

Recognizing One's Neighbors: An Exploration of How to Navigate a World of Religious
Pluralism

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Introduction

People live in a world of difference, and sometimes we are unsure about what to do with that. This can be the case, particularly, with religious difference. Religion is often understood as personal, important, and sacred—something that one holds dear. So, how do people navigate a world where people believe different things, or hold different things to be sacred? Sometimes this question feels like a large undertaking: asking people to reevaluate their theology or to dive deep into doctrine. At other times this question is more logistical, concerning things like, how do I share a meal that takes into account the religious dietary restrictions of all attendees?¹ Learning to navigate religious difference asks us to better understand religious difference. This is an important task, and it calls for a project of recognizing one's religious or non-religious neighbors.

There are two main responses to religious difference, an existential response and a practical response. The existential response deals with theology and reflections of self-identity. How does all of this difference impact the way *I* live? The existential reaction thinks about how we think about ourselves when there are others around. In contrast, the practical response is full of questions about how to live within a religiously diverse society. It asks what information does one need to know and what behaviors should one demonstrate when they interact with their neighbors who may have a different religious background? The majority of this thesis focuses on the second reaction, the concern with actually recognizing and living with one's neighbor, but it recognizes that the existential reaction is unavoidable, because underneath the practical conversations on how to live

¹ Lori G. Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 33.

with difference is an underlying anxiety regarding how the practical decisions shape our self-understanding. The truth of the matter is that once we evaluate how to approach difference, one must consider the potential challenges or roadblocks that are stopping people from interacting with others.

Beyond the two classifications of reactions, the important part of navigating life with religious or non-religious neighbors is genuinely recognizing our neighbors, or working to develop an understanding of those around us. This may sound like a simple task, but the project of “recognition” is complex and brings with it questions of its own. Theorists like Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth provide a helpful understanding of what recognition means, and what it entails. Yet the question remains, what is a person recognizing? Are we recognizing what we share in common with our neighbors? Are we recognizing what makes them special and unique? The task of seeing people as they are is deceptively obvious and immensely complicated. Recognition is about achieving deeper understanding with our neighbors and seeing them as they are. People are living creatures, and as such we change, grow, and adapt; who we are is not who we always will be or have been. Thus, recognizing our neighbors is an ongoing process and commitment. The ever-changing nature of recognition can spiral a person back into an existential crisis over concerns of how transformative the process of recognition truly is and the near constant reevaluation that occurs as we get to know others and ourselves.

Often, the project of recognition and the reality of religious pluralism are branded as new phenomenon, a challenge for the 20th and now 21st century.² Yet, the same scholar (Peter Berger) sees religious pluralism and the project of navigating it as nothing new—a challenge people have been facing for millennia.³ While the task of navigating religious difference feels pressing and relevant to people today, that does not mean that the task has to be new. Some challenges and questions are ones that humanity will continue to grapple with. As such, this thesis does not propose to end the challenges of reaching across and living with religious difference. Navigating such a life is complicated, but this thesis does propose to move past the temptation to be paralyzed by the complexity of religious diversity, identity, and recognition. It argues for an imperfect but important process that might aid in our ability to navigate religious diversity and seeks the pursuit of living well together—though importantly it does not seek to live perfectly together, as such a pursuit is doomed to fail.

Modern or not, humanity is tasked with the project of figuring out how to live well together in a world full of difference, including religious difference. The enormity of such a task can be overwhelming, as it requires managing many variables. The project

² Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity* (Boston: De Gruyter: 2014), 5-6, 14. Berger sees choice as a modern concept that impacts religion, and recognizes that new generations face new challenges in terms of religious pluralism. For further reading on the topic see also: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

³ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Berger recognizes that pluralism is old, even as he recognizes that modernity brings about new challenges for religious diversity. Berger notes “that pluralism is much older than the printing press and the steam engine, two powerful agents of modern pluralism.”(5). He notes that while pluralism is old, it is not unaffected by modernity. He sees this also in an example of a hypothetical young interfaith couple, whose relationship would be unimaginable to their grandparents. He notes that urbanization contributes to the new possibility, even as urban cities have been existing and contributing to pluralism for a very long time. (13-14).

of living well together is a balancing act, and it can be tricky to keep track of everything. One must respect or at the very least be mindful of other religious identities and traditions as well as one's own and the different ways one's interactions impact others. Of course, variables are further multiplied when people realize how much difference and diversity exists within the same religious tradition. The project of recognition requires patience, nuance, and the realization that at times the task of recognizing one's neighbors will require actions that might feel contradictory but are in fact crucial to maintaining the balance of the many variables present in pluralistic societies.

Admittedly, this thesis looks at the project of recognition primarily from a Protestant Christian perspective. This is not to say that this thesis only engages with Protestant thinkers, or that the project of recognition is only for Christians. Rather, I want to acknowledge that many of the theological voices are Christian.⁴ Part of my interest in the project of recognition is thinking about why Christians, and Protestants more specifically, should participate in this project. What concerns do they have that might be holding them back? What theologies might help push them forward in the project? Later on in this thesis the role of Protestantism in religious pluralism will be more deeply examined. Here, I simply want to recognize my own perspective (Protestantism) and how it shapes my approach to the project of recognition.

One example of where my Christian perspective can be seen is in the way I choose to use the word neighbor. Throughout this thesis I use the term neighbor to discuss those that are different. I am trying to avoid using the word other as much as

⁴ While I identify the perspective of this thesis as Protestant, several of the theologians cited in this thesis are Catholic and I do not wish to misrepresent their denominational identities.

possible because I understand that it is relative. From the other side of the interaction someone becomes the other. This means that while the word neighbor certainly does not lose its geographic understanding, I am not just talking about people who live near one another. My use of the term neighbor is an attempt to avoid othering, but I recognize that, in many ways, it comes from a Christian tradition wherein which the concept of neighborliness is explored, and the term neighbor is expanded beyond an understanding of the typical geographic proximity of the word.

This thesis will give extended attention to four main components of the project of recognizing one's religious neighbors (and at times one's self). Part one explores the concept of recognition, mainly through the lens of political theorist Charles Taylor and philosopher Axel Honneth. It is important to understand what it means to recognize one's neighbor and the impact that recognition has on our neighbors and ourselves. Still the question remains what is it exactly about our neighbors that we have to recognize? Part two focuses on one potential (or partial) answer to this question: recognizing common ground. This section explores different shared spaces for recognition and what a useful entry point similarity can be for recognizing all of our neighbors. Of course, what the content of such common ground is, is up for debate. Honneth, among others, advocates for grounding this work in the commonality of freedom, while others turn to religious truths, or shared identity characteristics. Lori Beaman offers a strong voice on the importance of recognizing similarity. Yet, this thesis explores how to live in a religiously diverse society, and the task demands recognition of more than just what people hold in common. Part three explores recognizing religious difference and how

important it is to understand what makes religious identities distinct. There are a variety of reactions on how difference ought to be recognized and what types of interactions it will encourage; thinkers and theologians like Lee Yearley and John Milbank offer different feedback on the importance of realizing just how distinct religious identities can be. All of this recognizing of the other can feel like a project that focuses outward, and yet, often what holds people back from recognition is ourselves. Part four, the final section of this thesis, explores how recognition impacts how we see ourselves, and why this can be a frightening task that follows alongside recognizing our neighbors. The prominent voices of theologian Paul Knitter and philosopher and social theorist Charles Taylor speak to the different types of fears that come with transformative experiences and how other people can potentially change how we see ourselves.

I want to acknowledge that much of this thesis builds on the work of Beaman, who asks that people focus on similarity without seeing everything as the same. While the case studies Beaman looks at and her analysis of them is particularly illuminating for my own work on recognition, there are certainly differences between her approach and my own. I start by describing society as pluralist and take an interest in how interfaith dialogue can contribute to recognition. Beaman is critical of both of those approaches.⁵ I appreciate and build on Beaman's focus for the everyday lived reality of religious difference and her affirmation of complex identities. However, I employ a more theological approach, looking for ways that those who are hesitant about opening up to others, or even recognizing their neighbors, might come to see how their faith makes such

⁵ Beaman, 9, 28.

recognition possible. Beaman sees that some people fail to recognize that people are already living messy, intersecting lives, and I too find that this recognition is a helpful way to negate the fears of the hesitant. In the end, Beaman wants people to know that often in everyday life religious diversity is not a big deal. I think that it might be a big deal, which is why the project of recognition matters.

Whether new or old, existential or practical, the challenges that accompany religious difference demand our attention. Interacting with our neighbors requires a commitment to an ongoing process of recognition. The goal is to better understand those around us, and, of course, to better understand ourselves. It is important to look at what we share and what makes us unique, and to consider what qualities in particular are relevant to our interactions. After all, we all navigate various forms of difference every day and not every distinct detail causes conflict. Ultimately, the project of recognition is an ongoing task that asks us to reflect on our understanding of others and ourselves. In a religiously diverse society people must learn or navigate how to be a good neighbor to those who hold different beliefs; recognition offers a path to neighborliness. What one must recognize is some form of common ground or community with his or her neighbor, allowing him or her to see the other as neighbor; one must also recognize the distinctness of one's neighbor's beliefs or non-beliefs, all the while recognizing that he or she is being recognized as well.

I. Recognition

What is recognition? And what are we recognizing in a religious neighbor? Recognition is complicated because there are so many different aspects of a person that

can be recognized, but it is important to explore the topic fully and understand its role in helping people navigate religious diversity. On a colloquial level people often use recognition to speak of familiarity. “I recognize that actor from something else.” Or, “I almost didn’t recognize you with that haircut.” In this sense, recognition is a tool for identification. This notion of recognition as a tool for identification is not too far off from the more complicated and academic uses and explorations of recognition. Much of the thinking surrounding the topic of recognition builds on or is responding to Hegel. While there are many different ways to frame recognition, two theorists whose work illuminates the topic are Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth. These two thinkers conceptualize recognition and explore what it is people should be recognizing and what recognition does.

I begin with Charles Taylor’s important essay “The Politics of Recognition”.

Taylor finds that many people describe the stakes of recognition as being tied up in identity.

The demand for recognition in these latter cases is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.⁶

⁶ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-73. 25. Emphasis original to the text.

In other words, to be recognized leads one to reflect and re-shape one's identity. However, it is not just being recognized that causes one to re-shape one's identity. As Taylor points out, it is often the case that being misrecognized shapes a bad or false identity. The role of misrecognition in shaping one's identity reveals, then, that other people have a significant impact on an individual's understanding of his or herself. Recognition (or misrecognition) does not give people their identities, but it does help to mold them. People understand themselves in relation to how others understand or view them. This makes identity formation a surprisingly social process. The role of recognition in identity formation is an interesting one to explore, and Taylor is certainly not the only scholar to be exploring recognition and the formation of identity, or to be discussing how recognition impacts the recognized. Yet, I want to point out that since recognition contributes to identity formation, recognition complicates itself. If recognition shapes identity, then what is being recognized initially? This can start to feel like a chicken and egg question. If being recognized shapes one's identity, then what is one being recognized as? What is the initial identity? I think this complication could, in part, be why Taylor finds misrecognition to be a more crucial factor in identity formation. It is almost as if in the misrecognition the identity shifts closer to how it is perceived than what it is initially. The identity starts to reflect what it has been described as, even if that description is inaccurate. So, on the one hand I am suggesting and exploring the idea that everyone should recognize the religious identity of their neighbor. On the other hand, I am suggesting that how one recognizes this religious identity shapes that identity itself. I think religion in particular is a difficult example, especially in the context of pluralism,

but Taylor situates his conversation on recognition within a conversation on multiculturalism, and his concern for managing recognition and diversity is still quite useful.

In many ways, one of the most important goals of recognition is to gain an understanding of the other that does not perpetuate misrecognition. Misrecognition is described by Taylor as something that “can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression.”⁷ There are negative consequences for those we recognize if we do it incorrectly. Therefore, the task of recognition is an important one to get right. In the case of religious pluralism, this is a difficult task, and surely we will not perfect it. Yet, it is crucial that people understand the role of accuracy of understanding when it comes to recognition. This requires a closer look at religious identity, which will be found later in this thesis.

However, there are other ways of looking at recognition that acknowledge that people have identities without being overly concerned about the content of those identities. In his book, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth, explores the idea of recognition in society that does not necessarily start with recognizing someone else’s identity. In his exploration of Hegel, Honneth discusses the notion of recognizing another’s freedom. He says, “Hegel thus faces the question of what these categorial tools must be like, if they are to make it possible to explain philosophically the development of an organization of society whose ethical cohesion would lie in a form of solidarity based on the recognition of the individual freedom of all citizens.”⁸ Hegel sees communities

⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 14.

functioning based on solidarity which is derived from seeing everyone as free. Before one can even recognize the identity of the other, they must first recognize the other's freedom to possess their own identity. This is a very normative understanding of recognition. For, if I say that one must recognize the freedom to choose or possess an identity before they can recognize the identity, it demands an affirmative recognition. One could hypothetically recognize a person's identity but also think that they should not hold that identity. An individual might say, "I recognize that you are X, but X should not exist, so I ask you to convert to or assimilate to Y." However, there is room to both recognize someone's freedom to have an identity and to still condemn that identity. One simply has to look at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU's) stance on hate speech, often providing services for hate groups, but encouraging counter-protesters to use their free speech to publicly denounce those groups.⁹ The idea being: "I recognize that you are free to identify as this or to espouse this identity, but I do not like it and I will tell you so." This is a complicated negotiation in recognition. On the one hand, it is important to understand or recognize all people (even those one dislikes or finds dangerous, if for no other reason than to protect one's self or to engage in the work of minimizing the other's impact). On the other hand, I find it problematic that marginalized and vulnerable groups could be recognized but then silenced. People practicing recognition need the ability to recognize that some identities are detrimental to the existence of other identities, and that to some degree context is absolutely necessary to navigate this concern.

⁹ "ACLU Statement on Charlottesville Violence and Demonstrations," *ACLU*, last modified August 12, 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/news/aclu-statement-charlottesville-violence-and-demonstrations>

Learning to figure out which identities harm other identities is a challenge. In fact, the difficulty of determining whether or not another person's identity or ideology is harmful causes some to question whether such a determination is possible. Stanley Fish's critique of multiculturalism in his essay, "Boutique Multiculturalism", addresses this question. The argument for multiculturalism does not hold up to hate, and the exclusion of hate is not as easy to navigate as it might seem. Fish looks at the example of hate speech, specifically, and finds that it is not easy to define. He says, "there is no such thing as hate speech, if you mean by that designation speech that would be judged hateful by an *independent* norm. Instead, there is speech that is hateful to some persons because it offends the ideals to which they pledge allegiance. To those who produce the speech however, it is not hateful but needful."¹⁰ Fish looks at multiculturalism as a project focused on recognizing ideals, but hate speech seems easier to define when one is thinking of recognition of identities. Fish seems to think that people who use hate speech would disavow hatred, yet, it seems possible that someone who espouses hatred might admit that they say hateful things because they think it is okay to hate people. Fish puts "hateful" and "needful" into a binary, and I think this is a potential misrecognition of some hateful/hate-fueled identities. In a world where people's identities are shaped by how they are recognized by others, there needs to be considerations for how to avoid violent or hateful misrecognitions that distort the identities of others.

¹⁰ Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism," in *Comparative Religious Ethics: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume 1: Comparative Religious Ethics: Defining a Field by Comparison* ed. Charles Mathewes, Mathew Puffer and Mark Storslee (New York: Routledge, 2016), 335-351. 346. Emphasis original to the text.

Perhaps, one option is understanding that the process of recognition has an influence on identity that works in two ways. While Taylor understands recognition or more aptly misrecognition to shape the identity of the recognized, Honneth notes that recognition also shapes the recognizer. He says:

Since, within the framework of an ethically established relationship of mutual recognition, subjects are always learning something more about their particular identity, and since, in each case, it is a new dimension of their selves that they see confirmed thereby, they must once again leave, by means of conflict, the stage of ethical life they have reached, in order to achieve recognition of a more demanding form of their individuality. In this sense, the movement of recognition that forms the basis of an ethical relationship between subjects consists in a process of alternating stages of both reconciliation and conflict.¹¹

The process of recognition is relational, and the relational quality of the task means that the process impacts or shapes both participants. Honneth understands that this process is complicated. He describes it as “a process of alternating stages of both reconciliation and conflict.” He is discussing Hegel’s work on recognition, and he sees that it is a negotiation. Recognition is not obvious, though at times it feels like it should be. It does not feel like recognizing someone else’s religious beliefs harms my own. Recognizing someone else’s beliefs is not the same thing as believing them. However, if the recognition does not impact the recognizer in some way, it is a weak recognition, one that does not go beyond the surface. “I see you practice X religion,” is not really engaging with the practice of X religion. A similar criticism can be found in the work of Stanley Fish. His article addresses multiple critiques of multiculturalism. Here he is critiquing the approach of respectful differences and disagreements. He says,

¹¹ Honneth, 17.

How respectful can one be of “fundamental” differences? If the difference is fundamental—that is, touches basic beliefs and commitments—how can you respect it without disrespecting your own beliefs and commitments? And on the other side, do you really show respect for a view by tolerating it, as you might tolerate the buzzing of a fly? Or do you show respect when you take it seriously enough to oppose it?¹²

Here Fish also ties the object and subject together; offering the other tradition respect impacts the respect one holds for one’s own tradition. It feels like people will lose something in recognizing the other. However, Fish is not discussing recognition he is talking about respect, and he acknowledges that opposition might be respect. How might this fit within recognition? Is it possible to recognize something as it is, but as a problem? Must recognition be affirming?

For Honneth recognition is an expectation. He says, “Built into the structure of human interaction there is a normative expectation that one will meet with the recognition of others, or at least an implicit assumption that one will be given positive consideration in the plans of others.”¹³ The desire for recognition is a form of affirmation, and as discussed earlier, recognition is indeed a normative project. One wants to be included, or to be considered by others. If recognition requires some sort of inclusive or affirmative aspect, it might be difficult to ask for the recognition of religious others. Yet, it seems impossible to avoid the task of recognition in a pluralistic society, in part, because recognition forms communities. Honneth says, “It is no coincidence that Mead speaks at this point of the ‘dignity’ one is granted as soon as one is recognized, through the granting of rights, as a member of the community. For, implicit in the term is

¹² Fish, 343.

¹³ Honneth, 44.

the systematic assertion that the experience of recognition corresponds to a mode of practical relation-to-self in which one can be sure of the social value of one's identity."¹⁴ Recognition is, on some level, about recognizing someone as a part of the community. In a world of difference and in pluralistic societies this recognition gets complicated. There are multiple tasks of recognition going on at once. One must recognize someone of a different religious tradition as other in the sense that you must recognize the distinctness of their religion, while also honoring them as part of a community.

It can be helpful to look at how real-life communities approach recognizing one another. In her book, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*, Lori Beaman looks at the complexity of identity in modernity, including through the use of several Canadian case studies. She emphasizes that one of the most important ways of navigating difference is by focusing on similarities.¹⁵ We should be recognizing how we are like our neighbors not only how we are different. And yet, this is insufficient because we are different. One of the case studies Beaman looks at is the story of a Canadian child who had to go through a legal battle over whether or not he could wear his kirpan to school. The solution required dual recognitions. On the one hand, the boy needed to be seen as Canadian.¹⁶ On the other hand, he needed to be seen as distinct. The kirpan could not be seen in the same light as a kid bringing a knife to school.¹⁷ This dual recognition

¹⁴ Ibid., 79. In this quoted section Honneth is discussing the following work: George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 199.

¹⁵ Beaman, 13. This is just one example of Beaman's exploration of similarity. The focus on similarity can be found throughout Beaman's book.

¹⁶ Ibid., 164. Beaman explores the choice of school with a desire to think about being a good citizen.

¹⁷ Ibid., 166-168.

belonged in different places. The recognition of difference is necessary to prevent false equivalencies in conversations about equality. Yet, the recognition of similarity or community was required when the boy interacted with people in public. Beaman quotes Gurbaj Multani as saying, “they do come up to us and ask, oh, you’re the same guy, oh you know, you shouldn’t do that, you’re in the community like this, you’re supposed to live the way they live, we explained them, and then we find that their point of view against the kirpan is changed right after we tell them.”¹⁸ Initially there is a sense that to be in the community one must be exactly like the rest of the community, but Multani’s conversations usually end with support from others. The understanding that comes from these interactions requires the dual recognition of similarity and difference, or at least I assume that is the case. One must see their neighbor as a fellow community member and see that their traditions are distinct.

Honneth writes about the connection between recognition and confidence, which is a connection that can help us better understand community. The confidence may come from being recognized by the group as part of the group. “I am confident in my faith, because my fellow believers recognize my faith.” In reality, our identities are much more complicated, and we belong to many groups. Beaman looks at concerns in Canada at a maple sugar venue that worked with Muslim costumers so that they could enjoy their experience.¹⁹ On one level Beaman is asking that Canadians recognize the Muslim group as Canadians, and on another level, the Muslim group is asking to also be recognized as

¹⁸ Gurbaj Multani, as cited in Howard Kislowicz, “Social Processes in Canadian Religious Freedom Litigation: Plural Laws, Multicultural Communications, an Civic Belonging,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2013), 213 as Cited in Beaman, 171.

¹⁹ Beaman, 146-147.

Muslim so that they have a space for prayer and no ham in their food.²⁰ The shifting identities demand shifting recognition, or maybe more simply the demand of recognition is to recognize complexity.

The complexity of recognition can make it difficult to figure out what indeed must be recognized, though of course, the project of recognition demands that we recognize many things in our neighbors. People can recognize both the identity of their neighbor and their neighbor's freedom to possess his or her identity. As Taylor and Honneth indicate, recognition shapes the identities of both the recognizer and the recognized. Throughout our lives and our interactions, we play both of those roles. Recognition is pervasive and significant; we are influenced by it and called to enact it.

Practicing recognition is an important task. There are two main approaches to recognition: recognizing the common ground one shares with others and recognizing what makes one different from their neighbors. It can be helpful to start with the familiar and recognize what one shares with one's neighbors. Recognizing common ground is complicated, but it is often the best place to start, especially if one is unsure of how to begin recognizing one's neighbors.

II. Recognizing Common Ground

Now that we better understand recognition, it is time to take a closer look at what the project of recognition entails. How do we go about recognizing our neighbors, and what exactly is it that we are recognizing? Of course, there is not simply one thing that people are recognizing, but since there are so many aspects of recognition and so many

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

details about our neighbors to recognize, one might look for an entry point into the project of recognition. There are many entry points into recognition, and they can all impact how identities are formed. One starting place that might make the process of recognition easier is finding common ground with one's neighbors; think about what circumstances or characteristics people share. Finding common ground seems like a nice place to start because it offers some semblance of familiarity, something people might already recognize. Of course, the content of the common ground itself is up for debate. Some find common ground in recognizing freedom, others in shared identity characteristics, and some even find it in a quest for truth. For all of these different conceptions of what common ground is, finding the common ground can be an incredible motivator for recognizing one's neighbor. It might establish why we seek to recognize the other in the first place. This does not mean that common ground is not without its dangers, as will be seen throughout this section. Common ground is one place to start, and within that starting place are further details. One must look for common ground that is strong enough to support the project of recognition.

A. Freedom as Common Ground

One common ground, which people can seek to ground their recognition in is freedom or rights. This is an approach looked at by Honneth, that he sees doing important work not just for communities but for individuals as well. Honneth says, "The cumulative expansion of individual rights-claims, which is what we are dealing with in modern societies, can be understood as a process in which the scope of the general features of a morally responsible person has gradually increased, because, under pressure

from struggles for recognition, ever new prerequisites for participation in rational will-formation have to be taken into consideration.”²¹ In other words, more rights are being respected because more people are being recognized. Rights, then, are hugely important for recognition because they offer a starting place for situations that might otherwise be difficult. How does one recognize someone who is making the opposite choice? One recognizes their freedom or right to make the choice, just as that one individual has the freedom or right to choose the opposite. If people possess different identities but possess similar freedoms, it might be easier to see freedom as a common ground: “we all have the right to believe what we do.” The shared belief that one has the right to identify however one does is the common ground, as opposed to the content that makes up those identities.

If people’s freedom is what they have in common, then it should be recognized as something we all share. Honneth says of self-respect, “What is required are conditions in which individual rights are no longer granted disparately to members of social status groups but are granted equally to all people as free beings; only then will the individual legal person be able to see in them an objectivated point of reference for the idea that he or she is recognized for having the capacity for autonomously forming judgements.”²² According to Honneth, for people to receive the benefits of recognition, we must recognize their freedom, and this recognition should be consistent and offered to everyone. The protection of freedom allows for the protection of identities and practices that are not one’s own. What does this look like in religiously plural societies? It can

²¹ Honneth, 114-115.

²² *Ibid.*, 119.

look like the motivation or justification for getting involved in interfaith actions and conversations. Take for example, Chris Stedman, an atheist interfaith leader; he has obvious disagreements with other religions in the sense that he does not believe them, and yet, he is already engaged in advocating for them. Stedman was involved in activism surrounding the building of a mosque near ground zero. Eboo Patel, in his book, *Sacred Ground*, quotes Stedman as saying,

‘Many Americans see nothing but godless, immoral, savage heathens when they think of Muslims. As a community comparably cast, we should empathize and come to their defense. Defending their freedom is defending our own.’ It is precisely because atheists value freedom of religion (‘because of it, we are able to choose none,’ he wrote), and know what it means to be marginalized as a result of their views, that they ought to be on the front lines in support of those who are having their religious choice demonized.²³

Stedman wanted to encourage other nonbelievers to participate on the grounds that the religious freedom of our neighbors is what should be recognized. What atheists and Muslims had in common is what spurred an effort to support a particular group of people. Needing the protection of religious freedom creates a common goal of defending religious freedom, which leads to action and interaction. In a world of difference, recognizing similarity in our neighbors can have a tangible impact.

Yet, basing the common ground of recognition in religious freedom means inevitably recognizing difference. Returning to the example of Stedman, he discusses the motivation for getting involved in the conflict over the mosque as being about

²³ Chris Stedman, “Why This ‘Mosque’ Matters to Atheists,” *Non-Profit Status*, July 28, 2010, <http://nonprophetstatus.wordpress.com/>. As quoted and cited in Eboo Patel, “The Art of Interfaith Leadership,” In *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 88-103. 100.

protecting the religious freedom that also protects him and other atheists. Yet, in this work, Stedman must recognize Muslims and the mosque building efforts. That is the reality of recognizing people's freedom as common ground: people are free to be different from you. Recognizing another's freedom and rights legitimates difference. One's neighbor has a right to believe what they believe, or practice what they practice; their tradition or non-tradition is validated by the high regard placed on rights and religious freedom in this common ground. This is of course complicated; respecting a person's right to believe something is not the same as endorsing their beliefs. Yet, it does require acknowledging their beliefs, or that those beliefs exist. If someone wishes to recognize similarity through religious freedom, then they are opening themselves up to and, on some level, must participate in the project of recognizing difference.

Yet, even as people must recognize difference, they still find ways that they are the same. It is not just recognizing that we are the same, it is also recognizing that we want the same thing, at least in the abstract. For Stedman, he recognized that both atheists and Muslims want freedom of religion. Freedom, then, as Honneth has also alluded to, is one place to start in terms of recognition. In fact, recognition of freedom opens up space for atheists to take part in the conversation. Atheists can often get pushed out of interfaith conversations because they lack a common ground with religious counterparts (they are not pursuing truth claims in the same way that religious individuals might). In her book *The im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, Catherine Cornille considers the potential to affirm truth a crucial aspect of interreligious dialogue. She says, "the possibility of interreligious dialogue still ultimately depends on the ability of

one religion to recognize truth in the other.”²⁴ Because atheists find their common ground to be religious freedom and not pursuit of religious truth, Cornille considers them ill-equipped for dialogue. Deeper dialogue, for Cornille needs a deeper common ground. She says, “In order for dialogue to be more than episodic, it may thus need to be grounded in a sense of interconnection that is more inherently religious, or internal to religious self-understanding.”²⁵ For Cornille, the purpose of religious dialogue is on some level about discovering further truth.²⁶ This means that sustained dialogue must be about religious truth. It is not that the common ground of shared religious freedom is a bad thing for particular projects, but for Cornille such a common ground cannot provide motivation for relationships or reflection beyond those particular projects. Ultimately, for her, freedom as a common ground is insufficient for a deeper recognition through interreligious dialogue.

Other thinkers also want recognition of similarities to go beyond a shared freedom to be different. Beaman’s focus on similarities is, for her, in direct contrast to interfaith movements. She says, “One of the important sites of deep equality narratives has been the space in which difference is negotiated as a non-event. Interfaith dialogue depends on difference as an entry point, and often hardens the boundaries between religious groups.”²⁷ For Beaman, difference must be minimized, and thus her approach to religious pluralism is different than typical interfaith approaches. However, it is worth

²⁴ Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: A Herder & Herder Book The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 177.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁷ Beaman, 9.

noting that Stedman's approach is one considered interfaith by Patel and thus some interfaith groups do start with what people have in common, even if, as Beaman critiques it, the work itself is premised on people having different beliefs.

While it may seem like Patel and Stedman's approach to interfaith activities avoids some of the concerns Beaman has with exacerbating difference, for her, religious freedom is also an insufficient ideal for common ground. This is, in part, because it is a legal category and there is a "pervasively Protestant understanding of religion that exists in law."²⁸ This means that less religious groups are afforded freedom under this common ground, or they must be comported to look like a dominant religion (Protestantism) to have access to this common ground. Furthermore, the term comes with more baggage that would need to be recognized when recognizing the religious freedom of others.

Beaman says,

First, considered independently of social context, concepts such as 'religious freedom,' and 'religious diversity', and so on, may seem to be universal goods intended to further substantive equality...However, as [Winnifred F.] Sullivan argues, that universalism is in fact a particularism that frames religion in very specific ways. Similarly, [Elizabeth S.] Hurd does not object to the use of religious freedom per se, but insists that its deployment as a mechanism for the furtherance of a particular vision of the good society must be critically analysed. In the end, she argues, its current use may be doing more harm than good.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., 29.

²⁹ Ibid., 29. Beaman is discussing the following works in the quoted passage and its surrounding context: Elizabeth S. Hurd 'Promoting "Religious Freedom" Does More Harm Than Good'. *The Conversation*, 28 March 2014. <<http://theconversation.com/promoting-religious-freedomdoes-more-harm-than-good-24917>>. Elizabeth S. Hurd. *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Elizabeth S. Hurd. "The International Politics of Religious Freedom." In *Living with Religious Diversity*. Ed. Sonia Sikka, Bindu Puri, and Lori G. Beaman (Delhi: Routledge, 2015), 238-48. Winnifred F. Sullivan. *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Religious freedom, then is not an unproblematic common ground for everyone. That does not mean that it cannot be a common ground for particular projects as Stedman makes clear. People can still recognize freedom as Honneth discusses in his development of recognition. However, if freedom is not universal, who gets recognized? Are those who do not have a similar understanding of religious freedom still recognized, or are they failing to recognize others? Beaman might argue that this question distracts us from the real project of recognition. Religious freedom has been debunked as a legitimate option for a lack of universalism, but also because Beaman has something much stronger in mind when it comes to recognition. Beaman's book is dedicated to the project of equality.³⁰ We must not recognize someone's freedom, but instead their equality.

B. Shared Identities

Beaman's project of deep equality emphasizes similarity. She understands that part of deep equality is recognition. She describes the following as "a crucial element of deep equality"³¹: "similarity or the recognition of overlap in identities, life circumstances, shared hardship or joy, or shared activities. This active process of reconciliation and recognition is a recurring theme in the interviews and other data I've examined."³² Here Beaman says that people must recognize one another, but also recognize themselves in the other. Not wholly, in the sense that people are identical—Beaman is critical of a "just like us" over assumption of the other³³—but rather people are recognizing some aspect of

³⁰ Beaman, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

³² *Ibid.*, 57-58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 61.

one's own identity in one's neighbor. Her focus is on the "overlap in identities."³⁴ When people interact with their neighbors and seek to understand them, they need to recognize what they have in common. The way to handle diversity is to find connection. Common ground here has more content than a common ground of freedom. The content of the particular identities matter, and seeing where the content is the same, can propel people forward in their interactions with their neighbors.

Finding a common ground with one's neighbors that consists of more substance, such as the content of one's identity, can still leave space for the individuality of those who share characteristics. Beaman says, "Similarity reconciles difference without creating sameness by finding common ground, or a space from which deep equality can be accomplished. Religion is only one identity point from which people act. To be sure, religion can and often does cause friction, but the point is it often does not and it is this fact of 'ordinariness' that is little remarked upon in both academic and public debates about diversity."³⁵ This means that the "overlap in identities" may be found outside of the realm of any possible tension—though that is not to say that it could not also be found inside the realm of tension. If people do not know how to recognize their neighbor who practices a different religion than them, then they might consider recognizing what they have in common with their neighbor. If we conceive of the word "neighbor" geographically, then one might recognize that the two share a commitment to the same neighborhood; their identities overlap in seeing themselves as members of the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

subdivision. However, there might be other entry points into recognition. Both individuals could be parents, or love gardening, or have the same profession. By focusing on similarity, there are a variety of entry points into recognition. This is part of what is so interesting about recognizing common ground without “creating sameness.”³⁶ Everyone can be a different kind of parent, or gardener, or subdivision resident, while still maintaining that overlapping identity as common ground. Furthermore, because that common ground is only one part of a person’s identity, even if individuals were eerily similar in the overlapped portion of their identity, there is still plenty of space for difference. One can relate to someone because they share a certain characteristic or an identity, but one understands that this does not mean the person is exactly the same as one’s self.

In many ways, Beaman’s common ground seems similar to the notion of recognizing choice and freedom through Honneth’s theoretical approach and Stedman’s real-life example. The overlapping identity in that case is an individual who possesses freedom or is committed to freedom. However, Beaman’s common ground still differs from the others in this way: there is not much substance to understanding freedom as part of an identity. The real-life example of Stedman shows that he thinks of religious freedom as the overlapping identity between Muslims and atheists. That freedom is sturdy enough. Yet, upon closer analysis it would seem that one would need common ground to be extended beyond religious freedom. Freedom is an ideal, not an identity. Why does Stedman think that the Muslims organizing the mosque should have the

³⁶ Ibid., 69.

freedom to do so? Perhaps Steadman thinks all humans should have this freedom. But why in particular might it be a motivating factor in this case? I want to emphasize that asking such a question is an exercise in conjecturing Steadman's motives to understand that there exists a deeper common ground that religious freedom rests upon—I am not saying that I actually think this was Steadman's motivation for getting involved. One could argue that the overlapping identity is the location of America, that the common ground of this country enables an understanding where religious freedom should be granted. This is not to say that America is the only country with religious freedom, but rather to acknowledge—as was pointed out in an earlier exploration of Beaman—that freedom has context. The deeper common ground finds an overlapping identity as the basis for seeing the neighbor as someone else who is deserving of freedom. What do we need to recognize in the other to recognize their choices or their rights? Perhaps this returns us to the chicken and egg question that comes out of Taylor's recognition. If recognition shapes identity, but what humans are recognizing is identity, then it is difficult to decipher what we are recognizing. While many see freedom as a common ground to start with, Beaman thinks it is less common than people wish to believe.³⁷

Charles Taylor describes one form of recognition that has a role in a project of equality that takes a step outside of identity. He says, “the principle of equal respect requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion. The fundamental intuition that humans command this respect focuses on what is the same in all.”³⁸ In this

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 43.

understanding of equality difference is fully cast aside, not to be recognized, instead one is to only look for similarities with the other. This form of recognition is recognition with blinders. Instead of recognizing all of the ways that people are different, this recognition focuses on seeing people as the same. This is a far less nuanced position than Beaman who wants to recognize equality without it sliding into sameness. Her understanding of equality must recognize difference on some level, even as it starts and focuses on similarities. The form of recognition of similarity that Taylor is describing³⁹ is hyper focused on what is the same, to the point that it finds difference to be problematic.

The equality described by Taylor stems from something other than the overlapping identity that Beaman finds as a starting place for common ground. Taylor says, “The liberalism of equal dignity seems to have to assume that there are some universal, difference-blind principles. Even though we may not have defined them yet, the project of defining them remains alive and essential.”⁴⁰ There is something to be recognized beyond the content of a particular identity, and whatever that is, it is the basis for common ground. There is a universality that is being requested on some level. The recognition of these unknown but universal principles is crucial to how we understand people. Unlike other questions of recognition it does not quite have the tension of the chicken or the egg scenario, concerning what came first. In this example the equality

³⁹ I want to be clear that Taylor is describing different approaches and responses to multiculturalism and is not necessarily advocating for what he describes.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

both starts and stops with these not yet defined “universal, difference-blind principles.”⁴¹ On the one hand, recognition starts with the universal; it is recognized, it shapes who people are and how they understand one another. On the other hand, difference-blind principles only seek to recognize what is the same in people, and therefore serious recognition of the other in a way that is different gives pause to the project of recognition. While Beaman may have considered the recognition of overlapping identities as a starting point for how to navigate religious pluralism, the object of recognition in the understanding Taylor has brought forward is difference-blind principles. The content of the individuals and their identities do not fall under the category of what is to be recognized under this framework because they would remove an individual from sameness and on some level acknowledge difference. The danger of recognizing sameness as universality is that one stops recognizing their neighbors for who they are and the content of their identities on some level. The project of recognition gets derailed by the project of difference blindness as it is hard to recognize something when you have your eyes closed, and this project of difference blindness asks us not to see our neighbors for their identities, overlapping or not. The project of recognizing our neighbor demands seeing them as they are, and becoming “un-blind” to differences, recognizing the content held in common not the difference blind principles. In this sense, the principles are like religious freedom, which may understand itself to be universal. In the same way, religious freedom is insufficient because it is not always as universal as some are led to believe.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

While Taylor and Beaman explore recognizing others by seeing similarities and equality, others advocate for a recognition of similarity that does not fit within a framework of equality. Cornille's book, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, critiques the concept of equality in interreligious dialogue.⁴² However, her book shows a commitment to dialogue, which includes commonality. Cornille says, "Interreligious dialogue thus presupposes a conviction that, in spite of important and ineradicable differences of belief and practices, religions may find one another in a common ground. This meeting point between religions may be located in the past or in the future, in a common origin or goal outside or within religious traditions"⁴³ There is a common ground between people of different religions, and without such commonality dialogue would be pointless.⁴⁴ Even though Beaman indicates that interfaith dialogue is predicated on difference, Cornille shows that while the dialogue may be focused on interactions between people of different faiths, the dialogue itself cannot occur without a common ground.

Common ground can help people begin to engage with their neighbors. While there is debate on what should be recognized as common ground—whether it be religious freedom, or some section of shared identity—recognizing that people share things in common with one another helps us to navigate the reality of religious diversity.

Recognizing a common ground is the first step in learning more about one's neighbors

⁴²Cornille, 84. "Commitment to the truth of one religion logically excludes the recognition of the equal truth of others, and religious commitment generally entails a sense of belonging that does not present itself as a priori subject to change."

⁴³ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 95.

and developing an understanding of them. Whether one is recognizing freedom, truth, or community it all seems to start with what we share. It is important to recognize that people have something in common because it can help us better understand our neighbors and it can provide an entry point into learning about what makes us different.

Not only is recognizing what makes us different the next step after recognizing what we share with others, it also prevents us from seeing commonalities where they do not exist. Sometimes to better understand someone's beliefs, people try to think about those beliefs from their own frameworks, even if those beliefs do not fit in that framework. Recognizing difference can give people the skills to understand when they are recognizing a common ground that does not exist. Recognizing difference can help us to more accurately recognize our neighbors and to avoid mis-recognition.

III. Recognizing Difference

While recognizing common ground may be a helpful place to start, it is certainly not the place to end. It is also crucial to recognize how people are different from one another. This allows us to understand our neighbors more fully, because no matter how much common ground we share, we are not all exactly the same. On one level, recognizing difference is a part of recognizing reality: we simply are not identical. On another level, recognizing difference goes deeper. This section explores both social theorists and theologians who think about what it means to recognize difference. Even Beaman, the champion of recognizing similarity, sees spaces where difference needs to be acknowledged. While some thinkers like Lee Yearley turn to the recognition of difference to capture the reality of distinct religions, others turn to the recognition of

difference because they think that difference has been hidden. Langdon Gilkey, John Milbank, and Tiffany Puett are all concerned with a misrecognition of similarity that leads to false universalism. Recognizing difference is a useful tool for dismantling the misrecognition they are concerned with. However, as was the case for similarity, recognizing difference is not without its drawbacks, including concerns of power. Recognizing difference allows for a different understanding of one's neighbor than recognizing what we have in common, and this different understanding can further illuminate a path towards the goal of accurately recognizing one's neighbor. Though, of course, recognizing similarities and recognizing differences are projects that feel very different, they can and perhaps should be done together.

For Charles Taylor, recognizing equality and the common ground of dignity leads one to recognize difference. He says, "The politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity through one of those shifts with which we are long familiar, where a new understanding of the human social condition imparts a radically new meaning to an old principle."⁴⁵ There is a way, wherein recognizing similarity in the sense of recognizing that everyone is similarly dignified, demands that difference be recognized. Taylor describes the goal of a difference focused approach to recognition and social equality: "the goal of which["measures now urged on the grounds of difference"⁴⁶] is not to bring us back to an eventual 'difference-blind' social space, but on the contrary to maintain and cherish distinctness, not just now but forever. After all, if

⁴⁵ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

we're concerned with identity, then what is more legitimate than one's aspiration that it never be lost?"⁴⁷ Recognizing difference is a critical part of the recognition project. Part of avoiding misrecognition is recognizing how certain individuals, identities, and traditions are particular, or rather how every individual, identity, and tradition is particular. This particularity may feel limiting, how can we relate to one another? Yet, to fully and accurately recognize one's religious neighbor one has to recognize what they do and do not share. To think that one is too similar, or to project one's own identity onto the other is problematic. To gloss over distinction is to lose identity.

While it is important to recognize the common ground that people share and to find a space or context for dialogue, it is not enough to only recognize similarities. Differences must be recognized as well. An interesting author to look at on this topic is Beaman because she so heavily supports emphasizing similarity as an approach to religious difference. However, Beaman also uses a case study that illustrates just how important recognizing difference is. Throughout her book, Beaman follows the legal case of Gurbaj Singh Multani and his school to determine whether or not (and under what conditions) he could wear his kirpan to school. Much of the case against allowing the kirpan to be worn to school was based on the fact that the kirpan is assumed to be a "weapon".⁴⁸ Beaman cites the testimony of an expert witness in her work: "This means that a student may believe it is necessary to bring a knife to school to defend himself from other students in case of a fight, since he knows that because some students have the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁸ Lori G. Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 166.

right to carry one, other students have also decided to carry one without telling anyone about it.”⁴⁹ This example features numerous differences between the situation suggested by the expert witness and the situation where Gurbaj Singh Multani wears a kirpan which the school knows about. However, the focus of Beaman’s analysis is that people have equated the kirpan with a knife. Beaman herself notes that “the kirpan [was] simplistically reduced to a knife like any other by the school board and the courts.”⁵⁰ What is not recognized in this situation is the distinctness of the kirpan, or the religious significance (and difference) of the object. Beaman goes on to quote a lawyer involved in the case, “The idea that Quebec students cannot be taught the difference between a kippa and an illegal hat or a baseball hat worn by students, that they cannot be taught the difference between a kirpan and a knife...is terrible.”⁵¹ Children, and quite frankly adults, need to be taught to recognize difference, to not just understand everything else by fitting it into their own framework. Sometimes things exist outside of someone’s framework, and that individual has to be able to recognize that. This is a difficult task. How does someone recognize something outside of their framework? Or, is it enough simply to recognize that it exists outside of one’s framework. The eventual solution offered by the school involved securing the kirpan, sewing it into a “sturdy cloth envelope,” among other conditions.⁵² Beaman says of the solution, “The agreement

⁴⁹ As cited in *Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys v Singh Multani*, [2004] RJQ 824 [*Multani C of A*] at para. 97 as cited in Beaman, 166.

⁵⁰ Beaman, 166.

⁵¹ Cited in Howard Kislowicz, “Social Processes in Canadian Religious Freedom Litigation: Plural Laws, Multicultural Communications, an Civic Belonging,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2013), 212, as cited in Beaman, 168.

⁵² Beaman, 151.

Christianizes the kirpan by rendering it invisible, private, and harmless.”⁵³ In other words, the agreement does not actually recognize the kirpan. It tries to put it into a framework, from which it does not belong. I do not mean to say that it does not belong in an exclusionary way; I am concerned with the kirpan being mis-recognized in a framework and am not trying to keep the kirpan out of any particular framework. Sometimes things and people are different from one another; they just are, and in order to appropriately respond or act in those situations one needs to recognize difference.

In fact, for other scholars, recognizing difference, and what that means for those doing the recognizing, can be crucial in recognizing the reality of the situation. Lee Yearley, in his essay “New Religious Virtues and the Study of Religion”, discusses an approach to religious pluralism that not only acknowledges the presence of regret but seemingly requires it. He says of his new virtue and religious diversity, “That virtue deals with the recognition that various, legitimate ideals of religious flourishing exist and that although some of them move you deeply you cannot manifest them, indeed may not even want to manifest them.”⁵⁴ Here Yearley affirms the idea that there are multiple legitimate paths to religious flourishing and that they should be recognized by others. He also qualifies that an individual has different reactions to these different legitimate paths. For Yearley recognition is not a wholehearted embrace of a new or additional belief system, and it is not a solely joyful and optimistic project. The feeling of regret in the

⁵³ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁴ Lee H. Yearley, “New Religious Virtues and the Study of Religion” in *Comparative Religious Ethics: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume 1: Comparative Religious Ethics: Defining a Field by Comparison* ed. Charles Mathewes, Mathew Puffer and Mark Storslee (New York: Routledge, 2016), 231-248. 232.

project of recognition is unavoidable for Yearley. Yearley says, “Spiritual regret is one of those virtues that concerns the appropriate response to the recognition that extremely varied, legitimate religious ideals exist and that no person can possibly manifest all of them. Like all virtues it is corrective of a corresponding human weakness, in this case the tendency to overlook the challenge produced by the presence of other integral and even tempting religious goods.”⁵⁵ This is part of the project of recognition; what we are recognizing is different, and sometimes what we are recognizing we cannot partake in. While Beaman, in her focus on similarity, felt that difference was played up and thus exacerbating conflict that was not as strong as it was presented to be, Yearley finds that difference is often overlooked. The problem with recognition in pluralism is that to recognize difference is to recognize the conflict that it partakes in. Yearley is still advocating for recognition, but he finds that part of what must be recognized is an inability to partake in the other traditions. For Yearley our response is to take seriously the traditions we recognize and to understand that there might be a conflict in attempting to fully participate in both, even as we recognize that both are good and desirable. If we attempt to follow both, then we are failing to actually recognize the situation and the particularity of the traditions involved.

Not only can one not follow both religious traditions, one cannot see every religion as one. The recognition of difference is important because the alternative can be false universalism. Langdon Gilkey, in his essay, “Plurality and Its Theological Implications”, discusses the problems with universalism: “no one doctrine in any such

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

system of symbols (again, for example, God or human being) can be abstracted out and be established as universal in all religions, a point of unity with other religious traditions, God is as similar—and as different—from the ultimate principals of Hinduism and Buddhism as are the Christ and Krishna or the Christ and a Bodhisattva.”⁵⁶ For Gilkey, recognizing difference does not mean ignoring similarity, it means recognizing accurately that the world religions are not interchangeable and universal. Like Yearley’s spiritual regret, Gilkey understands each religion to be particular. In fact, for Gilkey universalism is a misrecognition of particular traditions. He says, “Recent decades have shown us clearly that no religious tradition is universal, and as a consequence that its claims to be universal distort rather than express its message.”⁵⁷ Only recognizing similarity is not recognition at all. For Gilkey, there is a level of manipulation of a tradition’s message when one makes it universal. One of the primary goals of recognition is to avoid misrecognition. Usually, it is to stop misrecognizing others so that misrecognition does not get internalized and perpetuated. However, in this case the misrecognition may originate as a misrecognition of everyone involved—a misrecognition of one’s own tradition and of the other traditions, by failing to see what makes them distinct and different. Gilkey’s remark about religious principals being both similar and different, captures nicely the dual project of recognition. Yes, people should recognize a common ground and the things that they share with others, but they must also recognize that

⁵⁶ Langdon Gilkey, “Plurality and Its Theological Implications,” In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 37-50. 41. Emphasis original to the text.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

people are not identical and that there are important distinctions especially when it comes to religious beliefs and non-beliefs.

Even though she is focused on similarity, Beaman shares the concern of misrecognizing one's neighbor as too similar to one's self. She says, "the path to similarity and the identification of commonalities includes an exploration of difference and then an identification of similarity without a view to universalizing."⁵⁸ Like Gilkey, it is crucial to avoid universalization for Beaman, even as we look for similarities. Being similar is not the same as being the same. Recognizing difference keeps the task of recognizing similarity in check.

However, that is not to say that recognizing difference does not have its own dangers. Beaman is mindful of the problems that can arise by being too keen to recognize difference. She says, "In the everyday, difference replicates power relations between minorities and majorities, and produces vulnerability to the vagaries of generosity, for that is the position of the 'giver' of accommodation and tolerance."⁵⁹ Difference creates space for hierarchies. By recognizing people as different, one can legitimize power imbalances. For Beaman, these imbalances are found in solutions to diversity like accommodation. The majority group of people who are the same get to decide how to incorporate or handle difference in their society, which means they might not fully recognize the other. Furthermore, Beaman is concerned with equality, which means for her that the space difference creates for hierarchy is deeply problematic.

⁵⁸ Beaman, 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

However, the solution cannot be to pretend that everyone is the same, as that also reinforces the power dynamic because the majority group assumes or pretends that everyone is like them, and thus a kid cannot bring their kirpan to school because it is the same as a knife. The power imbalance is not solved by ignoring difference.⁶⁰ How one goes about recognizing difference is important for avoiding the misuse of power.

Yet, recognizing similarity can also lead to the problem of not recognizing power imbalances.⁶¹ In his essay “The End of Dialogue”, John Milbank, discusses his concern with recognizing common ground: that it might not be so common. He says,

The same recognition exposes to view a stark paradox: The terms of discourse which provide both the favored categories for encounter with other religions—*dialogue*, *pluralism*, and the like—together with the criteria for the acceptable limits of the pluralist embrace—social justice, liberation, and so forth—are themselves embedded in a wider Western discourse become globally dominant.⁶²

The categories that people think are shared are in reality particular. Milbank suspects that putative “universalisms” are really imposed Western ideals. While Beaman is concerned that recognizing difference opens up space for hierarchy, Milbank addresses the possibility that recognizing similarity covers up a hierarchy that is already in existence. Like Gilkey, Milbank is concerned with how often universalism seems to be a substitute term for western ideals. Recognizing difference allows for the opportunity to

⁶⁰ To clarify, Beaman is not suggesting people ignore difference; instead she advocates for common ground and deep equality.

⁶¹ What follows builds on work of mine in a previous paper that explores this text.

⁶² John Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 174-191., 175. Emphasis original to the text.

acknowledge that there are different criteria and different understandings of how to interact with one's neighbors (or the other) that is not social justice or liberation.

Milbank's main concern with recognizing similarity seems to be that it will lead to misrecognition, and that too often people misrepresent the two groups in order to manufacture similarities between the two. Recognizing difference is an important task for Milbank and it requires work on the part of the recognizer. He says,

If today we wish to register again this difference, then we have to understand that it is not something which will be 'confessed' to us by the living voice of an interlocutor, whose very willingness to speak will probably betray an alienation from the seamless narrative succession of a tradition which never felt the need for dialogical self-justification, but whose words and acts are held valid in their very repetition of previous roles and sequences. Rather, it is we ourselves who have to conjure up this difference, not by listening to the most articulate of the living, but by an attentive reading of 'dead' texts pre-dating Western intrusion and practices relatively uncontaminated by Western influence.⁶³

For Milbank people must recognize difference at the level of tradition. He is concerned about the tradition being misrecognized when people turn to other people for the answers. Instead, Milbank encourages people to turn to texts. Dialogue for him is unproductive in recognizing difference because partaking in the conversation is in some way a distortion of those religious traditions. Milbank is focused on the religious traditions. Yet, this thesis explores the recognition of people, and it must ask: how practical is the recognition of a tradition as static and authoritative? Many traditions break into smaller subgroups, and within those subgroups people have differences of opinion over theology. What is the purpose of "recognizing" a tradition as a whole?

⁶³ Ibid., 178.

In many ways, seeing the project as recognizing the tradition as a whole will lead to misrecognition. Beaman discusses the concern held by some religious minorities, that they are often asked to speak on behalf of an entire religion. She quotes an interview conducted for her research project with a Pakistani woman who lives in Canada:

somebody says ‘oh, we are looking for someone to speak to from the Muslim community’...and so I get a call from our executor ‘oh, everybody’s working, this reporter wants to talk to somebody, you’re available’ and I can’t say no. Even if I didn’t want to project...or...claim I am Muslim, I get forced into being Muslim, the representative...I don’t want to carry that burden for the community. But somebody tells you nobody else is available, can you talk to them, then suddenly I become the face of the Muslim community.⁶⁴

The woman is uninterested in being the representative for an entire tradition. She describes such a task as a “burden”. In many ways, this woman’s commentary supports Milbank’s point about turning to texts to recognize difference. An individual from a religious minority community may not want to be tasked with educating others on the tradition or representing the entirety of another tradition. Yet, I do not think that turning to a text is a useful takeaway.

The woman’s comments on some level undermine the notion of any one person being able to represent an entire religion, how can the one text do this? Yes, the text might have more collective legitimacy, but texts are open to interpretation and some religious groups split into subcategories over interpretation. How will a text be a more successful model of recognition than one individual? A better approach to recognition

⁶⁴As quoted in Beaman, 34. In the paragraph that introduces this quote she references the following work, which features a portion of the quote Beaman uses, but uses male pronouns to refer to the interviewee: Caitlin Downie, “Negotiating Perceptions and Constructing Identities: Muslim Strategies in St. John’s Newfoundland” (master’s thesis, University of Ottawa, 2013). The portion of the quote can be found on page 84 of the Downie’s work.

might instead be talking with multiple people. One should not substitute one individual or one text for a comprehensive understanding of the tradition. In fact, especially practically speaking, one should be recognizing people not traditions. In this sense, the text is less illuminating than people because people live religion differently than doctrine presents it. In his book *The Heretical Imperative*, Peter Berger insists that “religion is not primarily a matter of reflection or of theorizing. The heart of the religious phenomenon is prereflective, pretheoretical experience.”⁶⁵ Experience is, of course, connected to tradition, but it seems more personal than doctrinal. It is not that one should not look at texts to gain a better understanding of religion, it is that only looking at texts will not provide a full understanding of religion. Returning to Milbank’s comments, if the concern is with people, then simply reading dead texts can lead to its own form of misrecognition. The difference that needs to be recognized is not simply at the base level of tradition but also how this difference plays out on the level of lived reality.

Of course, Milbank finds even these conversations to be betraying the religious tradition on some level because dialogue is recognizing more similarity than is actually there. He says of dialogue specifically,

Yet as it is impossible to neutrally specify such a reality independent of biography—the ‘writing of life’—dialogue obscures the truth-of-difference. One can only regard dialogue partners as equal, independently of one’s valuation of what they say, if one is already treating them, and the culture they represent, as valuable mainly in terms of their abstract possession of an autonomous freedom of spiritual outlook and open

⁶⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), 36.

commitment to the truth. In other words, if one takes them as liberal, western subjects, images of oneself.⁶⁶

Dialogue, for Milbank only works with constructed recognition, which reveals more about ourselves than others. Since the common ground is not universal, dialogue only works once religions have been comported to fit within the common ground. As Milbank points out this common ground is often western and liberal. It also means that one is not recognizing difference to the extent that they should.

However, within religious dialogue and pluralism in America, there is a more particular common ground: Protestantism. This sounds strange. How can interfaith dialogue require a common ground of Protestantism? Wouldn't that just be a monologue? The common ground is implicitly Protestant, in the sense that participants and traditions must meet characteristics that are often considered Protestant.⁶⁷ In her article, "Managing Religion: Religious Pluralism, Liberalism, and Governmentality", Tiffany Puett discusses concerns of power in religious pluralism. Similar to Milbank, she finds that, often what people consider to be common ground is not so common. She says of different stages of pluralism identified by William Hutchison, "Both stages, however, assume a Protestant establishment to which minority groups must assimilate or adapt."⁶⁸ Common ground in this case is something created, not something simply recognized.

Groups must be altered or alter themselves to see themselves as similar. This means that

⁶⁶ Milbank, 177-178.

⁶⁷ Tiffany Puett, "Managing Religion: Religious Pluralism, Liberalism, and Governmentality," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48, no. 3 (2013): 317-327, accessed December 13, 2017., 320. Puett is referencing the following work in the larger context surrounding the quote I have chosen: William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Have, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Puett, 320.

recognizing similarity is sometimes a coercive project. It is as if recognizers are saying to their neighbors “become like me, so that I can recognize you.” The recognition, on some levels, registers as false.

Puett’s concern, similar to Milbank’s, has much to do with liberalism. Yet, while Milbank sees a hiding of differences in dialogue, Puett sees it in pluralism more generally. She says, “Thus, I argue that pluralism, especially through its discursive practices, functions as a mode of liberal governance and legitimates liberal democratic norms.”⁶⁹ Pluralism functions on a common ground of liberal norms, and similar to Beaman’s concern with religious freedom, such a common ground is insufficient for recognizing all of one’s neighbors. Liberalism, for Puett, is closely tied to Protestantism. She says, “Early liberal theories arose in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and embodied a modern social transformation in which society was reframed around the individual, rather than the sovereign or the church.”⁷⁰ Protestantism is, on some level, the common ground for religious pluralism, as it has shaped the formation of modern society. This, of course, makes it difficult to recognize the religions of our neighbors because they are distorted into protestant frameworks so that people can recognize their neighbors. Puett discusses the pervasiveness of Protestantism in liberalism: “Thus, liberalism legitimates and drives processes of secularization and, at the same, privileges Protestant norms with their emphasis on individual morality and salvation.”⁷¹ The distortion of other religions privileges a specific religion and a specific subset of traditions within that

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

religion. Recognition is not a particularly useful tool if the only way to recognize other religions is for them to become more like the majority religion of a group, which is what happens when people seek to understand other religions by situating them in Protestant frameworks.

One solution might be to find a way to preserve difference as people recognize their neighbors, yet, Puett sees certain conceptions of difference as contributing to the problem. She says, “Difference itself gets naturalized. Discursive practices function to construct ‘difference’ as having an essential reality, rather than being the product of political processes and power dynamics.”⁷² In the same way that pluralism obfuscates that common ground is constructed, it also hides the fact that difference is in some ways constructed. This concern with difference is also held by Beaman, who sees the exacerbation of difference as a reason to recognize similarity. Puett, however, sees similar issues with similarity, and thus cannot turn to the recognition of similarity. She sees both as contributing to the power of Protestantism in pluralistic spaces. She says, “As a related discursive practice, pluralism also constructs the demarcation of difference. It functions as a set of tools or tactics for responding to, as well as ordering and disciplining, ‘other’ or ‘different’ religions, essentially establishing the hegemonic dominance of liberal and latently Protestant norms and defining what constitutes acceptable deviance from those norms.”⁷³ Puett expresses concerns that recognizing difference in pluralism gives the recognizer a new authority. Once a person recognizes

⁷² *Ibid.*, 324.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 323.

something or someone as different, he or she has to decide how it is going to fit within his or her community. The recognizer holds all of the power in the process of recognizing difference because in otherizing their neighbor they are also implicitly stating what they find to be normal. Yet, I do not think that recognizing difference needs to lead to this power dynamic, though it is a concern people should be mindful of. Why does recognizing difference make someone the gatekeeper to the community? Puett's point is wrapped up in pre-existing power; recognizing difference does not make one the gatekeeper, belonging to the dominate religion does. Yet, recognizing difference may also mean recognizing a lack of difference, by which I do not mean similarity. Instead recognizing difference may mean looking at the gatekeepers and seeing that they are not as different as people thought, or perhaps no one thought them to be different. If people recognize that the gatekeepers are all the same, then maybe there can be a concerted effort to diversify the gatekeepers, to redistribute the power, so that recognizing difference does not become hierarchical or the beginning of the process of assimilation. Or, perhaps we should all see ourselves as both the recognizer and the recognized.

Recognizing difference is crucial for genuinely understanding one's neighbors. It is important to avoid assuming that the basis for conversations across difference is universal. In other words, too often people mistake liberal and Protestant norms for universal principles. Recognizing difference can help acknowledge that conversations are happening from a particular perspective. While it is helpful to begin working across difference by emphasizing similarity, to truly respect and recognize our neighbors we must see that there are differences and try to avoid navigating the differences by

contorting them into our own frameworks. This can be a difficult task, as recognizing our neighbors and seeking to genuinely understand them can lead to fears about how this will impact our self-understanding. To truly participate in recognizing difference, people must reflect on how recognizing their neighbors can be tied to how we recognize ourselves.

To recognize difference in others, we must reflect on our own identities in order to understand what our neighbors are different from. Bringing our own identities into the project of recognition can reveal many anxieties we have about pluralism. Reflecting on our own identities should also lead us to consider how our interactions with our neighbors might impact or change our identities. It is important to explore how the anxiety and fear surrounding what might happen to our own identities when we recognize others, impacts our ability to participate in the project of recognition.

IV. Recognizing Ourselves

So much of recognizing the other, of seeing how we are similar, or acknowledging that we are different feels like it should not be complicated. What is holding people back from the path to understanding? Are there any concessions in recognition? So many of the conflicts or concerns people express in real life examples are that recognizing the other somehow changes one's self. At the heart of these conflicts seems to be a concern for identity. People worry about how the project of recognition will impact their own identities and traditions. This section explores this fear by looking at the connection between recognizing others and self-understanding. It also explores different theological and social responses to the fear of how recognizing the other might

change how we recognize ourselves. While some Christian theologians embrace the reflections and lessons that come from interfaith interactions, others balk at the idea of embracing a neighbor without tempering one's own faith. Exploring the concern of how recognition impacts the recognizer is crucial if the project of recognition is to be enacted. It is important to evaluate what people want to protect when they interact with their neighbors, and whether it actually needs protecting at all.

It might be helpful to, once again, turn to a real-life example of concerns over how one's neighbors might impact or influence one's own identity or tradition. Beaman looks at a maple sugar cabin in Canada. She describes trips to the cabin as a "ritual", which she ties to a stronger sense of identity in Quebec: "...it is not an exaggeration to say that anything that might threaten that ritual is viewed as threatening the very culture of Quebec."⁷⁴ There is a specific tradition that people feel needs to be protected in order to maintain a specific culture. Beaman writes of an incident where the ritual was perceived to be under threat due to Muslim visitors, who required dietary accommodations.⁷⁵ She notes that a commission found a difference in media representations of the event and the commission's representations of the event. Beaman quotes the commission's description of the media representation: "All of the other costumers were therefore obligated at noon that day to consume pea soup without ham and pork-free pork and beans (this prohibition was apparently subsequently extended to

⁷⁴ Beaman, 146.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

other sugarhouses).”⁷⁶ The participation of Muslims seemingly threatened Quebec’s culture by removing the non-halal meat from everyone else’s meal. The commission, however, has a different representation of the story, noting that the ham and pork free dishes “would apply solely to the members of the group.”⁷⁷ The tradition as a whole was less threatened than the media portrayed it to be. The fear was that the participation of others would take away from or change the Quebec culture surrounding sugar cabins. While the tradition and culture may be under less of a threat than the media portrayed it to be, this example shows that whether or not the loss of culture or identity is occurring, the fear that it is happening or could happen very much exists. Examining this fear of losing a sense of self or tradition to the other, may help establish a better understanding of the project of recognition.

The fear is that in recognizing the other we will no longer be able to recognize ourselves. This fear stems from the notion that recognition is a transformative process. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler says, “To ask for recognition or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other.”⁷⁸ Recognition, according to Butler, does change how we recognize ourselves, in part because it requires relationships with others. These relationships can be destabilizing. Butler says, quite famously, “Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing

⁷⁶ Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation* (Quebec City: Government of Quebec, 2008), 72. as quoted in Beaman, 146.

⁷⁷ Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, 72. as quoted in Beaman, 146.

⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 44.

something.”⁷⁹ Butler sees relationships as undermining a static sense of self, but she does not think this is a bad thing. It does, however, legitimate the fear that recognizing others means we may no longer recognize ourselves.

This fear needs to be addressed if recognition is to be achieved or even if recognition is to be named a goal in pluralistic societies. The existential crisis cannot be avoided, and it should not be avoided, in part, because it is in many ways valid. Recognition is tied to the identity of the recognizer. In fact, for Honneth, self-discovery may be a primary part of recognition, at least in his exploration of Mead. Honneth says, “The concept of the ‘me’ that Mead uses here to characterize the result of this original relation-to-self is supposed to make it terminologically clear that individuals can only become conscious of themselves in the object -position.”⁸⁰ This means that people cannot understand themselves as subjects. They must otherize themselves, or they must use the other to understand themselves.

In fact, while this thesis has been discussing the importance of recognition in the development of the identity of the recognized, recognition is also crucial in the development of the identity of the recognizer. Honneth quotes Mead as saying, “Such a ‘me’ is not then an early formation which is then projected and ejected into the bodies of other people to give them the breadth of human life. It is rather an importation from the field of social objects into an amorphous, unorganized field of what we call inner

⁷⁹Ibid., 23. For further reading on “undoing” see also Catherine Keller, “Unsayings and Undoing: Judith Butler and the Ethics of Relational Ontology” in *Cloud of the Impossible* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) 215-236.

⁸⁰Honneth, 74. In this quoted section Honneth is discussing the following work: George Herbert Mead, “The Mechanism of Social consciousness,” in *Selected Writings* (Indianapolis: Library of the Liberal Arts, 1964), 134-41., 139.

experience.”⁸¹ In other words, the other is used to craft an understanding of ourselves, whether that be using the other to create a distinction, “I am not that”, or using the other to see something in ourselves, “I am that”. How we recognize other people is a tool used to develop self-understanding. An existential concern is, of course, valid. Recognizing the other might change the way we recognize ourselves. Maybe recognition *should* change the way we understand ourselves.

However, the existential concern fails to see how the relationship or roles in recognition are reciprocal. There is not just the majority or dominant religious tradition recognizing the other. Different people are simultaneously taking on the role of recognized and recognizer. Everyone involved is both of those things, and thus it only makes sense that recognizing the other could change us, because at the same time we are that other being recognized.

A. *The Impossibility of a Pure Identity*

An important question to ask one’s self in relation to the existential concerns of recognition, is what are we afraid of losing, in the process of recognition. If much of the reluctance to recognize the other as someone who is both similar to and different from one’s self is the loss of identity, then it is important to evaluate that identity. Let us return to Beaman’s example of the rising tension and media concern over a maple sugar house in Canada and the accommodations it made for a Muslim group.⁸² Beaman herself notes that the syrup house in particular is something very closely associated with

⁸¹ George Herbert Mead, “The Mechanism of Social consciousness,” in *Selected Writings* (Indianapolis: Library of the Liberal Arts, 1964), 134-41., 140. As quoted in Honneth, 75. Honneth notes that essays in *Selected Writings* were collected by Andrew J. Reck.

⁸² Beaman, 146-147.

Canadian culture.⁸³ It would seem to me, that the primary concern is protecting the purity of Canadian identity. However, lest one think, that this is solely a concern of national identity, the same could be said of Christians concerned with pluralism.⁸⁴ The essence of what it means to be Canadian or Christian, or fill in the blank, implies that there is some piece of identity worth protecting, some integral pure aspect of a tradition, culture, or group that must avoid being tarnished at the cost of our interactions with others. Yet, our identities and traditions are not pure. A person could be a Canadian Muslim, and American Christian, a Marxist Christian etc.... Those identities do not even begin to include occupations, gender, sexual orientation, and a variety of other groups and aspects that we take in as part of our identities. In her work, Beaman points out that identities are often far more complex than acknowledged, and that often the religious other is reduced to just their religious identity, and some pure form of that. She notes interviews in which people express concern at the idea that they must represent their entire religion to others, because people may not understand that individuals hold nuanced religious perspectives.⁸⁵ She is critical of a focus or over emphasis of religious identity. She says, "Religion is, after all, only one of many identities and it is also fluid over the life course. This complicated matrix of identity rigidity, flexibility, and change is often incongruent with the categories we use to study religious diversity."⁸⁶ Beaman sees that studies on religious diversity and pluralism over emphasize religion, when there

⁸³ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁴ Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 61.

⁸⁵ Beaman, 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.

are plenty of other differences and identities with which people in a diverse world must navigate. She also challenges a notion of recognition, by pointing towards the fluidity of religion. Recognition, if it is to accurately capture the other person—and Taylor points out that accuracy is crucial to the identity formation of the recognized—must not be a static project. People must be constantly recognizing the other, or at the very least frequently reevaluating their understanding of the other. This helps to transform the recognition of difference, and not just because it complicates religious identity—people must recognize that individuals who all believe in the same religion hold different interpretations and experiences. Recognition of difference must recognize how an individual’s identity is different now than it used to be. There are not pure identities, because humans are creatures who are shifting throughout life, and the project of recognition must recognize this and adapt.

The critique of a pure identity is not just rooted in the complexity of the identity of individuals, but also the ways that traditions impact one another. Beaman sees the influence of religions on other religions already existing in her work. One such place where this is the case, is in the concept of “contaminated diversity”.⁸⁷ Beaman says, “contaminated diversity...implies the use of common ground and the borrowing of language, gesture, or practice that unravels the thread of distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them.’”⁸⁸ Beaman finds examples of this in different religious groups who share a cultural or geographic space who use the terms of one religion to describe the practice of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

another. In one particular example a Muslim man uses the word “puja” to discuss his prayers.⁸⁹ Pure religions and pure identities do not exist. What are we afraid of losing? And how do we draw an arbitrary border line? One’s religious identity or one’s national identity can be influenced by one another and by trends and economics and social norms, but another religion feels like a bridge too far? On the one hand, just the acknowledgement that there is not a pure identity or tradition does important work in combatting the notion that people must reject recognizing the religious other to protect the sacredness or the essence of their tradition. On the other hand, it says something interesting that religion is allowed to be under the influence of many other things, but not other religions. Why are religions framed as being in direct conflict with one another? Why does the arbitrary gate keeper let in Marxism, or capitalism, democratic ideals, and cultural norms, but not Islam or Hinduism, or Buddhism?

Gatekeepers often have a vested interest in protecting their power. After all, the job of a gatekeeper is to protect what the gate surrounds. Keeping out others is part of the job. Puett, whose work is illuminating in understanding just how Protestant and liberal gatekeeping is, also finds that gatekeepers have a hard time with identities that are less than pure, or maybe I should say more than pure. She says, “They [Bender and Klassen] identified the limitations of pluralism, including the confines of the discrete, observable boundaries that pluralism requires of religions, pointing out that the hegemony of religious pluralism often insists that hybridity and mixtures lack

⁸⁹ Ibid., 18, 21.

authenticity and legitimacy.”⁹⁰ Puett sees that hybridity undermines the power of pluralism because it does not fit the constructed common ground. There could be many reasons for this. On the one hand, hybridity can make it harder to recognize difference because there exist people who fall somewhere in the middle of these differences and bridge the gap. On the other hand, hybridity also makes it harder to recognize similarity—especially if similarity is conflated with sameness. There is a hint of common ground, but it inches towards difference. It is as if someone is saying “that’s familiar, oh, wait; never mind. It’s more different than I thought.” Hybridity can make it harder for people to grasp what they are trying to recognize, as they are unable to find either similarity or difference as an entry point.

Yet, this is not the only way people live their lives. To be sure, people may try to understand things by categorizing them. There is a desire to categorize ourselves and others by contrasting them. Sometimes we develop a grasp on things by determining what they are not. In the context of religious diversity, this can take an interesting turn. In her book, *Beyond Chrismukkah*, Simira K. Mehta looks at interfaith marriages and families. She discusses the navigation of Christmas by families and couples who come from Christian and Jewish backgrounds, saying, “couples often had to explicitly promise to exclude a Christmas tree from their home in order to have a Jewish wedding, rather

⁹⁰ Puett, 323. In this quoted section Beaman is referencing the following work: Pamela E. Klassen and Courtney Bender, “Introduction: Habits of Pluralism,” in *After Pluralism, Reimagining Religious Engagement*, ed. Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1-28.

than, for instance, promise to light Shabbat candles.”⁹¹ Sometimes people need to delineate concepts from one another. This is one of the concerns of misrecognition, that people will internalize it and end up identifying as something they are not. It feels as if there are clear boundaries. However, Beaman shows that those boundaries are not clear, and Mehta’s book looks at interfaith families. People (or couples and families) do not categorize nicely. People seem to be afraid of muddying up categories, identities, and traditions that are already messy. They think that in complicating a pure identity they are losing something that is essential to their identity. There is a sense of loss that comes with messy identities and traditions. People equate messiness with destruction, and while a hybrid identity or a “messy” tradition is changed, it is not necessarily destroyed. People fear the messiness they can see coming, but they seemingly forget the messes that they already live with. In other words, the gatekeepers want to protect what is inside the fence, and yet, there are already so many things that have gotten past the gate. How is it that people do not know what to do with hybrid identities when those identities exist all around them? It is as if the gatekeepers have become so preoccupied with what is outside the fence, that they have not reflected on what is inside the fence. In terms of religious pluralism, people have worked so hard to stop other traditions and individuals from distorting their own tradition and community, that they are no longer reflecting on what that tradition or community looks like, particularly in practice. In fact, the things outside the gate—the religious (or non-religious) neighbors—can help illuminate what is inside

⁹¹ Samira K. Mehta, *Beyond Chrismukkah: The Christian-Jewish Interfaith Family in the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 11.

the gate—the traditions and communities the gatekeeper belongs to, and even the gatekeeper themselves. For if some things have already gotten past the gates, and people live messy, hybrid lives, then the gatekeeper does not seem to have a consistent policy. Some theologians would suggest that the gatekeeper stop being arbitrary and let more things in. There are several reasons for this, and the first is that if one needs to isolate their faith and religion this much for it to not be damaged, then it probably is not as strong as one thinks it is. The second reason is faith and religion can be so much stronger when one engages with and is exposed to religious and theological others.

One Christian theologian who encourages theological work with other traditions is Francis Clooney. In his book, *Comparative Theology*, Clooney discusses the importance of navigating the complexity of interreligious commentary. He says, “In the context of reading, reflecting on other religious realities with an openness and willingness to learn need not threaten readers’ faith; nor need faith to be an obstacle to learning. What matters most is a commitment to the careful and slow learning of texts, reading the other as we would read our own.”⁹² Clooney reassures people that an openness to recognizing other religions is not a barrier to faith, and that one’s own religious identity need not be a barrier to recognizing the other. In fact, he draws on religious perspective to encourage recognition: “reading the other as we would read our own.”⁹³ One’s own religious identity informs an approach to the religious other. In the case of Clooney, he works with texts and is calling for a recognition of the text. In some ways, his

⁹² Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 63-64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

commitment to accurately recognizing the text of another draws on self-identity, where one is recognizing and thinking about how one reads one's own religious texts. There is potential for misrecognition—people do not read or interpret sacred texts the same way—however, Clooney is talking about commitment and about recognizing truth.

Clooney recognizes that this task is complex and people must navigate the truth claims of both the recognized and the recognizer. He says,

Interreligious commentary is interesting and difficult because complicated loyalties are at play when we venture to read reflectively and slowly the religious text of another tradition. If we pick up the text of a tradition that believes the sacred truths are contained therein, such belief cannot be neglected or dismissed by careful readers, particularly theological readers who do not believe that words and truths are easily separated. Nor can such readers imagine that reading is a merely neutral activity, with no long-term effects. They will then have to consider what they learn by reading, alongside the convictions they have brought to the reading from their own traditions....They will have to respect the potency of the text of the other tradition, and in turn think more deeply about their own religious identity as textually mediated.⁹⁴

There is a lot to unpack in this statement. Clooney believes that the sacredness of a text needs to be recognized, while simultaneously realizing that the text is not sacred in the same way to others. He calls on people to recognize and take seriously truth claims and sacredness; these things cannot be cast aside for the sake of recognizing common ground. It is crucial that people fully recognize the other religion and that cannot be done without acknowledging the “potency of the text of the other tradition”.⁹⁵ The work of recognition must be done, and it allows people to think about both how they would like to be recognized and how they recognize the sacredness of their own texts. In thinking through

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

the recognition of sacredness and truth claims that one does not believe in, one must think through the sacredness of their own truth claims. While some think that these deeply held claims pose problems to living well together, to not take them seriously diminishes the possibility of living fully together. Stanley Fish's critique of multiculturalism hits a similar but slightly different point, that in many ways multiculturalism does not take the ideas within it seriously.⁹⁶ Fish's point is that there are some ideas that when taken seriously need to be excluded from the conversation, but the point remains that to take religious viewpoints seriously, truth cannot be fully removed from the conversation, even if it makes peace more difficult.

B. Finding Stability

While I challenge the notion that there is a pure identity to preserve in the avoidance of recognition, there is still something important about recognizing both difference and one's own identity and recognizing that there is something distinct in different identities. William Connolly explores this in his book *Identity/Difference*. He says, "Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness to secure its own self-certainty."⁹⁷ For there to be something to recognize, there will be difference. Difference helps us understand ourselves, but it also creates something we want to protect. Connolly says, "This constellation of constructed others now becomes both essential to the truth of the powerful identity and a threat to it. The threat is posed not merely by *actions* the other might take to injure or defeat the true identity but by the

⁹⁶ Fish, 343.

⁹⁷ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 64.

very visibility of its mode of *being* as other.”⁹⁸ Connolly hints at the desire for purity by acknowledging that difference seems like a threat to our identity, even as it is integral in forming our identities. Difference and identity are complicated but the two are unavoidably linked.

It might be helpful to look at how particular religious identities navigate what makes them distinct, and whether or not this distinction requires a defense from different religions. For Christians, theologian Paul Knitter explores what is essential about Christianity and Christian identity; he looks at what must exist in some form, or what must be recognized in order for a person to be considered Christian. He says, “For this person Jesus is truly the son of God, the savior, mediator, word of God, messiah, the living one. Without the *feeling*—without an experiential awareness—that inspires the “truly” one cannot be, one would not want to be, a Christian.”⁹⁹ For Knitter, recognizing Jesus as savior is crucial to an understanding of Christianity, but what that means exactly is up to interpretation. The identity is not pure, even if there is a specific element to it. Still, there is a concern for some that pluralism comes at the cost of identity, and Knitter describes the concern of others: “To place Jesus in a community of equals with other revealers is to steal the stamina of the Christian disciple’s commitment and to dilute the courage of the Christian prophet’s denouncement of evil. It may make for a comfortable community of religions, but at the cost of Christian identity.”¹⁰⁰ The way religious pluralism is framed, puts it in conflict with the identity of Christianity, but for Knitter this

⁹⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁹ Knitter, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61.

is not the case, in part because Christianity is not a pure identity. There are a vast amount of denominations and interpretations, and not everything is exactly as it seems. Knitter says “When one knows that Jesus is truly savior, one does *not* know that he is the *only* savior...Discipleship requires ‘truly’; it does not seem to require ‘solely.’”¹⁰¹ The essence of Christianity does not need to be isolated; it does not need to be in conflict with pluralism. For Christians, there is no need to be on the defense because Knitter points out that there is a way to maintain what is recognized as distinct in Christianity, without pushing away the project of recognizing others. When the task of protecting the identity does not mean to shield it from other truth claims, it opens space for truth to be a part of the pluralist conversation. While Beaman shies away from discussing the truth,¹⁰² Knitter provides an opportunity for truth to be a part of the conversation that is not inherently steeped in conflict. Often religion and truth claims are framed as zero sum, if one is true then all others are false,¹⁰³ but that assumption does not have to be the reality, and Knitter opens that space up to conversations that might otherwise get shut out when he reminds Christians that such a framing is not necessary for the Christian identity.

Yet, even theologians who embrace dialogue disagree with Knitter’s solution to the concern of protecting truth and identity. Cornille, engages with the work of Knitter directly and finds herself unconvinced. For her, commitment is a crucial component of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁰² Beaman, 93-94.

¹⁰³ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 75. Gregory says of Christian doctrinal claims: “Such claims explicitly or implicitly affirm that certain things are true, which logically always implies that others are false. For example, if God is real, then atheism is false...” While Gregory is talking about Christian truth claims, I believe this true false dichotomy is assumed of other religious truth claims as well.

interreligious dialogue, and an approach that factored in equality alongside truth conflicts with that component. She says, “Commitment to the truth of one religion logically excludes recognition of the equal truth of others, and religious commitment generally entails a sense of belonging that does not present itself as a priori subject to change.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, Knitter’s theological understanding cannot logically follow commitment to Christian truth. However, Knitter’s theology asks why exclusivism is the logic of truth? Why can’t both things be true? This space that is opened up between affirming one truth and rejecting other truths should not be feared, and does not diminish a commitment to a particular religious truth. As seen earlier in this thesis, Cornille advocates for recognition of truth in other religions, so long as that truth is understood as less than the truth of one’s own commitment. This begs the question, if one’s own truth is superior, why even bother learning about the lesser truths that can be discovered in other religions? Cornille does see value in dialogue and seeing pieces of truth in other traditions, but the recognition remains limited for the sake of one’s own tradition. Cornille is a Christian theologian, but the notion of seeing one’s truth as superior is something I think she would offer to all other religious people.

Cornille, as a supporter of dialogue, has her own approach to avoiding concerns of how interfaith interactions impact one’s own identity. For her commitment is a component of dialogue alongside others, such as humility. Humility helps create some of the space that commitment seems closed off to. She says, “It seems clear that the traditional Christian notion of humility does not necessarily imply recognition of the

¹⁰⁴Cornille, 84.

incompleteness, finitude, or fallibility of Christian teachings themselves.”¹⁰⁵ There is still room for interaction with difference and recognition of others that does not demean one’s own faith and identity. For Cornille, humility provides this space. One could also make the argument that humility is a crucial aspect of Knitter’s solution: people should be so humble that they acknowledge that their truth might not be the only truth. For Cornille, such humility is in excess because it is not tempered by commitment.

But Cornille is not the only theologian to critique Knitter’s perspective on whether something can be ‘truly’ without being ‘solely’. These critiques are crucial to understand because they can lead to hesitance in the project of recognition. Stanley Hauerwas, in his piece “The end of American Protestantism”, discusses concerns with a faith based in freedom. He says,

The story that you have no story except the story you choose when you had no story produces people who say things such as, ‘I believe Jesus is Lord – but that’s just my personal opinion.’ The grammar of this kind of avowal obviously reveals a superficial person. But such people are the kind many think crucial to sustain democracy. For such a people are necessary in order to avoid the conflicts that otherwise might undermine the order, which is confused with peace, necessary to sustain a society that shares no goods in common other than the belief that there are no goods in common.¹⁰⁶

There is a lot to unpack here. First, I want to clarify that Hauerwas is not directly critiquing the position of Knitter, though he is critiquing a similar position. Knitter says that Jesus is truly savior, he just might not be the only revelation or truth, he does not say that this means that Jesus is not true for everyone—though admittedly such a stance is

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, “The end of American Protestantism,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, July 2, 2013. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/07/02/3794561.htm>

complicated. Yet, Hauerwas describes an approach geared towards pluralism as shallow, as if to say a faith that does not demand itself to be the truth of others is inadequate and not deep. I profoundly disagree. The theologians explored on the topic of recognition and participants in interfaith dialogue are not shallowly dismissing the hard truth of the exclusivity of religion; they are reflecting and engaging with questions of truth, difference, and community. It is also problematic to assume that such a stance has no common ground except the reality that there is no common ground. In many ways, this is a negative understanding of freedom. Yet, Honneth and Steadman show that freedom and rights are a common ground, and that freedom and rights are a good. There is deep commitment to one's neighbors in recognition and there is a great commitment to faith (or none in the case of Steadman and other atheists/agnostics) in acknowledging that what you believe is not what others believe, and that what you believe should not be what everyone believes. For Yearley, this looks like practicing spiritual regret; the commitment means acknowledging the loss of another practice and the inability to believe it all, while still seeing other religions as legitimate. The notion of regret and the possibility of conflict remain. Acknowledging that what one believes does not have to be what everyone else believes does not eliminate difficult conversations about faith; it does not mean that everyone is in agreement about what to believe or how to live life. Such a position creates conflict with people who hold a different understanding of religion, such as Hauerwas himself. As Knitter explains commitment to one's neighbors is part of living out what Christianity is.¹⁰⁷ The dismissal of not wanting to cause disruption can

¹⁰⁷ Knitter, 95.

also be a dismissal of a commitment to care. What Hauerwas perceives as a shallow response to religious diversity, others see as a committed way of living out a specifically Christian calling within the love your neighbor tenet.¹⁰⁸

While Hauerwas and Knitter are theologians who disagree about whether or not the presence of religious options distorts faith, scholars in other fields provide insight on the topic. Political theorist Charles Taylor, whose work on recognition has been central to this thesis, deals with concerns of fragilization, among many others, in his book *A Secular Age*.¹⁰⁹ Taylor affirms, to some degree, the existential concern of recognition: that seeing the other fragilizes tradition. He says, “The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering. This fragilization is then increased by the fact that great numbers of people are not firmly embedded in any such context, but are puzzled, cross-pressured, or have constituted by bricolage a sort of median position.”¹¹⁰ In other words, the alternative allows people to second guess their religious tradition, or to sit in an in-between space. For Taylor, there is something that lacks stability in a religiously plural society. To recognize a religious other lets other possibilities into your life. Recognizing the other may lead to what people fear; it could distort, weaken, or destabilize one’s own religious identity.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 95-96.

¹⁰⁹ The following exploration of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* builds on work I have written in a previous paper.

¹¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 556.

Yet, even Taylor does not see this destabilization as inherently weakening one's faith. In a footnote about the previously quoted section, Taylor clarifies his fragilization, saying,

I mean by this [fragilization] that greater proximity of alternatives has led to a society in which more people change their positions that is 'convert' in their lifetimes, and/or adopt a different position than their parents. Life-time and intergenerational switches become more common. But this has nothing to do with a supposed greater fragility of the faith that they end up with (or decide to remain with)...On the contrary, the faith arising in this contemporary predicament can be stronger just because it has faced the alternative without distortion.¹¹¹

Recognizing the other can actually allow one's faith to develop further. When one engages in the project of recognition, one reflects on one's identity, which means that one is reevaluating and potentially reaffirming one's own religious beliefs. Recognizing the other does not have to be as destabilizing as the existential crisis that sometimes accompanies recognition implies. Or perhaps, the fear of one's own faith or identity changing as a result of recognizing the other does not take into account that this change can be for the better.

Of course, this change may not always feel like it is for the better. Taylor notes that this stronger feeling can be in "the faith that they end up with"¹¹². Conversion, for Taylor is on the table in religious pluralism. To recognize the other could potentially be to recognize one's future or new tradition. This possibility may seem horrifying or deeply troubling. One might ask who wants a stronger faith if its not in what they currently believe? Yet, maybe the better question is why would people hold on to their

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 833-834 n19.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 834n19.

faith so tightly if something else may fit them better? Hauerwas, would mostly likely take issue with my decision to discuss religion by fit, as if it is an article of clothing you try on. However, there is something to be said about one's faith if at the end of an encounter with the other you are moved to believe what they believe. For many who write on interfaith/interreligious dialogue conversion is off the table.¹¹³ For Sallie B. King, this means that in these interactions you cannot try to convert the other to what you believe.¹¹⁴ For Catherine Cornille, this means that it is okay if there is not a possibility of a person participating to convert.¹¹⁵ Yet, for Taylor the possibility of conversion in religiously diverse societies is present. The idea that there are other possibilities out there has been planted. The presence of other possibilities is inescapable and yet not inevitable. For Taylor one's own faith may be strengthened or one's new, converted faith may be strengthened, but ultimately you can end up with something stronger if you are open to the reflective work that comes with recognizing religious others and thinking through other faith claims. While I do not mean to minimize the emotional pain and turmoil that can accompany religious conversion, my point is that to fear it is in some ways to insult one's current faith. If it is not strong enough to withstand exposure to the other, then it is probably not very strong on its own. Failing to recognize the religious other allows one to live in ignorance, ignoring problems with their own faith. While other religions can destabilize one's faith because they reveal what some might consider

¹¹³ Cornille, 90-91. and Sallie B. King, "Interreligious Dialogue". *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, ed. Chad Meister (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101-114. 106.

¹¹⁴ King, 106.

¹¹⁵ Cornille, 90-91.

to be lacking or insufficient, they do not actively take one's faith away. The reflection illuminates what is there, it does not necessarily change what is there but how one relates to it. If one fears parting with a portion of their identity that feels essential to who they are, then one should consider that if you can part with it, then it is probably no longer essential to who you are. Thus, while the experience might be frightening and uncertain it is not frightening for the reasons one might think.

While much of this conversation has focused on coping with the fear of changing one's identity, or how one's identity can be maintained. The reality of the situation is that in recognizing the other, people should embrace how this changes their own faith. In his essay, "Plurality and Its Theological Implications", Langdon Gilkey discusses what recognition requires,

To recognize, as one does or must in dialogues, the presence of truth and of grace, validity of symbol and efficacy of practice, in another faith is radically to relativize not only one's own religious faith but the *referent* of that faith, the revelation on which it is dependent. Thus to be in dialogue is also to be driven on a new theological quest—namely, the effort so to interpret one's symbols as neither to exclude nor offend this other. That is to say, some mode of new theological self-understanding is necessary, and understanding that includes and supplements what the other offers instead of rejecting it as false or incorporating it as merely one vista in the panorama shaped by one's viewpoint.¹¹⁶

Recognition—at least the recognition of the existence of truth in other religions—requires a new theology for Gilkey. It is not simply that one might change, but that one should change. This interaction demands rethinking one's theology. While people fear that interacting with their neighbors might impact their theology, perhaps their theology

¹¹⁶ Gilkey, 40-41. Emphasis original to the text. I want to clarify that Gilkey is not necessarily advocating for this change or embracing this reaction to pluralism, but he is describing what he thinks this type of recognition requires, which is a new theology.

needs to change. There are many genres of theology that address contemporary problems as people experience them. Feminist and queer theologies are one example of theologies that see how certain interpretations of the Christian tradition should change. Similarly, recognizing the other might lead one to discover that one's theology should change to better reflect the religious experience of living in a pluralistic society.

There is a major concern that once we participate in the project of recognition we will no longer recognize ourselves. I think that this fear is legitimate in the sense that the project of recognition does change participants, but that does not necessarily make one's self unrecognizable. Recognition—both as a recognizer and the recognized—is a transformative process. When people recognize their neighbors it invites them to reflect on their own identities and traditions. While Taylor points out that one might convert to a new tradition, even he finds that this does not damage the strength of one's faith. From a Christian perspective there are many theological responses to difference: as truth, as an opportunity for reflection and growth, and as a path towards new theology. If recognition does not change us, then we are doing it wrong. If recognition did not change anything, then recognizing others and being recognized ourselves would not be important. Yet, recognition does matter, it shapes how we understand ourselves, it shapes our communities, and it can help us navigate conflict—not eliminate it, but potentially navigate it. Recognition changes how we and others understand ourselves, and even though that reality might be frightening, it is the reality of the situation.

Conclusion

Recognition as a transformative process is complex and nuanced. The project aspires for people to see themselves and their neighbors fully. People reflect on what binds them together, and why we offer recognition to one another in the first place. Often there is something shared, on the most basic of levels be it freedom, geography, or some small slice of our identities. Yet to truly see our neighbors one must also recognize the ways that we are distinct and different, even if it makes recognizing one another more difficult. People should resist the temptation to frame their understanding of others in their own frameworks. As Milbank and Puett point out, there is a fine line between recognizing common ground and misrepresenting something else by re-describing it in one's own terms. Recognizing difference can be difficult because it is hard to understand something that does not exist in one's own framework or at the very least exists differently in one's own framework.

Recognition, then, requires relationships. It requires that seeing our neighbor fully means getting to know them fully, beyond even their religious identity.¹¹⁷ Recognition is also relational because it is ongoing and mutual. Since recognition is a transformative process, people are changed by what they recognize, and since recognizers are also recognized this requires further recognition by the recognized in their role of recognizer. As people are transformed they must continue to be recognized, and thus we are all tasked with continuing to recognize our neighbors. Of course, once the project has momentum it will not always feel as difficult as it might at the start, where there is more room for growth and a need for understanding. This continual process of recognition is

¹¹⁷ Beaman especially emphasizes seeing people beyond their religious identity.

also helpful for avoiding instrumentalizing our neighbors. Because the process of recognition is, well, a process, one cannot see them as simply something they have to learn about once and move on to the next different neighbor. Recognition can build relationships and helps us to recognize our neighbors as neighbors.

As explored in the previous section, building these relationships across difference can be frightening and requires vulnerability. Recognizing our neighbors changes us. Yet, what alternative is there? One could isolate oneself, or insulate oneself by surrounding oneself with likeminded people. However, to do so would be to misrecognize reality. To shut others out is foolish. Either one will pretend that everyone is the same, or one will be a staunch gatekeeper letting nothing in, but as previously discussed some things have already slipped past, and to pretend they are the same is still just pretending. The reality is that we live with people who are different from us, who believe different things than us and in different ways. To not recognize neighbors or to misrecognize them is to fail them.

Across the world danger and acts of violence harm religious people. In the academic year I have been writing this thesis, there have been mass shootings in places of worship. The Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States, and two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand are just two examples of violence perpetuated against Jews and Muslims respectively.¹¹⁸ Recognition is not a cure-all for

¹¹⁸ Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele and Sabrina Tavernise, "11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged with 29 Counts," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 27, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html>; Matthew S. Schwartz, Richard Gonzales, and Barbra Campbell, "49 Dead in 'Terrorist Attack' at 2 Mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand," *NPR*, March 14, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/14/703644006/shots-fired-at-christchurch-new-zealand-mosque>

these acts of violence, and I do not think that it should be offered as a solution to such situations. Public safety, policy, and so much more must be considered and explored. What I mean to show is that the project of recognition exists in a world with stakes. To think recognition is only about one's self and what it might do to the potency of one's faith, is a stance that is situated in privilege. It situates a person as solely recognizer and then fails to take on the responsibility of recognizing others. The world we live in is connected and diverse, and it demands that we recognize ourselves as the recognized as well as the recognizer.

There is a lot to keep track of in recognition. People are seeing what they share with their neighbors and what is different. Within that process is self-reflection about what is shared and what makes one's self unique. There is growth in the project of recognition as we seek to live deeply and fully with one another. Admittedly, there are some viewpoints that can be recognized and not affirmed. Just because someone can understand something does not mean they must endorse it—especially dangerous rhetoric. One might also find that some viewpoints that seem to be stubbornly against recognizing a deeper framework like truth, actually contain space to recognize that deeper concept of truth in their neighbors. Recognition is a project that is imperfect and complicated and up for debate. Some people recognize freedom, others truth, and others a difference that should not be covered. The first step just might be recognizing others as one's neighbors. This does not mean that they have to be like you, or think like you, or value what you value; it means that when we see other people, when we live with other

people, we realize that we must embark on the project of recognition together; we can only hope as well as fear that we might be transformed.

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