns have often proved short-lived (Jones 2012; Watkins and Swidler 2013).

Still, the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in health and development is difficult to ignore. Organizations from every faith tradition have entered relief and development work and are among the largest donor entities (G. Clarke 2008; Deacon and Tomalin 2015). Such work is hardly new, as religious traditions have long enshrined practices such as zakat (one of Islam's five “pillars”) that institutionalize support by religious practitioners for the material wellbeing of their communities. In some cases that humanitarian support is limited to fellow believers, but Gooren (2011) found otherwise: among development groups in Guatemala aid freely crossed sectarian (and non-religious) lines.

Inevitably, this humanitarian impulse has come with political strings attached. State aid agencies are frequently assumed to be acting with foreign policy goals in sight. FBOs, as well, often mix humanitarian assistance and political change, both repressive and progressive. Janine Clark (2008) has examined the role of the Islamic Center Charity Society, the semi-autonomous charitable arm of the Muslim Brotherhood and one of the largest NGOs in Jordan. Its work includes establishing schools, colleges, clinics, and training centers (that serve a mostly-middle class clientele), along with providing direct aid to people in poverty. Its modes of development work, including its limited ability to engage issues of women’s rights, have been shaped both by its conservative religious milieu and by the authoritarian state context in which it works. Assessing or working alongside such faith-based development organizations requires careful questions about the populations to which they have access and the practical assistance and training they can provide, along with a clear-sighted assessment of the political and religious constraints that may limit the work.

6.3 Religion and education

All of this suggests that the effects of religion on economic wellbeing must take into account both the spiritual beliefs and practices of the groups in question and the religious institutional infrastructure (i.e. both the safety net and the direct involvement of religious groups in educational and economic life). Religious institutions across the world have been significant providers of education at all levels, with demonstrable positive effects on democratization (Woodberry 2012). In Indonesia, for example, Islamic schools, including pesantren (traditionalist boarding schools) and madrasas (modernist day schools) have long integrated religious education and general education successfully. In the early twentieth century, some
pesantren supplemented religious education with training in areas such as mathematics, history, and language. Since the 1970s, state initiatives to modernize and standardize the general curriculum at madrasas and pesantren have produced a thriving, mostly privately financed infrastructure of religious schools which feeds students to higher education as well as training them for a variety of vocations (Azyumardi, Afrianty, and Hefner 2007; Lukens-Bull 2001). Pohl (2006) argues that a strong focus on community service motivates the development of skills for moral and social engagement. She found that the Pesantren Al-Muayyad Windan in Solo on Java engages its pupils in conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, and the empowerment of women.

Thirteen percent of all Indonesian students were enrolled in these institutions in 2007. They are more affordable for rural and poor students than national schools. During the Asian financial crisis between 1997 and 2001, enrollment by poor students in national schools dropped significantly, while both pesantren and madrasas saw their numbers rise (Azyumardi et al. 2007). Similarly, examination of rigorous case comparisons in Latin America, Africa, and Asia demonstrate both higher accessibility and equal or higher test performance for students in faith-based schools (Barrera-Osorio, Patrinos, and Wodon 2009). It is worth noting finally that in many parts of the world, attendance at these institutions crosses class divides, as well-heeled parents choose elite religious schools which provide high quality preparation for university. Religious institutions thus form a vital subsystem of wider national educational systems and can be critical components in a strategy to increase educational capacity.

6.4 Religion and health

Religious capacity is also present in the realm of health promotion and care, but it is often surrounded by controversy, ranging from family planning to immunization to female genital mutilation and end of life issues. Public health providers are frequently horrified by the harm they see, harm that must be addressed. Confronting the seeming impasse between secular health professionals and faith-based providers, a series of essays in The Lancet (July 2015) has offered an evidence-based way forward. Their authors suggest greater engagement by all parties in order to foster better mutual understanding and to identify common goals and values. Tomkins and her co-authors (2015: 1782) argue that clarifying interpretations and teachings can restrict conflicts to areas of real disagreement, allowing cooperation elsewhere. Not all partnerships will be advisable, but if advancing health goals is critical to poverty reduction, the full range of available health care providers is needed to meet the challenge. But as Duff and Buckingham point out,
“Though public sector and faith-linked entities bring distinctive assets that help achieve health goals, ideological challenges present barriers to collaboration and need careful negotiation on both sides” (2015: 1787). That said, they conclude that the work required for such partnerships pays off in measurable advances in population health.

An accurate assessment of overall religious capacity and impact is difficult, however, since religious organizations are generally not distinguished as a separate category in NGO reporting. The “Religious Health Assets” project represents a pioneering effort to integrate religion into the study of “health systems,” that is, all the organizations and resources that are seeking to improve the health of a population (Olivier 2015). Olivier and her colleagues concluded that the extent of health care provision provided by faith-based groups in Africa is often overstated, with estimates ranging from 5 to 45 percent. However, they did find some evidence that faith-based health care providers take care of a slightly higher percentage of the poor compared to public and private providers (Olivier et al. 2015: 1770-1771). Religious providers seem to excel in mobilizing and supporting volunteers, in prioritizing poor, marginalized, and hard to reach populations, as well as developing innovative progressive fee structures that require the poor to pay little.

Responses to HIV offer a case study of the complexity of the relationship between religion and health. In the early days of the epidemic, religious leaders in Africa painted HIV/AIDS as God’s anger and not a matter for either compassion or education. However, as serious campaigns began on the continent, churches joined others, particularly the state, to lend support to AIDS victims. Many churches established programs of home support and took on the care of orphans. They also developed both local health care delivery systems and informal modes of mutual education aimed at prevention (Trinitapoli and Weinreb 2012).

Similar patterns have been evident in Latin America. Seffner and associates (2011) looked closely at a health service engagement between the Brazilian Catholic Church and the Brazilian national STD/AIDS program. At first glance, collaboration does not look promising. The National STD/AIDS Program established condom use as its principle measure of prevention, while the official stance of Brazil’s Catholic Church is to oppose condom use which it sees as promoting sexual promiscuity. However, the Catholic Church is hardly monolithic – indeed one Brazilian Catholic theologian has written a "theology of prevention" which has been widely used to support care for people with HIV or AIDS. In that context, the Casa Fonte Colombo is a health service organization for people with HIV/AIDS run by Capuchin Friars (an order inspired by the teachings
of St. Francis of Assisi). They provide medical and psychological attention, spiritual guidance, massage therapy, donated clothing, bathrooms, and spaces for rest. Their services aid predominantly poor, HIV positive patients, and are an important source of education on how to live with the disease. Strikingly, they collaborate with other NGOs as well as the Brazilian National STD/AIDS Program of the Ministry of Health. Seffner and associates describe how, upon entering the Casa Fonte Colombo the visitor inevitably comes across a large bowl of condoms of all colors and models. Artfully decorative and conspicuously placed, it exhibits the common sense implications of the “theology of prevention.” This represents a sort of modus vivendi in which a local Catholic institution is able to work with secular governmental institutions; it is a grass-roots working arrangement that has been developed without explicit public statements.

As in many other instances, religion as lived in everyday practice may not follow the lines apparent in official pronouncements. It is also important to remember that health goes far beyond what happens in medical institutions. Throughout the world, definitions of health and of health promotion are often not only physical but spiritual. This parallels an increasing recognition that “alternative” forms of healing can and do exist alongside highly-developed forms of scientific medicine and in many different parts of the world. Both states and insurers have recognized the advantages of broad-based pragmatic partnerships.

6.5 Religion, welfare, and healthcare in Europe and the United States

Economic, physical, and social wellbeing are not simply matters of concern in the “Global South.” Across the developed world, markets do not always treat vulnerable people well. It is true that states have attempted to fill the gaps, even the playing field, and regulate the markets, but neither states nor markets have yet succeeded in providing an equitable and responsive set of provisions that allow all their citizens to flourish – and among the providers filling the gaps are religiously affiliated voluntary organizations.

This is as true in Europe as it is in the USA, but the division of labor is different. In (then) West Europe, the post-war settlement led to the development of the welfare state – or more accurately welfare states – a shift in which the state assumed the primary role for the care of its citizens: that is for their education, for their social protection and welfare, and for healthcare.
The welfare states of Europe differ in type – a situation outlined in Esping-Andersen’s *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). Less often appreciated are the obvious parallels between these “types” and the state churches which pre-existed the welfare state by several centuries (Bäckström and Davie 2010; Bäckström, Davie, Edgardh, and Pettersson 2011). It is no coincidence, for example, that the Lutheran societies of Northern Europe embraced with enthusiasm the welfare state in its social democratic forms. The Catholic countries further south turned in a rather different direction.

Post-war aspirations were high and lasted until the 1970s, when the effects of the oil crisis began to bite. Financial constraints and shifting demographics (notably a rise in the number of older people) led to retrenchment, though at varying speeds and more so in some parts of Europe than others. No longer was it possible to assume that the state would care for its citizens from the cradle to the grave; nor – it was argued by at least some protagonists – should it.

Multiple voluntary agencies emerged to fill the gaps, among them a series of religious providers, modestly in those parts of Europe where the welfare state was relatively well funded, and more comprehensively further south (in the Mediterranean countries) where it was rudimentary right from the start. Bäckström and associates (Bäckström and Davie 2010; Bäckström, Davie, Edgardh, and Pettersson 2011) map these changes and the questions that emerge in consequence. The latter include the appropriateness, or otherwise, of religious providers in this field, and their advantages and disadvantages in specified services (see also Beaumont and Cloke 2012).

Bäckström and colleagues examined the reactions of European populations to this changing situation. The response was clearly articulated. Europeans would prefer a comprehensive and publically funded welfare state. They know, however, that this is not realizable in the present economic climate. It is better therefore that the churches and related organizations fill the gaps than to have nothing at all. A final question cannot be avoided. It concerns entitlement: who is or is not entitled to the welfare benefits of any given society? And who – it follows – will care for those excluded from the “system”? The question has become more acute as Europe experiences high levels of immigration.

In the USA, the situation is different. Here there is no welfare state in its European form and no state church (the two “absences” are related). The resulting system of voluntary religious organizing means that each religious group is responsible both for its own maintenance and for whatever beneficent activities it may choose to undertake (Ammerman 2005, ch. 7). Although most religious work...
goes into building and sustaining the communities and traditions themselves, a remarkable consensus exists that religious congregations should voluntarily contribute to the common good.

In the evangelical Protestant culture of the USA, providing assistance to a (deserving) needy person is a personal virtue, and the state has no special place in the enactment of this sacred duty (Chaves 1999; Ebaugh, Chafetz, and Pipes 2006; Quadagno and Rohlinger 2009). The result is a weak welfare state and a strong charitable sector. The figures are impressive. In 2006 it was estimated that $50 billion was spent annually by faith-based organizations, mostly on the most essential stop-gap services of food and shelter, with government expenditures on similar services amounting to only $138 billion (Stritt 2008). In other sectors of the welfare state – housing, education, health – the state is a much more dominant player.

In recent years, changes in the US welfare system have included a lowering of the “wall of separation” between church and state through “charitable choice” exceptions, allowing faith-based organizations more easily to receive state funds. In practice, little changed (Chaves 1999). For well over a century, legal mechanisms have existed to allow government funding to support the “pervasively secular” work of providing food, shelter, job training, and more, even when the organization in question is itself religious. Social welfare in the USA has long been delivered through a complicated mix of explicitly religious resources (money, volunteers, space), secular voluntary contributions, and state-funded programmatic effort (Bane, Coffin, and Thiemann 2000). The largest U.S. religious nonprofit, Catholic Charities, spent $2.58 billion in 2006, and received $1.7 billion from government sources (Stritt 2008).

6.6 Summary and recommendations

Religious belief and practice is, for much of the world’s population, linked to the pragmatic concerns of everyday life. Economic wellbeing, health, and education are visions of social progress that are shared by religious groups, even as there are many places where religious ideas and practices are at odds with secular norms. States, NGOs, and faith communities all have a role to play. Establishing effective partnerships will require a holistic approach to all the social capacities that are present.

- In practical terms strategic disagreements are best approached at the local level, to encourage both mutual understanding and pragmatic solutions.
- Faith-linked organizations are pervasive throughout the world and form a critical element in the social safety net. This is true both where the state has a great deal of capacity and where it
does not; but in any given place, faith-linked organizations are especially valuable in serving the most vulnerable populations.

- The health, education, and economic wellbeing of societies depend on all the sectors of society being positively engaged. Faith-linked organizations are neither the sole solution nor irrelevant to progress.

### 7. Care for the earth

Most spiritual belief systems address the relationship between humans and the world around them, including non-humans of all kinds (both living and inanimate). Religious beliefs and practices are therefore expressed both within and through the physical spaces in which they are embedded – whether these be local places of worship or the earth itself. For this reason, the spiritual significance of human (material) action – whether routine or globally consequential – is of significance for religious thinkers and religious communities of all kinds.

The growing seriousness of environmental concerns, including issues of pollution and public health, decreasing biodiversity, and diminishing sources of clean water, have inspired religious commentary since the late 1960s and early 1970s. More recently, climate change has spurred religious leaders to explore how spiritual traditions and faith communities can provide a foundation for meaningful action. A common theme emerges in this thinking: concern for the environment involves fundamental principles that implicate not merely human relationships with non-humans, but human relationships with each other. At the same time, concrete activities (such as recycling, replanting forests, or adding solar panels to places of worship) become necessary spiritual acts. Thus, a spiritually sound environmental ethic is understood as essential to human flourishing.

Prominent figures in the major world faiths are well placed to articulate environmental ethics for global audiences. At the same time, indigenous peoples speak with authority granted by long-standing connections to particular locations. What these diverse actors share is a conviction that secular laws, science, and markets are insufficient to change the ways of life that have produced the problems in the first place. Instead, they advocate a personal and collective reconsideration of human obligations to the earth itself.
7.1 The intrinsic spiritual significance of the environment

A significant form of religious engagement with the environment – sometimes called eco-theology – involves a re-evaluation of both sacred literature and oral traditions that speak to the spiritual significance of the natural world. Such work presumes that religious beliefs and practices can exacerbate or restrain harmful environmental behaviors.

In 1967, Lynn White Jr. proffered the hypothesis that: "[B]y destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (White 1967: 1205). By the nineteenth century, he argued, the idea of using scientific investigation to assert technological power over nature had become widespread, a way of thinking which was philosophically justified by the biblical statement that God gave humans dominion over the natural world (White 1967: 1206). White’s article has generated significant discussion among Christian and non-Christian thinkers as well as secular critics. By suggesting a direct relationship between Christian belief and harmful environmental practices, White argued that Christianity itself was implicated in contemporary environmental crises.

The link between Christian beliefs and anti-environmentalism has been most visible in the skepticism of American evangelicals to climate science. Many such critics are motivated by “end-times theology” – arguing that no action need be taken because what the world is witnessing is simply the “end times” as prophesied in the Bible. Unsurprisingly, disinclination to take action follows (Barker and Bearce 2013). Other groups link climate science with scientific work that they find either unacceptable, such as evolution, or unethical, such as stem cell research. That said, despite the stridency of some political voices, grassroots evangelical sentiment differs only slightly from other white middle class religious groups, and younger generations are increasingly likely to voice pro-environmental views (Funk and Alper 2016; B. G. Smith and Johnson 2010).

White’s hypothesis about Christianity has inspired a great deal of subsequent work on the “intrinsic” environmental philosophies of a variety of faith traditions. In recent years prominent thinkers in Christianity and Islam have given considerable attention to the interpretation of “dominion over nature” in order to explore more deeply the human relationship with the environment. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been one of the earliest and most prominent voices inviting a reassessment of human obligations to the natural world. He argues:
Human beings and the environment form a seamless garment of existence, a complex fabric that we believe is fashioned by God. It follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin....How we treat the earth and all of creation defines the relationship that each of us has with God” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew 1998: 4).

Similarly, in the papal encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis strongly critiques interpretations that equate dominion with unrestrained exploitation. Drawing from scripture and from the writings of prominent church figures (notably St Francis of Assisi), Pope Francis stresses that the gift of creation requires a strong sense of responsibility toward both humans and non-humans. “Dominion over nature” should not be understood as free rein to indulge in exploitation with no attention to costs. Rather it implies a responsibility to protect creation as something inherently good and as a gift for all humans, including future generations (Pope Francis 2015: 160-161).

Within Islam, the special obligations of humans towards wider creation are ethically analogous to the special obligations of the wealthy or accomplished towards the rest of human society. Just as those whose God-given abilities allow them to prosper are obliged to do more to support the poor in society, so are humans, by virtue of their inherent gifts, obligated to act with respect and care towards non-humans. The earth is for all of creation, not just for humans, and thus humans are particularly obligated to respect Allah’s divine wishes for a harmonious world (Haq 2001; *Islamic declaration on global climate change* 2015). In Islam, such care is a necessary part of human worship (Amery 2001; Haq 2001). Thus exploitation (i.e. dominion without reciprocal responsibility) is rejected as behavior that ignores human obligations to God. All that said, biocentric views in which humans have no special status, are firmly rejected (Pope Francis 2015: 88; Haq 2001: 154).

In opposing the idea of dominion as exploitation, scholars in these traditions have sought alternative metaphors to capture the idea of responsibility. In Christian thinking, the most common is the idea of stewardship. Based on a biblical parable about the good steward, it suggests humans are obligated to return the earth to God without damage (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew 1998; Moody and Achenbaum 2014). Yet the notion of stewardship also requires interpretive work. Some have pointed out that the parable favors the steward who produces the most wealth, which appears to encourage both materialistic behavior and exploitation (Gorospe 2013; Wright 2010). Others argue that the practical use of the idea of stewardship in Christian churches in relation to fundraising exacerbates an interpretation that focuses too heavily on monetary reward as a
measure of stewardly virtue (Santmire 2010). Rather than rely simply on a different metaphor, critics of simplistic interpretations of stewardship push for a deeper exploration of virtuous relationships, grounded in scripture and commentary (Gorospe 2013; Wright 2010).

In considering the consequences of climate change, Islamic, Christian and Judaic traditions have pointed out that the consequences of environmental harm are borne to a large degree by the poorest and most vulnerable members of society (Pope Francis 2015: 116-120; Haq 2001: 152-153). Drawing on wider work on the issue of environmental justice, they argue that environmental problems are symptoms of profound human failings to take proper care of one another. Islamic thinkers, for example, stress the inseparability of (a) worshiping God and respecting the divine mandate for the world, (b) caring sustainably for the environment, and (c) living in just relationships with each other (Haq 2001; *Islamic declaration on global climate change* 2015). In concrete terms, these perspectives can include equitable access to food, water, shelter, and dignified employment. The idea that suffering by many is justified by the desires of the few is firmly rejected (Pope Francis 2015: 118).

Of particular significance is the notion of inter-generational equity, which emphasizes the obligation of current generations to protect the environment and pass it undamaged to future generations. Such a tendency can even be seen among American evangelicals as selected groups evoke future generations as the basis for re-evaluating attitudes towards the environment.[19] More straightforwardly, Pope Francis asks Catholics to embrace an integral ecology, which can respect human needs and “extend the boundaries of solidarity through time and across species.” (Pope Francis 2015: 103-120). The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and the Environmental Sciences (IFEES) emphasizes the interdependence of humans with one another and across generations. They characterize their mission to provide religious training about the environment as a contribution to the common good: a “gift from Islam to the world.”[20]

Other spiritual traditions also speak of environmental matters in terms of networks of relationships that link ethical, spiritual, and material concerns. Buddhists, for example, do not necessarily agree whether care for the environment is built into Buddhist teaching or not, yet many stress the co-dependence of all beings, reject any idea of dominion, and assert the virtue of compassionate action that encompasses both humans and non-humans. Humans enjoy a special status in light of their spiritual advancement, which obligates them to bear the burden of solving problems that humans have created (Swearer 2006).
Despite significant diversity among indigenous spiritualities, an understanding of the world as a place defined by active, meaningful relationships between humans and non-humans resonates widely (Carroll 2015; Kawagley 2006; Mavhunga 2014). Many indigenous cosmologies include an ethical framework built on expansive networks of kinship with both humans and non-humans. Such networks are grounded in reciprocal responsibilities, and are often viewed in terms of thankfulness and gratitude (Carroll 2015; Kawharu 2000; Mavhunga 2014). Carroll, for example, relates Cherokee stories about ancient times when such relationships were not respected and disaster ensued, a teaching (he argues) which is central to Cherokee attitudes toward non-humans (Carroll 2015: 37-38).

Within some of these groups, significant relationships may extend both forward and backward in time, bringing obligations to both ancestors and descendants (Kawharu 2000; Mavhunga 2014). Ties of kinship strongly shape interactions with each other and with the wider environment. For example, among Maori, responsibilities for what non-Maori might call environmental resources are deeply embedded in kinship relations between human groups. No decisions bearing on one can be taken without reference to the other (Kawharu 2000: 352). Kawharu explains that the Maori term kaitiakitanga, which is often used in legal contexts in New Zealand to denote legal guardianship, “weaves together ancestral, environmental, and social threads of identity, purpose, and practice.” (Kawharu 2000: 349) In this holistic world view extended relationships and shared understandings of accountability and reciprocal responsibilities shape the ways that Maori balance the needs of humans and non-humans. Such balance is critical to the spiritual and physical well-being of Maori tribal groups.

A number of overlapping themes emerge from this diverse group of spiritual belief systems. Each strongly links environmental behavior to social relationships, arguing that harm to the environment is related to dysfunctions in human society. Each challenges individualism and materialism via the ethics of interdependence, and through appeals to the spiritual significance of the natural world. The common frame of reference is holism. Integral to various forms of Eastern spirituality (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism), as well as many indigenous spiritualities, such viewpoints have been less visible in Christianity. That said, in Europe and the United States the growth of movements such as ecofeminism together with a growing interest in Eastern spiritualities since the 1960s and 1970s have familiarized more people with holistic ways of thinking (Kearns and Keller 2007). Bit by bit, these ideas have worked their way from the margins of society into the wider collective consciousness; they offer a
foundation for shared perspectives that bridge secular and spiritual orientations, allowing for common, mutually beneficial, and mutually respectful action.

7.2 Taking action through education

For most religious and spiritual leaders the solution to environmental problems requires a deeper personal transformation of values and behavior than is achievable through conventional tools of law and regulation. Pope Francis, for example, argues that without deeper convictions, regulation becomes something to obstruct, remove, or avoid (Pope Francis 2015: 91). Like many secular activists, religious actors stress the need to raise awareness of environmental problems in order to change behavior. Indeed the transformations that they advocate are framed as a form of spiritual engagement.

Programs to educate believers about the environment and its connection to religious teachings are widespread. They range from projects focused on conservation and recycling in and around sacred sites, to more ambitious attempts to engage believers in working to protect watersheds, forests, and other rural landscapes. In West Sumatra for example, an initiative supported by IFEES integrated Islamic education with a project aimed at protecting a watershed and local forests (McKay 2013). Work included forest rehabilitation, biodiversity mapping, and the establishment of tree nurseries, all of which would protect the viability of the region’s water supply. Local religious leaders were themselves educated on the place of environment in Islam, and ulama were invited to deliver sermons about water conservation during Ramadan in mosques across the area. The project combined customary forest management practices with Islamic management systems, which included designating areas either as zones for sustainable use, sanctuary spaces, or rehabilitation areas. The project team found that religious education noticeably increased local interest in water issues, especially among women, who particularly embraced the Islamic principles of environmental care. Project organizers argued that the combination of religious and environmental education provided a stronger social foundation for these new practices than environmental education alone (McKay 2013: 85).

Many projects involve significant cooperation between secular environmental groups or funding organizations and religious leaders. The Alliance of Religion and Conservation for example aims to connect faith leaders to environmental organizations and to encourage interfaith discussion about environmental issues.[21] Among other outcomes are multiple efforts to define “eight year plans” for the transformation of environmental thinking and practice. Both Mongolian Buddhists and the International Confucian
Ecological Alliance have produced such plans, which are aimed at lay practitioners as well as local spiritual authorities. The Green Pilgrimage Network, an alliance of pilgrim cities, was set up to share information about reducing the environmental impacts of pilgrimage. Understanding sacred meanings as well as environmental significance, and recognizing the overlap between the two, can provide inspiration for new strategies of care for the earth (Kuiper and Bryn 2013).

Faith-based environmental initiatives have been notably successful, particularly in reaching out to communities who might otherwise have been hostile to environmentalism, or simply not been engaged at all. For example, "Interfaith Power and Light," an American based organization which brings together 18,000 congregations, including Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Baha’i, Jewish, and Hindu participants, has developed programs to encourage environmental action (installing solar panels and energy efficient appliances) as well as educational material (sample sermons) that explore the concepts of environmental justice. In the US context, their aim is to model the actions they would like to see taken up by governments (Bingham 2016).

At a 2016 conference sponsored by the Washington Office on Latin America, Evan Berry noted that climate change has helped to create both interfaith alliances and collaboration between secular and faith-based organizations, in part because climate change has significant consequences for social justice work in which faith-based groups have long been active.[23] In Latin America, these collaborations have been particularly productive. Indigenous organizations, Catholic, and Protestant groups have found common ground, where in earlier years there had been little cooperation. At the same time, increasing awareness of shared commitments and overlapping aspirations has given all partners in the collaboration a stronger voice. Easing tensions between religious groups is a welcome by-product.

7.3 Virtuous behaviors and the challenge of climate change

Clearly, educational programs not only raise awareness but also define and encourage virtuous behavior. Religious activism in connection with climate change is telling in this regard. Representatives of most major faith traditions have issued statements linking actions to corresponding virtues. For example in the Cape Town Commitment (a document created by the international evangelical Christian community), both environmental activists and those who responsibly use environmental resources are recognized as having a “missional calling,” thus acting as witnesses for their faith through their actions. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis
Encourages change in consumption practices both to benefit the environment and as an opportunity to reconsider the deeper purposes of life beyond material consumption. Catholic organizations stress the value of building communities and spiritual solidarity through collective action (Pope Francis 2015: 152-161).

And within Islam, it is widely believed that God tests human faith and resolve, thus virtuous behavior becomes a daily statement of faith and commitment (Amery 2001: 486).

Indigenous peoples have been particularly ready to speak out, demanding representation at the Framework Convention on Climate Change and contributing to the development of the UN’s sustainable development goals in 2015. For indigenous peoples, such concerns are particularly pressing, in that they frequently live in communities that are on the front lines of climate change. It follows that arguing for a meaningful response to climate change is vital to their survival. The work of the First Nations Organization “Idle No More” to protest the Keystone XL pipeline in Canada and the United States was linked with longer-term efforts to gain sovereignty over their lands, and to protect the environment from both the immediate threat of oil spills, and the longer-term threat of climate damage.

Attention to attitude and affect are significant elements of this discourse. The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change calls for Muslims to act humbly and not to “strut arrogantly on the earth.” The Cape Town Commitment calls for a spirit of repentance for the “destruction, waste and pollution of the earth’s resources and our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism.” Pope Francis explicitly rejects attitudes of despair or indifference and encourages instead a feeling of realistic hopefulness based on belief and action (Pope Francis 2015: 44). The Dalai Lama encourages the development of mental peace as a foundation on which to build universal responsibility and compassion (Dalai Lama 1995). The religious practices and the moral communities of these diverse faith traditions form a rich store of resources for progress in fighting climate change.

7.4 Epistemic challenges

Virtuous actions such as recycling, consuming less, and embracing sustainable energy, are widely repeated in religious environmental discourse. Yet religious critiques of relationships with the environment go deeper, questioning the epistemic basis of human methods of making and using material things. Individuals are encouraged to be mindful of consumption and even to turn their backs on the materialism that grounds the global economic system. Such radical calls for change are tempered by recognition that consumption practices are frequently conditioned by economic assumptions, the direction of scientific investigation, and day-to-day
technological infrastructures, which may be difficult to dispense with (Pope Francis 2015: 75-85). Nevertheless, these religious critiques challenge the epistemic foundations of dominant global society. Recalling the work of Lynn White, we can ask whether global technology and science necessarily represent a thoughtless dominion over nature. The answer is of course mixed. “Technology” implies solar panels as much as internal combustion engines, or hand tools as well as nuclear power plants. In short, some technologies exploit more than others. That said, human embeddedness in complex technological systems, for example electrical grids, or roadways, gas stations, and gas-powered automobiles, is likely to constrain individual action (Pritchard 2011).

More deeply, environmental thought and planning are clearly rooted in complex political relationships (Jasanoff 2005). Having constructed lives and economies in dialogue with such systems, how can human societies go about making significant change? Some statements from religious leaders, like the Cape Town Commitment, for example, do not address these problems at all. Others have given this more attention.

One of these is Pope Francis, who explicitly rejects the “technological fix” mentality for environmental problems, or the idea that technologies are simply neutral tools. Simply applying more technology, he argues, is insufficient for grappling with the deeper social, environmental, and spiritual problems facing humanity. Indeed “more of the same” may exacerbate the impulse to dominate (e.g. geoengineering) and fail, therefore, to tackle the foundation of our problems.[26] Furthermore, such approaches are too often disconnected from the needs of the many (Pope Francis 2015: 75-85). The notion that technological and scientific work need to be more strongly linked to ethical foundations is shared by both the Dalai Lama, and some notable Muslim thinkers. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for example, has long argued that Muslims should be engaged in rebuilding science and technology on a new epistemological foundation – one guided by belief, and devoted to realizing God’s intentions for the world (Nasr 1991, 2010). If the epistemic foundations are tied to true belief, he argues, it is possible to create technologies which avoid harmful side effects, and which confer broad rather than narrow benefits. Many Muslim scientists and engineers have taken up the idea that belief is critical to changing the foundations of the technological world in which humans are embedded (Amery 2001; Lotfalian 2004; Razak and Majeed 1997). Thus the larger question of technology requires “revolutionary” change (Jasanoff and Kim 2015), change for which religious ideas and communities may be valuable partners.
Some of the most serious challenges to the technological status quo have come from indigenous activists. In their efforts to remove or protest intrusive and damaging technologies such as dams or mines from their traditional lands, they have raised awareness of the power relations embedded in these technologies (Simpson 2008; Voyles 2015). Such projects have alienated indigenous people from their traditional lands, sacred spaces, and ways of life, making it difficult for them to maintain the extensive bonds of kinship that are central to their understanding of the world. Furthermore, the benefits of such projects are enjoyed more by distant than local populations, questioning the claims that such work is for “the common good” (Groenveldt 2003; Hall and Branford 2012; Swainson and McGregor 2008). Fighting such technologies is not a matter of knee-jerk anti-technological romanticism, but constitutes a significant protest against the value systems and power relations that these technologies support.

Challenging the dominant epistemic order is central to indigenous battles to maintain traditional knowledge and social life, as well as to protect sacred spaces. Activists have pointed out that significant economic and health problems in indigenous communities are exacerbated when the institutions and philosophical frameworks of dominant political authorities are the only ways by which such problems are addressed (L. T. Smith 2012). Yet working against such structures, and implementing different models of knowledge, authority, and leadership are difficult things to do (Carroll 2015; Kawharu 2000).

Legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie, drawing on the work of Miranda Fricker, has highlighted the importance of epistemic injustice, which in this case means the failure of legal systems to recognize the value of indigenous knowledge (and experts) and cosmological belief systems (Tsosie 2012: 12). She gives as examples the failure of US courts to recognize tribal members as valid culture experts during testimony, even those whose standing within the tribes themselves is unquestioned. As a result, courts often render injustice, as when they find no cultural harm to Native Alaskan tribes as a consequence of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which made indigenous ways of life effectively impossible, or when they failed to stop the pumping of treated sewage onto a sacred mountain of the Hopi and Navajo in Arizona (Tsosie 2012: 12). Understandings of the relationships between humans and non-humans, and the integration of culture with the material world, were legally rejected on the basis that “true belief” was possible only as a purely mental construct, and thus no change in the material world could threaten it. Fighting for epistemological justice is therefore central to maintaining holistic worldviews. In short, representation by indigenous groups in climate talks, and in setting sustainability goals does more than simply
7.5 Summary and recommendations

Religious understandings of the earth and faith-based activism on behalf of the environment share much with secular groups, including techniques for raising consciousness, specific actions, and concerns with environmental justice. Commentators such as George Rupp suggest, however, that religious beliefs are so diverse, not to mention internally inconsistent, that they may not offer sufficient intellectual resources on which to ground environmental action (Rupp 2001). The evidence suggests otherwise. Diversity of belief does not mean that religious ideas and faith communities are irrelevant to progress toward a more sustainable future. As we have seen, religious leaders across societies are mining their traditions for ways to inspire changes in behavior and in relationships.

Progress toward a sustainable future will require just such creative thinking. Successful challenges to entrenched systems of power, knowledge, and technology can gain direction and legitimacy in cooperation with faith communities.

- Faith-based organizations, drawing on perspectives that link material action in the world with broader spiritual imperatives play a critical role in a task that is as much moral and spiritual as technical.
- The religious worldviews of indigenous communities may be especially valuable in challenging entrenched ways of living and establishing healthy and holistic relationships between humans and the earth.
- Grassroots religious organizations provide valuable sites for education and political mobilization. Pragmatic partnerships with secular organizations can be particularly effective.

8. Coda: Religion and human rights

Running through our discussions of religion's role in political and social life have been questions of human rights and how they are to be understood and implemented. Human rights is a defining discourse in the management of diversity, in the self-understanding...
of democracy, in the resolution of conflict, and in the fair distribution of resources. Across these domains, the relationship between religion and human rights runs the spectrum from active advocacy to open hostility. Three aspects of this problematic relationship call for our attention. The first recalls the origins of the human rights discourse and the place of religious thinking in this; the second examines the growing tension in certain circles between human rights, in general, and the freedom of religion and belief in particular; and the third looks at the role of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The history of human rights as we now know them is long and complex; it should not be compressed into a relatively short and primarily secular narrative that leads inexorably from the notion that a human being has a set of inviolable rights simply on the grounds of being human to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Recent scholarship has placed this trajectory in a much longer timeline, which embraces ancient (including religious) understandings of the sanctity of human life (Banchoff and Wuthnow 2011; Ghanea, Stephens, and Walden 2007; Menuge 2013; Stoeckl 2014b; Witte and Green 2011). All three Abrahamic traditions, in fact, can point to relevant references in their sacred texts and legal traditions.

This complementarity continues, evidenced in more recent interventions from religious thinkers and activists. John Nurser (2005), for example, reveals the role that visionary leaders from the Protestant and Anglican churches played in the formulation and promotion of international human rights in the 1940s. Central among them was an American Lutheran Seminary professor from Philadelphia, O. Frederick Nolde. Samuel Moyn (2015) asserts that the rise of human rights in the immediate post-war period was not only prefigured but inspired by a defense of the dignity of the human person that first arose in Christian churches and religious thought in the latter half of the 1930s. In short, however the history is read, it is clear that religious ideas and actors were supportive players in the lead-up to the major documents and structures that we now recognize as representing global – if contested – statements of how human beings are to be treated.

Foremost among those statements is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, which includes Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Thus freedom of religion and belief, in its current historical form (Evans 2004), is seen as a
fundamental and universally applicable right. Individuals (i.e. all human beings everywhere in the world) are the primary holders and beneficiaries of this right; states, conversely, are the primary addressees and thus the primary holders of the correlative obligations (Lindholm, Durham Jr., Tahzib-Le, and Ghanea 2004: xxxvii). How though should this universal right to the freedom of religion and belief be understood in a host of different historical and cultural contexts, each of which possesses its own, and often varied, institutional arrangements?

A 2014 thread in the online Open Global Rights section of the Open Democracy Forum reveals growing tensions in this history – notably between the advocacy of human rights on the one hand and the demands of religion and religious people on the other.[27] Indeed for some Forum participants, the words “human rights” and “freedom of religion” are seen as opposing rather than consonant ideas. For example, activists working on women’s rights or LGBTi concerns see faith communities and their leaders as part of the problem, not the solution. They would therefore like to curb certain religious practices. Also difficult are the inevitable tensions between Article 18 on the freedom of religion and belief and Article 19 on the freedom of expression. Religions (and their state advocates) sometimes restrict – or attempt to restrict – what others assert, leading at times to violent outcomes. In the thread introduced above, Pakistani sociologist Nida Kirmani and Myanmar journalist Wai Yan Phone are forthright in their critique: the former holds religion responsible for the exclusion and persecution of minority groups in India and Pakistan; the latter details the anti-Muslim strains in Buddhist nationalism. Each argument reveals how loss of human rights can result when religiously-based hostility and constraint are allowed.[28]

But for other Forum contributors, this oversimplifies a necessarily complex picture, in which pragmatic as well as philosophical arguments are introduced. Both former Amnesty International director Larry Cox and Harvard International Relations professor Jack Snyder observe that normative frameworks outside the West are very largely religious. Precisely this makes it difficult for the secular human rights movement to penetrate such societies – which, it should be noted, are often those most exposed to human rights abuse. In situations such as these, Cox and Snyder argue, it is unwise to ignore the potential of carefully chosen partnerships with religious organizations and their associated networks (Cox 2014; Snyder 2014). As we argue throughout this chapter, deployed prudently, religious resources significantly extend not only the reach of those who care about human rights, but their credibility.
In Europe an interesting reversal has occurred. At an earlier stage, the notion of freedom of religion and belief was frequently resisted by religious traditionalists who feared that human rights approaches would undermine religious values, commitment to a faith community, and a sense of the transcendent (Bielefeldt 2014). This, for the most part, is no longer the case, at least in Europe. Resistance, however, has emerged from a different quarter: among those who not only describe themselves as “liberals” but are, for the most part, articulate advocates of human rights. Bielefeldt pursues this point by recalling a heated debate in Germany in 2012 regarding the ritual circumcision of underage boys. He – as the current UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief – was frequently asked to choose between “religious freedom” and the human rights of small children. But do these seemingly contradictory claims necessarily exclude each other? Bielefeldt argues otherwise, firmly resisting the view that freedom of religion or belief is somehow “less human, less liberal, less egalitarian and less secular that other human rights” (2014: 55). Rather freedom of religion, properly understood, is fully in line with a mainstream human rights approach, and can become “a powerful argument for establishing secular constitutions based on an inclusive rather than exclusive understanding of secularity” (2014: 64).

The establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief implies recognition of both the importance and the difficulty of finding ways forward in places where diverse religious and secular norms are valued, and in situations where they may come into conflict – gender-specific abuses being among the most common. As an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, his or her role is to identify existing (and emerging) obstacles to the right to freedom of religion or belief and to present recommendations on the ways in which such obstacles might be overcome.[29] Similarly, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has addressed issues related to the freedom of religion and belief in its Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; and in May 2016, the European Commission appointed Former European Commissioner Ján Figel as the first Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union. Such institutional arrangements allow a forum for adjudicating the complex relationships between religious freedom and other human rights.

Here as elsewhere, social progress is facilitated by the kind of critical assessment an expert can provide. It is also facilitated by the imagination of human rights advocates who are willing to seek creative partnerships with religious organizations and leaders who share – and can translate – their goals.
This chapter has highlighted five interconnected themes: the persistence of religion in the twenty-first century; the importance of context in discerning outcomes; the need for education in its broadest sense; the significance of religion in initiating change; and the benefits of well-judged partnerships. Each of these themes carries implications for action.

### 9.1 The persistence of religion

At the outset of this chapter we laid out evidence of the continuing significance of religion in the modern world. Specifically, a very high percentage of the world’s population claims some sort of identification with a religion, a percentage that is growing rather than declining overall. From this evidence we argue that religion is persistent – a term chosen with care to signify that religion is neither vanishing nor resurgent. The elision of modernization and secularization implies the former; a rather too ready embrace of a resurgence model stems as much from a change in perception as a change in reality. Now sensitized to a phenomenon that had been ignored for much of the twentieth century, many social scientists “discovered” religion where it had always been, claiming somewhat dramatically the “revenge of God” (Kepel 1994). More careful observation indicates that “religious thrusts” and “secular recoils” have happened for centuries rather than decades, though differently in different parts of the world (D. Martin 2011: 6-7). That said, religion undoubtedly takes new forms in late modernity – as indeed does everything else. By starting from observations of religion in everyday lives and local contexts, we have attempted here to analyze the impact of religion and its relevance to social progress in a wide variety of fields.

### Implications for action:

Researchers, policy makers, and activists should

- Start from the assumption that the presence of religious belief and practice is to be expected and that it is often a significant factor in whatever changes take place in a society.
- Reject a simplistic distinction between progressive secularism and reactive religion, which has the effect of reinforcing precisely the reactionary reflex it sets out to condemn (Juergensmeyer 2015).

### 9.2 The importance of context
Throughout this chapter, a consistent conclusion emerges: the dangers of generalization. There is no single phenomenon – “religion” – that can be said to act in uniform ways across contexts. Whether it be in terms of the family, of diversity, of democracy, of conflict, of peace-making, of welfare, of healthcare, or of the earth itself, the role of religion must be examined on its own terms and in its own context. In each and every case, religious beliefs, practices, and communities are set in particular historical, economic, political, and cultural trajectories. Careful attention to religion as practiced, and not just to religious doctrines as proclaimed, is essential to achieving this level of local understanding and to identifying potential partners for action. In short, the detail matters. The social sciences lend themselves to this task. It is the rigorous, but nonetheless sensitive, inquiry into the myriad aspects of religion and religiousness which lead first to critical appraisals and then to effective recommendations for policy.

Implications for action:

Researchers, policy makers, and activists should

- Engage in careful and thorough explorations to determine religion’s diverse forms in any given situation. Trusted local informants can be critical partners in interpretation, as can broad surveys that tap a wide range of belief and practice, not just the most vocal and loyal.
- Avoid either alienating or ignoring potential allies by recognizing and fairly representing the full diversity of stances within and between religions.
- Recognize that “official” authorities and teachings may protect existing powers and hide important sites of innovation. This implies looking past formal pronouncements to pragmatic practices.

9.3 The need for education

Both secular experts and religious leaders lack sufficient knowledge of each other’s goals and resources. Community workers, politicians, policy-makers and analysts of all kinds need new kinds of knowledge to make the necessary judgments in this field. Research on religion is essential throughout the social sciences, not just in specialized subfields. We (all of us) need broad and deep pools of expertise to help identify the situations in which religious ideas and practices have become dangerous, as well as the places where creative synergies are possible. Basic religious literacy is a minimum standard for civic discourse and collective decision-making. Responsibility for that literacy will be allocated differently in different societies –
educational systems, public programs, professional schools, and religious groups themselves – it is, however, an essential starting point. That said, the mutual knowledge that will make the most difference is likely to be gained in specific local contexts as diverse parties work together on concrete issues.

**Implications for action:**

*Researchers, policy makers, and activists should*

- Insist that professional education in all fields establish basic religious literacy as a standard for cultural competence.
- Cultivate on-going ties with religion scholars who can bring the necessary expertise to bear in any given situation. No single expert – secular or religious – should expect to have all the kinds of knowledge required.
- Encourage funders and reviewers of social science research to be alert to opportunities to expand existing research programs, in order to include attention to the role of religions in political, economic, and household life.
- Take advantage of common projects to expand mutual knowledge and understanding.

**9.4 The significance of religion in initiating change**

Religions have – and always have had – powerful potential as initiators of social change. Think for example of the initiatives to condemn slavery both in Europe and the USA. That impulse remains. This chapter has drawn attention to undertakings where religious beliefs are more reactive than proactive, but we have also seen strategic interventions on the part of religious activists – initiatives that span democratization, peace-building, and ecology, among others. When this happens, it arises from the power of religious ideas to motivate, of religious practices to offer transformative ways of life, of religious communities to mobilize, and of religious leaders and symbols to embody transcendent calls to action. All of that can be put to either good or ill. Attention to the *social mechanisms of religious life* has revealed, for instance, both the everyday structures of patriarchy that restrict women's freedom and the religious ideas and practices women can employ to resist. Attention to the mobilizing capacity of religion has revealed shifting relationships with ruling regimes from Venezuela to Taiwan. And attention to religious organizations and networks has pointed toward tremendously expanded capacity and reach for healthcare and development in Africa. The effect of religion is always a matter of multi-dimensional social forms and mechanisms.
Implications for action:

Researchers, policy makers, and activists should

- Recognize the specific contributions that religious traditions may bring, ranging from religious stories and symbols, to everyday ritual practices, to established and recognized leaders, to organizational capacity. Each aspect has its own dynamic and potential.

- Be able to discern the likely value – or at times potential danger – of religious initiatives in any given area.

- Assess the degree to which practices and beliefs may not form a coherent package. Where beliefs seem promising for furthering progress, practices may imply the opposite – and vice versa. Cooperation may be possible without full agreement, and resistance to detrimental practices may be possible without attacking beliefs.

9.5 The benefits of well-judged partnerships

The standout finding running through this chapter is the strategic benefit in well-judged partnerships between religious and secular actors. Agencies of many different kinds benefit when religion is taken into account, and – where appropriate – where the considerable resources of religions are harnessed. This is particularly so in those parts of the world where secular agencies, both state and non-state, are for whatever reason eroded, at times very seriously. In Brazil, for example, a Catholic community center became an ironic ally with government efforts to confront HIV/AIDS. In Indonesia, environmental restoration is gaining greater reach and effectiveness through collaboration with Muslim groups. In the USA and Europe religious charities remain important to the social safety net. And throughout the world, conflict transformation efforts frequently depend on faith-based leadership. Whether pursuing human rights or democracy, economic development or women’s empowerment, religious partners can bring value to the table.

It is important, however, to sound a note of caution: Well-judged partnerships benefit all the parties involved; ill-judged partnerships are potentially (very) dangerous. And once again it is for the political and social sciences to discern the precise conditions under which toxic forms of religion can join with toxic forms of political life leading to harmful consequences for all concerned. Religion can indeed encourage – indeed legitimate – destructive violence at every level of society, from the intimate to the global. Domestic abuse lies hidden; minorities are exposed to danger; terrorists become martyrs; nations are torn apart by factions; and the global order is disrupted,
sometimes dramatically. But that is not the whole story. As the sections on “Democratic Governance” and “Conflict and Peace” make clear, at times religion is the only force that can break through a stalemate, or offer a more hopeful vision of the future. And more immediately it is very often religious agencies – along with their secular counterparts – that bring aid to the excluded, support to the victims, and encouragement to the peacemakers.

Implications for action:

Researchers, policy makers, and activists should

- Support the efforts of religious leaders, groups, and movements which are working to end discrimination and engender greater wellbeing, equality, and opportunity for more people.
- Support initiatives aimed at exposing and countering abuses both within religious communities and beyond.
- Look for overlapping goals, without expecting full agreement.
- Look for complementary organizational capacities that can be brought to bear on the issues in question.
- Engage with religious partners in debating and evaluating policy initiatives.
- Bring the expertise of social science to bear on the critical analyses necessary to discern both the dangers and the potential of partnerships with religious agencies.

Sources Cited:


[1] Grace Davie
   University of Exeter, UK

[2] Samia Huq
   BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
We also wish to thank Kira Ganga Kieffer, Boston University, for constructing our bibliography, Caleb South, Princeton University, for a very helpful early reading, and Adam Westbrook, Boston University, for his careful proofreading.

[4] The year 1970 was the peak year for non-religious populations. Since then, religions of all kinds have been growing, including Christianity in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, Buddhism and other religions in China, and Islam in the Middle East and Africa. These trends are driven in part by non-religious people converting, but mostly they are a consequence of standard demographic forces such as births and deaths. Despite shrinking populations of Christian believers in Western Europe and North America, these forces are likely to result in sustained religious growth globally through 2050 (Johnson, Grim, and Zurlo 2016).


[6] In a recent experiment involving approximately 2,500 adult subjects in Egypt, Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent (2016) found that individuals were more likely to favor women’s leadership when they were shown that it was consistent with Qur’anic teachings.

Additional religious demographic data can be gleaned from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), Pennsylvania State University; Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS); Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International (IPUMS), Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota; and ZACAT Data Archive for the Social Sciences (GESIS), Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences.


For an account of religious diversity in Southeast Asia more generally, see Bouma, Ling and Pratt (2014).

This account draws largely on Davie (2006, 2013) both of which contain extensive references.

The arrival of significant numbers of Jews in the 19th and early 20th century was differently motivated as Jewish communities fled the pogroms in Russia and East Europe. Sadly antisemitism is currently re-emerging as a distressing feature of European societies.

Article 9/2 reads as follows: “Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

This volume contains the report of the RELIGARE project and 28 responses to this. RELIGARE was a European Commission 7th Framework Project on religious diversity and secular models in Europe which focused on innovative approaches to law and democracy. See See also the continuing publications of Eva Brems at the Human Rights Centre, Ghent University – and Matthias Koenig at the Max Plank Institute, Göttingen –.
Multiculturalism is discussed further in Chapter 15. See also the defense of multiculturalism in (Modood 2013).

See for example, Heng and Liew's (2010) edited volume which covers a range of Asian examples.


The Evangelical Environmental Network is one such in an initiative known as “creation care.” For more information see https://creationcare.org/.

For more information see http://www.ifees.org.uk/.

For more information, see http://arcworld.org.

By its very nature, the practice of pilgrimage may have dramatic impacts on the environment, especially when – as in the case of the Hajj in the present day – significantly larger numbers of people are undertaking pilgrimage with new expectations of comfort and convenience (Amanullah 2009). For more information see http://greenpilgrimage.net.

See http://www.wola.org/es/node/5557.

See also http://catholicclimatecovenant.org.

For more information see http://idlenomore.ca.

