

Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World*

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In his article about religion, religions, and the religious, theorist Jonathan Smith points out the fact that “The term 'religion' has had a long history. The better part of what happened prior to the 16th century is irrelevant to the contemporary use of the term.”¹ Although in posing it in this way, Smith runs the risk of erasing the importance of the meaning of the concept of religion prior to the 16th century, his expression succeeds in placing an adequate emphasis on the context which beginning with Immanuel Wallerstein would be known as the long 16th century.² In the 16th century it was not only that the content of concept of religion expanded, but that the very terms in which religion was approached and understood in the West changed. And it is these terms that define what we mean by religion and the study and theory of religion in modernity. With this idea, Smith breaks with a more traditional view that traces the basis of the theory of religion only from the Protestant Reformation or the European Enlightenment onward. It is within this historical and conceptual frame – which brings to light the complete panorama of the first and second phases of modernity – that the reflections of this section are situated.

I have explored elsewhere that the concept of *religio* played a crucial role in the epistemic strategies employed by groups struggling for effective participation in imperial power during and after the Western Roman Empire. I will show here that the conceptual coordinates that defined the “fight for the empire” and the forms of social classification of the 4th century, and of later centuries prior to the “discovery” and conquest of the Américas, would change drastically in the 16th century. The relationship between religion and empire would be at the center of a dramatic transformation from a system of power based on religious differences to one based on racial differences. It is for this reason that in modernity, the dominant episteme would not only be defined by the tension and mutual collaboration between the idea of religion and the imperial vision of the known world, but rather through a dynamic relation between empire, religion, and the peoples that appeared in those parts of the world which were previously unknown to or believed to be uninhabited by the Europeans (Africa south of the Sahara first and the Americas afterwards). It is with regard to these peoples that the idea of race is cemented, if not born in modernity.³ Ideas about race, religion, and empire functioned as significant axes in the imaginary of the emergent modern/colonial world. It is with respect to these points that I

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1. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269.

2. See the first two volumes of Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (London: Academic Press, 1980).

3. See Anibal Quijano, “‘Raza,’ etnia, y ‘nación’: cuestiones abiertas,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui y Europa: la otra cara del descubrimiento*, ed. Roland Forgues (Lima, Peru: Amauta, 1992); Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

would like to expand upon Smith's observations from the previously-cited essay.

Smith begins his article by citing the second earliest inventory of the “New World” in English, *A Treatyse of the Newe India* (1553). From that work, he cites the following: “At Columbus first comming thether, the inhabitantes went naked, without shame, religion or knowledge of God.”⁴ Smith also cites the *Crónica del Perú*, where Pedro de Cieza writes of the indigenous people in the Northern Andes that “they had no religion whatsoever, from what we understood.”⁵ Smith derives various conclusions from these observations, including the idea that “religion” is in these cases not a theological category, but rather an anthropological one, and that the concept presupposes universal applicability such that the absence of religion surprises the *conquistadors* and chroniclers. After discovering the meaning of the term, Smith traces other uses in later writings, granting particular importance to definitions that emerged within the context of the Protestant Reformation and the era of the Enlightenment. I would like to linger for a moment at the time of the “discovery” and conquest, since I believe that it is there that one can elucidate a profound meaning for the term religion in the modern age and its connections with the idea of race and forms of imperial power.

The first thing we need to ask ourselves is what it meant to refer to the indigenous peoples as subjects that did not have religion. Columbus uses the idea in the very first encounter with the indigenous on the 12th of October 1492:

Ellos andan todos desnudos como su madre los parió.... Y yo creí e creo que aquí vienen de tierra firme a tomarlos por captivos. Ellos deven ser buenos servidores y de buen ingenio, que veo que muy presto dizen todo lo que les dezía. Y creo que ligeramente se harían cristianos, que me pareçio que ninguna secta tenían.⁶

Later, on Tuesday the 27th of November 1492, Columbus also writes that:

Cuanto será el beneficio que de aquí se puede aver, yo no lo escribo. Es cierto, Señores Príncipes, que donde ay tales tierras que deve de aver infinitas cosas de provecho, mas yo no me detengo en ningund puerto, porque querría ver todas las más tierras que yo pudiese para hazer relación d'ellas a Vuestras Altezas; y también no sé la lengua, y la gente d'estas tierras no me entienden.... Mas agora, placiendo a Nuestro Señor, veré lo más que yo pudiere, y poco a poco andaré entendiendo y cognosçiendo y faré enseñar esta lengua a personas de mi casa, porque veo qu'es toda la lengua una fasta aquí. Y después se sabrán los

4. Smith, “Religion,” 269. The text cited appears toward the end of Sebastian Münster, *A Treatyse of the Newe India*, trans. Richard Eden (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor University Microfilms, Inc., 1966c), n.p.

5. Quoted in Smith, “Religion,” 269. It is necessary to mention that, as is evident in the first part of the *Crónica del Perú*, Pedro de Cieza makes use of multiple forms of referring to the “natural indians,” many of which include references to their idolatrous religion and their cult of the devil. See Pedro de Cieza de León, *Crónica del Perú. Primera parte* (Lima, Perú: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1984 [1553]). On this point, see the discussion by Luis Millones Figueroa about “the devil as an intellectual weapon” in the *Crónica del Perú*: Luis Millones Figueroa, *Pedro de Cieza de León y su Crónica de Indias: La entrada de los Incas en la Historia Universal* (Lima, Perú: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos y Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2001), 145-52. The references to idolatry and the devil mark the continuity prior forms of interpreting non-Christian subjects and cultures. But in the context of the “discovery” and conquest, there existed not only continuities but also ruptures and transformations in the medieval Christian episteme. The forms in which such ideas about religion were articulated will play, as we will see, a crucial role in these transformations.

6. Cristóbal Colón, *Los cuatro viajes. Testamento*. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986), 63.

benefícios y se trabajará de hazer todos estos pueblos cristianos, porque de ligero se hará, porque ellos no tienen secta ninguna ni son idolatras.⁷

To this we find added other observations that appear in the diary of Columbus' first voyage, on the 21st of December of the same year:

Y como vido qu'el Almirante avía resçibido lo que le avían llevado, todos o los más de los indios dieron a correr al pueblo, que debían estar cerca, para traerle más comida y papagayos y otras cosas de lo que tenían con tan franco coraçon que era maravilla. El Almirante les dio cuentas de vidro y sortijas de latón y cascaveles, no porque ellos demandassen algo, sino porque le pareçía que era razón y sobre todo, dize el Almirante, porque los tiene ya por cristianos y por de los Reyes de Castilla más que las gentes de Castilla, y dize que otra cosa no falta salvo saber la lengua y mandarles, porque todo lo que se les mandare harán sin contradición alguna.⁸

Columbus perceived the indigenous people as a *tabula rasa*. It was possible to write anything on their consciousness because they were empty, and they did not even “have a sect.” The idea that the indigenous people of the Américas had no sects translated in general as the notion that they were subjects without religion. In effect, just as we see in other writings from the period, “sect” is used as synonymous with religion.⁹ Stephen Glazier indicates that “the initial commentaries regarding the lack of religion among the Amerindians was echoed in the writings of the 17th and 18th centuries.”¹⁰ Traces of this conception can be found in writings such as the *Comentarios reales de los Incas* (1609) in which the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega writes of certain indigenous communities “had no inclination toward the adoration of anything – short or tall – neither from interest nor fear, but rather they lived completely (and still live) like beasts. And worse, because the doctrines and teachings of the Inca kings did not reach them.”¹¹ Columbus' view of people without religion was not much different, as they appeared to him as blank, as lacking their own subjectivity, and the result was that he imagined that they could be very easily indoctrinated with Christianity, and he also wagers that they would be good slaves. “Ellos deven ser buenos servidores y de buen ingenio, que veo que muy presto dizen todo lo que les dezía.” Since the indigenous people were subjects without religion, Columbus did not need to resort to the established parameters by the encounters with idolaters and “false religions” to dictate how he should interact with them. Here, servitude returns as something which is constitutive of being. This conception will persist even after it had been conceded that indigenous people had religion or after they had converted to Christianity. This is why the later recognition of the indigenous as Christians would not lead Columbus to alter the way he saw them: “y dize que otra cosa no falta

7. Colón, *Los cuatro viajes. Testamento.*, 110.

8. Colón, *Los cuatro viajes. Testamento.*, 141.

9. Las Casas, for example, writes in his *Historia de las indias*: “convidar y atraer y ganar, por paz y amor y mansedumbre y ejemplos de virtud, a la fe y cultura y obediencia y devoción del verdadero Dios y Redentor del mundo, a los infieles, sin alguna diferencia de cualquier secta o religión que sea y pecados y constumbres corruptos que tengan” (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las indias*, vol. 1 (Madrid: M. Aguilar, 1927), 94.).

10. Stephen D. Glazier, “Amerindian Traditions,” in *The Christopher Columbus Encyclopedia*, ed. Silvio A. Bedini (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 588.

11. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los incas*, vol. 1 (Lima, Peru: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991 [1609]), 31 [Tr: my translation.]

salvo saber la lengua y mandarles, porque todo lo que se les mandare harán sin contradición alguna.” With the declaration that these were subjects without religion, Columbus expropriated their land, denied them their own subjectivity, and declared them servile subjects. Is this merely a repetition of prior events or prior manipulation of the category of religion? Or is it maybe the case that this represents a rupture with the past and the opening of a new form of conceiving what had been understood as religion, the world, and its inhabitants? We will explore this more closely in this section.

There is an important precedent to Columbus' idea about the lack of religion of the inhabitants of what would soon be known as the “New World.” In a key chapter near the end of *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides provides a metaphor for the relationship between faith and reason that makes reference to the idea of subjects without religion. It is important to bear in mind here that the translation of *Guide for the Perplexed* into Spanish was the first and most extensive philosophical text to appear in the Spanish language. It is estimated that this translation, by Pedro de Toledo, was completed in 1433 AD.¹² It would be difficult to underestimate the significance and impact of this text. As Moshe Lazar asserts in his introduction to a recent publication of the Toledo translation, the *Guide for the Perplexed* provoked “a lasting controversy among students of Judaism and Christianity throughout the 13th century and afterward. Important echoes of this debate can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas, Alberto Magno ... and later in Spinoza and Leibniz.”¹³ Toward the end of the *Guide*, Maimonides divides people into three basic groups. On the one hand, there are those who follow the commandments and are oriented toward or know the truth. On the other hand, there are those whose beliefs are false – whose point of reference was probably Muslims – and whom Maimonides indicates that it is sometimes permissible to kill so that they not lead others astray. Finally, there are those subjects who do not follow any law or have no understanding whatsoever. For Maimonides, these are the Turks from the Far East, the Ethiopians in the South, and “the like.” Maimonides says of these people that “their judgement is more like that of non-rational animals than men; they are situated below men and above apes.” After a study of the forms of argumentation and philosophies that come closest to what we could deem a properly racist mentality, Ivan Hannaford indicates that it is with the metaphors of reason and unreason, in terms of who has and does not have religion for Maimonides, that we see the beginnings of a properly racist logic in the West.¹⁴ With this, Hannaford provides a critical key for understanding the meaning and implications of the idea of having or not having religion in the context of the conquest.¹⁵ To refer to the indigenous as subjects without religion removes them from the category of the human. Since religion is universal among humans, the lack thereof does not indicate the falseness of this statement, but rather the opposite, that there exist subjects in the world that are not fully human. However, the idea that the *Guide for the Perplexed* was capable in itself of inaugurating a logic that would be

12. See Maimónides, *Mostrador e Enseñador de los Turbados*, trans. Pedro de Toledo (Culver City, Calif.: Labyrinthos, 1989). For a more recent English translation, see Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander (New York: Dover, 1956).

13. Moshe Lazar, “Introduction,” in *Guide for the Perplexed: A 15th Century Spanish Translation by Pedro de Toledo (Ms. 10289, B.N. Madrid)*, ed. Moshe Lazar (Culver City, Calif.: Labyrinthos, 1989), xiv, traducción mía.

14. Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 112.

15. Although not central to the argument, we should mention here that there are studies which trace the Columbus' probably Jewish roots. This would suggest that he was perhaps up to date on these polemics and the forms which some Jews, including Maimonides, developed to refer to other groups. See Jane Frances Amler, *Christopher Columbus's Jewish Roots* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1991).

used not only against “the followers of Mohammad and the descendents of Ham” but also against the Jews themselves, would seem to not take seriously the Christian polemics from the 11th to 13th centuries, some of which predated Maimonides and already questioned in advance the humanity of religious subjects like the Jew and the Muslim. This prehistory of modern racism is important in order to understand the revolutionary and innovative use of the concept of religion by Columbus and other *conquistadors* and historians of the conquest.

The prehistory of modern racism is linked to the emergence of Christianity not only as the latter was the religion of the Roman Empire but also due to its global project, which appears in the history of Christianity as early as the 11th century.¹⁶ As the historian Dominique Iogna-Prat demonstrates, it was then we find the emergence of “an encompassing notion of Christianity, which no longer implied merely a spiritual community, but also designated a social and temporal structure.”¹⁷ Iogna-Prat shows that “Christianity (*Christianitas*) defined by the clergy in the 11th and 12th centuries was conceived as a unitary whole with a center, Rome, and with borders that needed to be defended against external enemies – pagans and infidels – and to be extended to comprise the entire world (*Universitalitas*).”¹⁸ Iogna-Prat adds that “the Church was like a mountain destined to gradually fill the entire space of the earth until it was one with the world.”¹⁹ From this point onward, it was of the highest importance to affirm the difference of those who did not constitute a part of the Christian view of the world. The Church of the 11th and 12th centuries identified with an expansive Utopia which would only culminate when *Christianitas* had become *Universitalitas*.

The project of 11th and 12th-century Christendom gives new spirit and significance to the Christian apologies and polemics that had been appearing since the 4th century. Iogna-Prat studies in detail the work of Peter the Venerable, who acted as leader of the Cluny Abbey between 1122 and 1156, and who commissioned the first translation of the Koran into Latin. He also appears to be the first Western author to use the term Talmud, employing it in a polemical treatise.²⁰ According to Iogna-Prat, Peter the Venerable raised to a new level the attempts of clerics in prior centuries to formalize and systematize the idea of the world derived from the separation between clerics and laity.²¹ For him, the Church was a holistic system with a global vocation, and within this view, “the struggle against the various avatars of the Antichrist – heretics, Jews, and Saracens – was a subject of great importance.”²² Peter the Venerable's strategy consisted of “fixing [the Church's] enemies in time and space.”²³ This was very clear in his perception of Jews, who had no history beyond their biblical past.²⁴ In contradistinction to Christian universalism, the Jewish religion of exile did not offer any future for the people: Peter

16. See, among others, Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam, 1000-1150* (Paris: Aubier, 1998); Richard Landes, Andrew Gow, and David C. Van Meter, eds., *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jacques Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1985); John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

17. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 12.

18. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 12.

19. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 12.

20. See Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 13-14.

21. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 107.

22. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 108. [Tr: my translation.]

23. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 317. [Tr: my translation.]

24. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 318.

“conceived of the nomadic children of Cain, exiled after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, as outside time, waiting indefinitely for their eternal condemnation.”²⁵ From this perspective the Jews were a people without a center, without direction, and even lacking a present: the Jews had missed the train of history, and had not participated in the great Christian event. In this way, Peter derived the idea that the Jews were tied to a past that only allowed them to reclaim as their own the kingdoms of David and Solomon. With the exception of serving as slaves, Peter also denied them a position within the eschatological Christian economy.²⁶

Pedro the Venerable's idea of Christendom as a global design leads him to pose a racial turn in Christian polemics. After analyzing what he considered to be the “bestial” legends of the Talmud, Peter came to ask himself if Jews were truly human beings.²⁷ Peter was not the first to generate these sorts of ideas, and the Christians were certainly not the only ones to invest intellectual energy into polemics of this type.²⁸ The Spanish Jew Judah Halevi – a contemporary of Peter the Venerable – formulated the notion of a natural difference between those born Jewish and those who converted to Judaism.²⁹ Halevi makes use of a history that argues that God chose twelve individuals that originated from the purified sperm of Adam, and that he placed them in Palestine. Halevi conceived of Palestine as the center of the earth and as a place which was especially imbued with divine presence. The Jews who descended from these twelve individuals, in this view, were “naturally” different from those who had converted to Judaism. For both Peter and Halevi the earth has a center (Rome or Palestine), and it is with relation to that center and those native to it that the rest of the world and its inhabitants would be defined. We see in these proposals, then, an intra-Western struggle over who occupies the epistemic axis of the world. The principal formal difference between Peter and Halevi resides in the fact that, while the account of the former feeds an expansionistic view of global ambition, the second attempts to secure a special place for a particular group. This is to say, while both contain the seed of racism, the first view is fundamentally expansionist and the second is protectionist.³⁰ Of the two, it is the first that will find a place in the racial global designs that characterize European modernity after the conquest of the Américas.

The expansionist view of a holistic and systemic Christendom that we see in the 11th and 12th centuries cannot be properly understood without reference to the first two Crusades (the first, from 1095-1099; the second, from 1146-1149) and the struggle against imperial Muslim power. John Tolan comments that, prior to the First Crusade, there was little interest in Northern Europe about the Arabs or Saracens, or about what would after the 6th and 7th centuries come to be known as Islam.³¹ At that time, Islam was referred to as idolatrous or as a heretical version of Christianity. In Spain, under the control of the Saracens from 711, the polemics against the latter

25. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 318. [Tr: my translation.]

26. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 320.

27. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 320-3.

28. See Norman Golb, ed., *Judaeo-Arabic Studies: Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997); Oliver Shaw Rankin, *Jewish Religious Polemic of Early and Later Centuries, A Study of Documents Here Rendered in English* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1956).

29. Ver Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 321

30. It is relevant to mention here that according to Arnaldo Momigliano, during the first years of Christianity, the Jews had a key advantage over the Christians in their confrontations with the pagans: unlike the Christians, they “no estaban del todo seguros de tener un derecho exclusivo a la salvación. En círculos rabínicos había mucho peso a favor del dictamen de Joshua ben Hananiah de que ‘hay hombres rectos en todas las naciones quienes tienen lugar en el Mundo a venir’” Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 134.

31. Tolan, *Saracens*, 69.

had a stronger character. The Christian inhabitants of the peninsula imported polemic traditions from the East, where the Christians had already encountered and been subjected to Muslim power. There, Islam was characterized as the religion of the Antichrist, as heresy, or as a form of power that served as a temporary punishment for Christian sins.³² Such conceptions would find a place in Spain, and from there would be exported to the rest of Europe, where they would then be taken up anew in the context of the Crusades. The great majority of the chroniclers of the Crusades described the Muslims against whom they were fighting as “pagans,” and interpreted victories against them as a part of the process that would eradicate paganism and, for some, would lead to the second coming of Christ.³³ The logic of writers like Tudebus was that Christianity had been in a struggle from the beginning against paganism, and that the hour was approaching when Christ would vanquish the pagan idols. Others saw the death of Saracens as revenge for having taken Jerusalem.³⁴ Such medieval chroniclers made little effort to understand Muslims, and assimilated the latter into the idea of paganism. The identification between the two was such that Christians came to use “Saracen” and “Moor” to refer to the pagans of antiquity,³⁵ thereby proclaiming a conceptual association that would prove fruitful for the Christian world order in the period of the conquest. The encounter with Muslims is completely inscribed, for Christians, within an almost ancient battle against paganism, and victory over the Muslims is perhaps as significant for Christians as the victory over the pagans by the Roman Empire, which served as the context for Constantine's conversion to Christianity.

In the 12th century, Christian conceptions of the Saracens were more than anything else defensive reactions against the power and prestige of the Arab-Muslim Empire. The universalist idea of the Church – in gestation since the 11th century – ran up against obvious difficulties with most of the known world under Muslim authority. In the 12th century, the Christians put a great deal of effort into preventing other Christians from converting to the Muslim faith, often employing distorted accounts of the life of Mohammad toward this goal. These same accounts served to inspire a sense of urgency with respect to the reconquest of Jerusalem. In preventing conversions to Islam, moreover, Christian thinkers of the period hoped to win Saracens over to Christianity. In contrast to the struggle against heretics and pagans, Church authorities were not sufficient for this task. Although this tendency did not spread far, Christians began to allude to rational arguments that would prove the falseness of Islam and the truth of Christianity. In this context, some Christian intellectuals began to read the writings of Jews and Saracens in order to refute them with their own sources, and Peter the Venerable was one of the pioneers of this enterprise.³⁶ Christians assumed naturally that reason was common to both themselves and the Muslims, and that rational argumentation would help the latter to realize their error. However, as Tolan points out, “la experiencia amarga de los misioneros del siglo XIII fue que los sarracenos no se impresionaron con sus argumentos ‘racionales’; cada vez más estos concluirían (como Pedro el Venerable concluyó acerca de los judíos) que los sarracenos debían ser irracionales.”³⁷

The Christian polemics against Jews and Saracens that emerged from the context of the development of the expansionist and segregationist vision of the clerics came, as we have seen, to question the rationality and even the very humanity of those with whom they debated. The

32. Tolan, *Saracens*, 40-1.

33. Tolan, *Saracens*, 109.

34. Tolan, *Saracens*, 116-7.

35. Tolan, *Saracens*, 137.

36. Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure*, 141-3.

37. Tolan, *Saracens*, 251.

intensification of the relationship between *Cristianitas* and *Universalitas*, and the use of reason as an instrument of persuasion, led the Christians more and more to believe that heretics, Jews, and Saracens were irrational. These polemics, no doubt, presupposed the rationality of their opponents, as one does not enter into debate with someone who lacks the capacity to reason. But the resistance that their opponents showed to “reason” made them appear increasingly as purely carnal or semi-bestial beings (38). The combination of an imperialist and expansionist expression of universalism with reason would lead to a fatally racist logic. This racism, however, would only be systematized and develop its own foundations in the 16th century. The polemics, the practice of which implies a certain concession to the Other, would continue in the 14th and 15th centuries, as would the idea that the opponents of Christianity are condemned for supporting a false religion.

The fruitless character of the Christian polemics generated a new social order with regard to those who had allegedly converted to Christianity. Christian polemicists and apologists were doubly defrauded: they firstly realized that Jews and Saracens were not dissuaded of their false beliefs through “reason,” and secondly that those who converted publicly often continued to practice their “false” religion in private. That is to say, their persuasion had not been effective. This situation represented some clear difficulties for the political order of the Christian kingdoms, particularly where there existed an intense struggle against Muslim power. At a moment in which the Christian kingdoms began to articulate their internal unity on the basis of religion and language, the existence of subjects who concealed where their religious loyalty lay would come to represent a threat to the religious and political order. The result was that it was decided to create an institution that would investigate the intimate lives and genealogies of all those who were suspected of being converts or of having a genealogy that was not completely Christian. A blood relation with Moors or Jews would lead to the perpetual suspicion that the subject in question might have religious affiliations with Judaism or Islam. As a result, the verification of the “cleanliness of the blood” was perceived as extremely important during that period.

The connection between blood relation and religious adherence established by the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition represented another step toward the integration of political power with social control. This, however, still did not produce the relationship between religion, race, and empire that would be so fundamental for the modern/colonial world. The Inquisition played a fundamental role in creating the idea of a Europe which was fundamentally Christian and exempt from Muslim and Jewish influence.³⁹ The discourse regarding the cleanliness of blood traces a firm limit between Western Europe and the people of the “Oriental” world, and in this sense it could be said that the Inquisition forced open a path to the orientalist colonial discourse of the 18th and 19th centuries. The Inquisition established the eastern limit of the modern/colonial global imaginary. But this fixation on genealogy and the “purity of the blood” still did not constitute a properly racist mentality, since the humanity of the subjects in question was taken for granted, and all that was in doubt was their political and religious loyalty. The lack of such cleanliness of blood reveals one as a potential traitor or enemy, but not as another species or as a formal exception from the human. As Maimonides anticipated, the latter perspective is opened up not with regard to religious opponents, but rather with those who are said not to have religion, and this occurs in a more or less systematic form precisely in the context of the “discovery” and conquest of the Américas. This conquest was not simply a continuation of the

38. Tolan, *Saracens*, 283.

39. Mignolo, “José de Acosta's *Historia*,” 466.

war for the reconquest of the Spanish peninsula. It created something entirely new.

The Christian polemics and the discourse and practices surrounding the concept of the “purity of the blood” are, in a manner of speaking, the anteroom to the modern racist discourse and practices that would be initiated with the arrival of Columbus in the Américas. Like many of the Christian apologists and polemicists of the 11th-14th centuries, Columbus was profoundly inspired by the “universal victory of Christianity.”⁴⁰ In a letter to Pope Alexander VI, Columbus asks that he send “sacerdotes y religiosos...porque yo espero en Nuestro Señor de divulgar su Santo Nombre y Evangelio en el Universo.”⁴¹ Columbus also planned to help to finance a new crusade to rescue Jerusalem from Muslim hands.⁴² But Columbus, unlike the Christian polemicists that put forth a universalist view based on the primacy of the clerical order and had justified the Crusades, he was not a cleric but a layman, and moreover he was a navigator and not a polemicist. The polemic and universalist Christian discourse were based since the 4th century on an opposition between true religion and false religions: the encounter with the non-Christian required the polemic. But with Columbus we see the initiation of a new regime, distinct from those based on truth and universality: Columbus did not find false believers, but rather, and as he himself indicated, he found subjects *without religion*. Such subjects are discovered, are used, and are indoctrinated, but they are not refuted.⁴³ Columbus reclaimed a stable space for the layman “discoverer” within the universalist Christian schema that had been in development since the 11th century in Europe. After Columbus, the clerical order would move progressively toward an order defined more strictly by the relation between colonizer and colonized. This is the form in which the incipient modern state begins to escape definitively from subordination to the Church.⁴⁴ The theo-political difference between those lands which were inhabitable thanks to the divine work and those which were uninhabitable would be translated in this context into the colonial and racial difference between humans and subjects who are not entirely human or whose humanity is in question. In this conceptual map of the emergent modern Europe, the notion of the idolater is replaced by the Aristotelian concept of the natural slave. As Wynter indicates, the religious view of the social, terrestrial, and cosmological order is gradually supplanted by a post-religious vision based in the non-homogeneity of the human species.⁴⁵ One of the consequences of this turn is that the dominant discursive genre ceases to be primarily the religious polemic. In a certain sense, one might say that the first words of the *ego conquiro* were not “I conquer,” but

40. See the discussion of these themes in Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquista de América: el problema del otro*, trans. Flora Botton Burlá (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1987), 18-23.

41. Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza, 1982), 287.

42. Columbus wanted to pay 100,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 on horseback to take Jerusalem. Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, 287. For an analysis of Jerusalem in Columbus' thought, see Alain Milhou, “Jerusalén en la cosmovisión de Colón: medievalismo y modernidad,” in *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica en el ambiente franciscanista español*, (Valladolid: Casa-Museo de Colón y Seminario Americanista de la Universidad de Valladolid, 1983), 435-70.

43. Bernardo de Sahagún has provided a detailed report of one such rare dialogue or colloquium, which were lamentably obscured by the way that the understanding of conquered subjects distorted the efforts of the *tlamatinime* or Aztec wise men to make them listen and by some Christians to incorporate them within a more universal concept of the human. The colloquium in question occurred between the twelve first Franciscans that arrived to Mexico in 1524 and several *tlamatinime* who had survived the conquest. See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986).

44. For an analysis of the relationship between colonial/racial relations and the humanist revolution that would help to rupture the theo-centric medieval episteme, see Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003).

45. Wynter, “1492,” 36.

rather “they have no sect or religion.”⁴⁶ This is how the clerical order based upon the apology and the polemic against false religions and false faith would come to be challenged, and it is in this challenge that we find the basis for racism and for the scientific humanist discourse of modernity. The indigenous people were described, not refuted.⁴⁷ The scientific, legal, and anthropological treatise would be the most crucial manner for expression in this context. The anthropological turn in the category of religion – highlighted by Smith – is therefore at the root of the anthropological turn in the modern sciences and of the racist conception of the human that would come to distinguish European modernity since more than five hundred years ago.

Much is said of the Copernican revolution, but much less about a Colonial revolution. The latter consisted in the rupturing of the theological-clerical episteme of the Middle Ages, which on the one hand was largely based on the relation between true religion and heresy or false religion, and on the other on the opposition between the clerics and the laity. The opposition between true and false religions had its roots in the context of the Christian opposition to the pagans in the Roman Empire in the 4th century: it was with this that Christianity was able to become the epistemic center of the Empire. The opposition between clerics and laity sought to tip the balance of power in the Christian world toward the Church. As Sylvia Wynter has argued based on the work of Jacques Le Goff, this opposition gave expression to the more fundamental division between Spirit/Flesh,⁴⁸ and the social, geographical, and cosmic orders were defined by such a division.⁴⁹ In this way, the heavens were conceived of as different in essence from the earth. The earth, in turn, as post-Adamic territory, was thought to be in the center of the universe, and the geography of the earth was also understood in a similar fashion. The inhabitable regions with a moderate climate, which lay on top of the water through the work of divine Grace, were centered in Jerusalem, and the other lands outside of divine Grace were considered uninhabitable. The medieval Christian polemics were largely played out within this geographical schema. The Christian politics of the true religion versus the false religions operated within an episteme that sought to take control of the known and inhabitable world.

In some ways, the medieval world had already entered into crisis before Columbus left for the Indies. Portuguese navigators had already refuted the classical claim that the Antipodes and the lands south of the Equator were uninhabitable.⁵⁰ In 1444 Dinis Dias, a Portuguese navigator, arrived at the Senegal River in Cape Verde, Africa. There, fifteen degrees below the Equator, he found tropical vegetation and inhabitants. From 1482, Columbus had visited Portuguese ports in Africa,⁵¹ and having seen that the supposedly uninhabitable lands were not in

46. For an analysis of the “I-conquerer,” see Enrique Dussel, *El encubrimiento del Indio: 1492. Hacia el origen del mito de la modernidad.*, 2da ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Cambio XXI, 1992), 50-66.

47. See Acosta.

48. Wynter, “Unsettling,” 278. See also Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval.*

49. Wynter, “Unsettling,” 279.

50. For an account of the Portuguese explorations in Africa during the Middle Ages, see Luis de Albuquerque, *Ciência e experiência nos descobrimentos portugueses* (Lisboa, Port.: Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa Ministério da Educação, 1983); Pierre Chaunu, *La expansión europea: siglos XII al XV*, trans. Ana María Mayench (Barcelona: Labor, 1972). Bartolomé de las Casas, among others, takes account of the classical theories that justified the idea of the absence of life in the so-called torrid zone, and he comments on their significance. Preoccupied with establishing the legitimacy of Christianity in the new context, Las Casas presents Columbus as a divine emissary charged with revealing the falseness of such theories to the world. See Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las indias*, 40-5.

51. Chaunu, Taviani, and Phillips, to mention a few, comment on the impact on Columbus of his stay in Portugal and his voyages with Portuguese mariners. See Chaunu, *La expansión europea: siglos XII al XV*; William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips, “Columbus's Early Years in Genoa and Portugal,” in *The Worlds of Christopher*

fact uninhabitable had a decisive impact on him.⁵² We should also consider here the fact that while Latin Christianity had already known the existence of black-skinned subjects, the encounter with African blacks in their own habitat that began with the Portuguese explorations posed the need for new forms of anthropological reflection.⁵³ The same occurred with the inhabitants of the Canary Islands who, after being confronted with Portuguese explorers, were gradually conquered by the Spanish during the second half of the 15th century.⁵⁴ However, the encounters with African blacks and the indigenous peoples from the Canary Islands in the 15th century, about whom early Christianity had already been aware, did not significantly alter the terms with which the Christians classified and understood the communities and peoples that were inside or surrounding their territories. In both cases, the subjects were classified according to a classificatory system based on the Christian politics of true versus false religion. It is interesting therefore to compare the expressions used by Columbus to describe the indigenous in the diary of the first voyage to the way in which Peter IV, King of Aragon, referred to the Canaries and their inhabitants in 1386: “I know that not long ago some islands were discovered in the ocean – known by the name Canary – in which there exist some populations, and whose unhappy [moradores] continue to blindly and erroneously practice idolatry, thereby placing them far from the true path.”⁵⁵ While the indigenous of the Canaries were cataloged as idolaters and devil-worshippers,⁵⁶ Africans were seen as Moors or Muslims.⁵⁷ The expansion of the category “Moor” to include Africans was not strange, since *moro* is etymologically related to the Latin term for *negro* or black.⁵⁸ Moor, then, was an ethnic and geo-political category based on skin pigmentation and religion. It would be Columbus, on his first voyage to what Latin Christianity would come to know as the New World, who would transpose the basis for the identification of subjects to the uninhabitable zones. More than merely subjects with a false religion, he conceived of the inhabitants of such zones as subjects without religion, which indicated an exception with respect to the religious universal on which the opposition between true and false

Columbus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85-111; Paolo Emilio Taviani, *Columbus: The Great Adventure. His Life, His Times, and His Voyages.*, trans. Luciano F. Farina and Marc A. Beckwith (New York: Orion Books, 1991), 16-9. For a detailed study of the subject, see Rebecca Catz, *Christopher Columbus and the Portuguese, 1476-1498* (Westport, Conn. (EEUU): Greenwood Press, 1993).

52. See Colón, *Textos y documentos completos*, 167; Phillips and Phillips, “Columbus's Early Years,” 106; Taviani, *Columbus*, 17-19; Wynter, “1492,” 9.

53. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Antes de Colón: exploración y colonización desde el Mediterráneo hacia el Atlántico, 1229-1492*, trans. Francisco Rodríguez Martín (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993), 21.

54. For an account of the conquest of the Canary Islands, see Demetrio Castro Alfin, “La ocupación de las Islas. El siglo XV,” in *Historia de las Islas Canarias: De la prehistoria al descubrimiento*, (Madrid: Editorial Nacional, 1983).

55. Cited in Francisco Caballero Mujica, *Canarias hacia Castilla*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Las Palmas de la Gran Canaria: Caja Insular de Ahorros de Canarias, 1992), 108. [Tr: my translation.]

56. See Castro Alfin, “La ocupación de las Islas. El siglo XV,” 137-8; Jesús M. Fernández Rodríguez, “Idolos europeos, divinidades aborígenes: una aproximación etnoarqueológica al contacto religioso en Canarias entre los siglos XIV-XVI,” in *XII Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana (1996)*, ed. Francisco Morales Padrón (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1998), 314.

57. David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 175; Luis Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y violencia: la conquista de América*, 3ra ed. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cemi, 1992), 312.

58. The Latin term from which the Spanish *moro* is derived is *morus*, which means black. *Morus*, in turn, derives from the Latin and Greek *maurus* or *mauros* that was used to refer to the dark-skinned peoples in Northwestern Africa or Mauritania. See Jack D. Forbes, “Negro, Black and Moor: The Evolution of These Terms as Applied to Native Americans and Others,” in *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 67.

religion was based.⁵⁹ And if Christians understood religion as a link or bond with the ultimate foundation of the world, then the indigenous appeared not to be linked to anything, which made them fundamentally uncivilized and indomitable.⁶⁰ Subjects without religion were not so much mistaken as they were, from this perspective, ontologically limited. Upon having judged the indigenous as subjects “without a sect,” Columbus had altered the medieval idea regarding the “chain of being” and had made it possible to think of the “condemned” no longer in exclusively Christian and theological terms, but rather in terms that were modern and anthropological. The “condemned” of the modern era not only lacked truth, but also diverged fundamentally from that which was considered to be a *human being*. Their shortcomings result not so much from their judgement, but from a problem in their very being. The coloniality of power, then, is born simultaneously with the coloniality of being. In these different ways, Columbus took charge of transgressing the two fundamental vertices of the feudal Christian episteme with a single gesture. While he would continue to look to Rome and Jerusalem as the central axes (*axis mundi*) of a world defined in terms of the holistic and systemic view of Christianity, his classification of the indigenous as non-religious subjects already announces the existence of an order that would emphasize anthropology over theology and racial classification over Christian polemics. Columbus' epistemic feat would give new meaning to the idea that while he himself was not a modern, he did play a crucial role in opening the doors of modernity.

The beginning of an anthropological and scientific schema, which represents part of the transition from the idea of Christianity as the axis of the feudal European world to a new epistemological axis of the globe, also provides a new basis for the study of the dialectic between Christianity and the process of Western secularization, which seems to have the articulation of the global/racial modern European project – or what Mignolo has described as the logic of coloniality – as its fundamental basis.⁶¹ Meanwhile, with his “discoveries,” Columbus may seem to simply have offered Latin Christianity the opportunity to transform itself into the effective center of the world, and thereby to complete the medieval mission and vision of Christianity, but in reality he opened the door to the epistemological and symbolic universe which would give birth to the “modern man.” And this modern man, rather than simply continuing the project of the Church, would attempt – as we will see later – to subordinate the latter, even to the point of

59. Sebastian Müller's *Treatyse of the Newe India* (1553) suggests that references to the absence of religion in indigenous people could have begun when Columbus stopped in the Canary Islands at the beginning of his trip, but there is no mention of encounters with natives in the Canary Islands in the diary of the first voyage. It is possible that Müller used the vocabulary that Columbus had applied to the Amerindians to narrate an encounter with the inhabitants of the Canaries. Regardless, it was in the context of the natural, cultural, and geographical description of the Americas in which the rupture with medieval forms of social and political classification would become most obvious. Of course, we must concede, as Felipe Fernández-Armesto insists, that “much of what was said about the American Indians had been presaged ... in the literature on the Canaries” (Fernández-Armesto, *Antes de Colón*, 21.) [Tr: my translation]. Moreover, the ways that the indigenous Americans were seen also had implications for how the native inhabitants of the Canaries were described and interacted with. For a description of the context of the colonization of the Americas, Granada, and the Canary Islands, see Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Las Islas Canarias después de la conquista: la creación de una Sociedad Colonial a principios del siglo XVI*, trans. Gina Louse Oxbrow and Iñiqui Iriondo Sáez (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1997).

60. Lewis Gordon makes the link between not having religion and a presumed lack of civilization in a commentary on the justifications for underdevelopment in Hegel. See Lewis R. Gordon, “Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look,” in *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement* 29, n. 1 (2004), 71-93.

61. See Walter Mignolo, “La retórica de la modernidad y la lógica de la colonialidad,” in *Coloniality, Transmodernity, and Border Thinking*, ed. Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and José David Saldívar (forthcoming).

declaring the death of God. In a sense, Columbus' "gift" to Latin Christianity was as much something given as it was – in accordance with its etymology – a "poison." The invention of a subject which personifies inferiority in its very nature, and with respect to which any action is possible, establishes the beginnings of a radical subversion of the medieval theological world, and in this sense the modern theo-politics of knowledge carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Now it is not so much God and religious salvation, but the *ego conquiro* and political and economic salvation which are situated at the center of the new form of knowledge. As Wynter has demonstrated, the conquest gives rise to a hybrid system of religious-secular representation in which *homo religiosus* begins to be displaced by *homo politicus* and *homo economicus*.⁶² Modernity, then, introduces ego-politics into the womb of theo-politics, as early modernity bears witness to the gradual marginalization of the theo-politics by the ego-politics of knowledge, in which a new God is born: modern man. The modern idea that "if God does not exist, then anything is allowed" is preceded in the first modernity by the idea that "given that anything is allowed (with respect to the colonized/racialized subject), then there is no God (and therefore *I am God*)."⁶³ Thus it is genocide, and not only technical and scientific expansion, that opens the doors to decide, and it is from the conjunction of these various elements that the modern *ego cogito/conquiro* emerges and is solidified.

The substantiation of this new racial perspective that began with reference to religion might not have had much impact were it not for the ramifications it had after the "discovery," as this same view was propagated by other *conquistadors* and historians. Moreover, the idea that the indigenous were like a *tabula rasa* without subjectivity, and that they were to be viewed as merely another interesting element among the flora and fauna "discovered" in the New World, gave rise to the question of whether or not indigenous people had souls. Anibal Quijano sheds light onto this question, arguing that although Pope Paul III responded affirmatively in 1537 to the question about whether or not American aborigines had souls or not – that is, whether or not they were fully human – it remains the case that "since then, in intersubjective relations and social practices of power, we find constituted the idea that non-Europeans have a biological structure which is not only different from Europeans, but which, above all, pertains to an 'inferior' level or type."⁶⁴ with regard to the indigenous, what was in question was less the truth of their religion than their very humanity, and in this context one did not so much debate with the indian as debate about the Indian's humanity.⁶⁵ The result of this was that the principal debates were between Europeans themselves, about the existence of natural law or something like human

62. *Homo politicus* and *homo economicus* are "Man 1" and "Man 2" in Wynter's terms. See Wynter, "Unsettling."

63. Perhaps the clearest example of this type of subjectivity is the *conquistador* Lope de Aguirre, who rebelled against Ursúa on the expedition in search of El Dorado. See, for example, Casto Fulgencio López, *Lope de Aguirre, el peregrino: primer caudillo de América* (Caracas, Ven.: Ediciones Nueva Cádiz, 1953).

64. Quijano, "'Raza,' etnia, y 'nación': cuestiones abiertas," 169. [Tr: my translation.] A translation and discussion of the 1553 papal bull *Sublimis Deus* appears in Lewis Hanke, "El Papa Paulo III y los indios de América," in *El Papa Paulo III y los indios de América y Los derechos espirituales y temporales del nuevo mundo*, trans. Alfredo Avila Barreira (Mexico, D.F.: Fundice y Editorial Jus, 1992), 11-85. Paul III's logic is that if indians are men, they are then capable of religious learning, which justifies systematic preaching in the Américas, and with this, the strong presence of the Church in the "New World." This transforms the indigenous into a subject to be indoctrinated, and polemics are accordingly very rare. For a detailed account of evangelization and the imperial/colonial project in the "New World," see Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y violencia*.

65. In order to understand the significance and depth of the 16th-century research into the humanity of the indian, see Michelle De Cesare, *El debate sobre el "indio" y las instituciones españolas en el Nuevo Mundo* (Salerno, Ital.: Edizioni del Paguro, 1999).

rights with respect to the indigenous, and this would become clearest in the Valladolid controversy of 1550.⁶⁶ As opposed to the 4th century, when Christian discourse had been directed toward polemics and apologies through which Christians distinguished themselves from the believers of false religions, 16th century discourse developed around polemics on the very humanity of colonized subjects. The only possible sort of apology was not for those who took up the defense of Christianity, but rather of those who attempted to defend the indian in the face of the most extreme positions taken against the latter.⁶⁷ The general skepticism about the completeness of the humanity of the indigenous peoples led to the explanation of other cultural differences in light of alleged differences with respect to the different degrees of humanity of the subjects in question. That is to say, cultural difference came to be crossed over by racial and colonial difference.⁶⁸ This way of understanding cultural production and intersubjective relations would survive the formal elimination of the colonial relation, and would continue to define relations among people in the modern world up to the present. Racism, then, is from this point-of-view a central element in the formation of the modern/colonial world.

We only need to add two fundamental points to Quijano's account. On the one hand, if the indigenous were finally conceived of as humans, and shared with other racialized subjects the idea of their dispensibility as a people, they were never able to escape the original idea that their subjectivity represented a *tabula rasa*. In addition to being considered dispensible subjects, the indigenous were seen as subjects to be indoctrinated and domesticated. What happened to the community of black slaves was different. The perception of the slaves represented something like a combination of the worst practices of the medieval politics of truth and falsehood and the modern racist geo-political perspective that began with colonization and conquest of the Américas. Those people who were kidnapped and sold in Africa and who came to the Américas as slaves were initially considered to be Moors or Muslims,⁶⁹ and the Portuguese had already used this to legitimate their enslavement. They took advantage of the conflictive history between Christendom and the Muslims, and of a perception of the latter as bellicose subjects, which thereby legitimized both just war and enslavement. This view of Muslims is clearly visible in Maimonides, for whom it was acceptable to eradicate Moors or Saracens if necessary. What I am proposing here is that, in the passage across the Atlantic, in coming from Africa to the Américas, African slaves came to be depositaries for the cruelest treatments of both the Moor in Africa and indigenous people in the Américas. The skepticism with respect to the humanity of the indigenous would be transposed and readapted to the African slave, who would cease to be merely a "Moor" and become instead a "negro." While the former designated religious and ethnic difference (as a Moor was a Muslim and inhabitant of northwest Africa or Mauritania),

66. On the Valladolid controversy, see Jean Dumont, *La vraie controverse de Valladolid: premier débat des droits de l'homme* (Paris: Criterion, 1995).

67. This is clear in the work of Las Casas. See Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967).

68. On the colonial difference and race, see Walter Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002); Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Walter Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," *Philosophy Today* 43, no. 4 (1999); Walter Mignolo, "Second Thoughts on *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Afterword to the Second Edition*," in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).

69. Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y violencia*, 312. I have already mentioned that the term "moor" is etymologically related to "black." On this and other relations between "moor" and "black," see Forbes, "Africans and Native Americans."

“negro” would be converted into a category of racial condemnation. As Wynter points out, “negro and negra” would come to represent the only legitimately enslaveable category within the culturally-specific European representational system: a category outside of the limits of the “real ‘we.’”⁷⁰

Thus we see that the modern “chain of being” – with God/White European Man at one pole and the colonized, condemned, or sub-alter at the other – would give rise to a “chain of colonial signification” which would replace the former with a colonial/imperial discursive structure, sometimes ambiguous, mutable, and evasive, but which would always militate against the effective decolonization of the modern/colonial world. This “chain of colonial signification” does not appear out of thin air, but nor is it completely determined by a given material structure: it exists in productive relation with those institutions that maintain the coloniality of power. In this case, when the Spanish and other *conquistadors* looked for slaves in Africa to replace or complement the indigenous workforce, both the available old forms of religious differentiation (derived in part from the Portuguese contact with Africa) as well as the new imperial and dehumanizing discursive forms that were crafted in the Américas intervened in the legitimation of African slavery. This justification, then, no longer needed to be based strictly on religious differences. The negro would come to be conceived as inherently a slave; slavery was part of the very being of the negro and vice-versa. As a result, the term “negro” would be used not only to refer to black-skinned subjects, but rather against all types of slaves and colonized peoples who threatened the colonial order, including indigenous people themselves.⁷¹

From being a subject with a different religion, the Moor or negro was converted into a subject without subjective experience. Both the absolute lack of subjectivity and the traces of having been subjects with a false religion would explain why it was that African slaves – unlike indigenous peoples – were not considered as subjects to be Christianized or inculcated in the dogmas of the Church. The indigenous were (and still are) subjected to an indoctrination regime without precedent in human history. While negroes were identified with the violent Moors who could be eradicated through violence, indigenous peoples came to be conceived in the context of the conquest as lost tribes of Israel.⁷² The indigenous were more than prepared to learn the gospel, whether because they were a *tabula rasa* onto which the divine word could be stamped, or because they had already in one form or another participated in the history of Christian redemption. Indigenous people, unlike European Jews who – according to Christians – were stubbornly determined to reject Christ, provided a new territory in which to evangelize, but as indoctrination and no longer a polemic. Clearly, the indigenous continued to be enslaved and abused, but in many contexts they were afforded a certain degree of protection from the juridical and theological order. We know that this protection was more theoretical than practical, and that it became a mechanism of control, but with respect to blacks it was not even necessary to justify violent behavior.

Anti-black prejudice was not new to the 16th century, and some researchers find clear traces of it in the Muslim world, in Judaism, and in Latin Christianity.⁷³ However, it would be

70. Wynter, “1492,” 33.

71. Forbes, “Africans and Native Americans,” 75, 79.

72. Diego de Durán is among those to express this idea. See Diego de Duran, *Historia de las indias de nueva Espana e islas de la tierra firme*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Porrua, 1967). De Durán and de Sahagún are suspected to have been Jewish converts, which would provide an interesting hermeneutic key to interpreting and analyzing their positions regarding the religion of indigenous people.

73. For Frank Snowden and Lloyd Thompson, there was no anti-black racism in antiquity or in the Roman world: see Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Latin Christianity that would raise that prejudice to the level of a principal axis in a form of power that, for the first time in human history, would be thought of and would begin to develop on with relation to the entire globe. If, as Quijano and Wallerstein argue, the “New World” became the model for those systems of power operating in the modern world-system, we need to add to this an idea partly advanced by Wynter, that anti-black prejudice – which was converted in the context of the transition from theology to a racist anthropology into *anti-black racism* – became fundamental compass for the order of modern forms of power.⁷⁴ The African slaves in the Américas became the only group that could legitimately be enslaved, and whose slavery was *hereditary* and not based on faith or religious belief.⁷⁵ As Sylvia Wynter argues, beginning with the relationship with black slaves there developed the principles/criteria that would dictate the similarity and difference between the indigenous and the Spanish, leading the former to be considered from the mid-16th century onward as subjects who inherit a condition of freedom within the Spanish Empire. Black slaves “embod[ied] the new symbolic construct of *Race* or of innately determined difference that would enable the Spanish state to legitimate its sovereignty over the *lands of the Americas* in the postreligious legal terms of West Europe's now-expanding state system.”⁷⁶ Anti-black racism, then, represents a principal axis in the change from the “royal power” of the Spanish state during the Middle Ages to the coloniality of power which would define modernity.⁷⁷

Anti-black racism and the formation of the idea of Race established a new logic to characterize the difference between subjects and communities, and readdressed the terms of the polemics and the ancient and medieval forms of differentiation. The idea that blacks were condemned by their affiliation with Ham took on a geo-political and racial significance in the incipient European racial modernity. One need not forget either that the dichotomy between true and false religion was associated with opposition between spirit and flesh: the truth was considered spiritual and those who were living in dishonesty were thought to live by the flesh or to be intrinsically carnal subjects. This logic had already been put into practice in the perception

University Press, 1983); Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Lloyd Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989). Thompson characterizes negative assertions about blacks as aesthetic judgements based on ethnocentrism. Bernard Lewis discusses anti-black prejudice in the early Muslim world: see Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). For David Goldenberg, anti-black prejudice was generated in the context of Islamic expansion into Africa and Asia, and that it spread from there to Jews and Christians: see Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham*. Although the origin of anti-black prejudice is in debate, what interests us here is the fact that anti-black prejudice already existed prior to the conquest of the Américas. However, what would occur after, firstly, Portuguese explorations in Africa and, later, the treatment of African slaves in the Américas, is part of a different episode in which racism (and no longer mere prejudice) becomes transformed into a vital axis for the colonial power matrix that would in large part define modernity. This is lost in the accounts of Bernard Lewis and David Goldenberg, who do not take into consideration the particularities of the modern episteme.

74. See Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System,” *International Social Science Journal* 134 (1992): 549-57. Wynter, “1492.” For a phenomenological analysis of anti-black racism, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995).

75. Wynter, “1492,” 11.

76. Wynter, “1492,” 11-2.

77. See, for example, Quijano's studies on the coloniality of power with relation to Nieto Soria's analysis of “royal power.” See José Manuel Nieto Soria, *Fundamentos ideológicos del poder real en Castilla (siglos XII-XVI)* (Madrid: EUDEMA, 1988); Quijano, “Colonialidad”; Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad”; Quijano, “Globalización, colonialidad y democracia”; Quijano, “‘Raza, 'etnia, y 'nación': cuestiones abiertas.”

of Jews and Muslims in medieval Europe, but with Afro-American black slaves it was naturalized. Skin color, and not faith, would become the mark of a subject's merely carnal constitution. The (black) African "Moor," in contrast to the indigenous, would not end up being defined as a *tabula rasa*, but rather as a subject which was simultaneously entirely carnal and in defiance of the Christian order. As a result, the black was conceived in the modern/colonial world fundamentally as a subject without subjectivity, but one which was also fundamentally violent and moreover (like the indigenous) feminized.⁷⁸ Hence, while anti-black prejudice preceded the conquest of the Americas, it is in the context of the latter that the anti-black racism so dominant in modernity would be forged.

The term "negro," then, came gradually, by virtue of the racist turn in the incipient Western modernity, to represent a symbolic category denoting radical dispensability, suspicion, violence, and hate. As a result, "negro" would become an established way of referring to violent natives and other racialized subjects in the modern/colonial world.⁷⁹ The "negro" became a subject with regard to which countless racist discursive forms and power structures would be created, which would subsequently be mobilized against various other groups during the history of modernity. While the "Moors" or African blacks would be partially "indigenized," thereby creating a new form of racialization which integrated elements of the feudal and new modern/colonial worlds, other racial subjects would then be "darkened," including the indigenous people themselves.⁸⁰ The "black" being became perhaps the most evident mark of condemnation in modernity. As a result, there emerges a global anti-black racism by virtue of which racialization processes would follow forms of "darkening" even when no black subjects were involved or even when the dominant group were themselves black. "Negro" would become a symbolic space to be occupied by colonized or racialized subjects with distinct pigmentations. This is another reason that anti-black racism would be so central to the Western modern/colonial power structure.⁸¹

Returning to Jonathan Smith's article, as he indicates, Columbus' assertion about the lack of religion of indigenous people introduces an anthropological meaning to the term. In light of what we have seen here, it is necessary to add that this anthropological meaning is also linked to a very modern method of classifying humans: racial classification. With a single stroke, Columbus launched religious discourse from the theological realm into a modern philosophical anthropology that distinguishes among different degrees of humanity through identities fixed into what would later be called races. This is why, while it may be possible to trace elements of race thinking to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or to certain figures who were followers of any of these religions, the most crucial aspects are arguably found in the views of travelers and

78. I deal more with gender in "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21.2-3 (2007): 240-70. The exploration, "discovery," and colonization involved a very peculiar relation to gender and sexuality. It is important to remember here Columbus' idea that the earth was not round, but more accurately that it was shaped like a breast. Anne McClintock refers to this as the "porno-tropics" of the "discovery" and conquest. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also Enrique Dussel's formulation regarding the patriarchal element of the modern *ego-conquiro*, in Dussel, *El encubrimiento del indio*, 64-6.

79. See Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

80. For a formulation of this point with relation to contemporary racial relations, see Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

81. For an analysis of anti-black racism that elaborates on these themes, see Gordon, *Bad Faith*, and Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997)..

conquerors who were defying Christian tenets as much as they thought that they were simply continuing the mission of the Church. Their departure from traditional Christian views in their ways of approaching and cataloguing the “New World” simultaneously validated anthropological views of religion (vis-à-vis theological approaches), empirical investigation, and race thinking. While it is admittedly an exaggeration, perhaps it is not completely out of place to consider the extent to which Columbus was not only the first modern theorist of religion but at the same time, and by virtue of the same theory of religion implicit in his views, the first modern Western racist.