Beyond the Binary of Divine Presence and Absence in the Colonial Encounter Between the Tupinambá and Jesuit Missionaries in Brazil: A Tupian Critique of Robert A. Orsi's Theory of Religion

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In *History and Presence,* Robert A. Orsi calls for a broad rethinking of religion and history. In part, his argument relies on an interpretation of how Catholic missionaries viewed Amerindian religious practices in terms of "metaphysics of real presences."[1] For Orsi, some North American Catholic groups and Catholic missionaries of the sixteenth-century shared with Amerindians, broadly construed, common or similar views about the nature of the "real" presence of the divine among them. In *History and Presence,* this assumption is justified by a given colonial narrative in which Catholic missionaries would have "better glimpsed" the "reality of the local gods and their cults."[2]

According to Orsi, Catholicism remained "the template for non-European people's idioms of presence."[3] The proposed resemblance between the two "metaphysics of real presence" figuring in American colonial encounters purports to represent the logical religious consequence of two empirical preconditions, namely, (a) the substitution, by missionaries, of Amerindian "gods" for the Christian god, and, (b) the identitarian "anxiety" that missionaries experienced when they would have recognized the "ontological similarities" between Amerindian religions and sixteenth-century Missionary Catholicism. Differently put, the thesis of the substitution

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1. Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard, 2016), 33.
2. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 33.
3. "Catholicism became the paradigmatic religion of real presence; as such, it was the template through which Europeans approached and understood other religions" (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 33, 250).

of gods, together with the reports about missionaries who "converted" to a "Pagan" way of being in the world, would provide sufficient empirical grounds for Orsi's conclusion that some Amerindian religions operate principally upon basic concepts about the nature of reality that constitute "Catholicism." At the intersection of the two cosmovisions or "ontologies" – "Indigenous" and "Catholic" – would stand the common notion that "religion" in general is essentially characterized by the concept of presence – divine presence – which bespeaks to Orsi the intuition that "presence" might be also the "norm of human existence."[4] Since Orsi assumes the notion of divine "presence" primordially configures what religion is, he thinks "the 'crusading Portuguese,' operating within the common logic of Catholic colonial strategy, sought to *substitute* local demonic counterparts for authentic (meaning Catholic) presences by means of 'replacing idols with crucifixes and *feitiços* with statues and images of Catholic saints.'"[5]

But, why does Orsi portray and interpret such a culturally and politically complex encounter simply in terms of "substitutions" of deities and religious identitarian anxieties? What exactly sustains Orsi's theological and political assumptions in the "substitution" of deities and its theoretical premise, namely, the ontological "parallel" between Amerindians and Catholics? What exact elements constitutive of the Amerindian cosmologies and cultures would have imprinted on the Catholic missionary experience in sixteenth-century South America the feeling that Orsi calls "ontological anxiety"?

This essay challenges Orsi's theological assumptions about religion in public life during early colonial encounters in South America by means of comparing the theological theses of ontological similarity and divine substitution between Catholic missionaries and Amerindians with two other theses. In order to interrogate the validity of Orsi's theological argument about divine "presence" being a paradigm both in Amerindian religions and Catholicism, the essay elaborates on the concept of "ontological incompleteness," which derives from the anthropology of Tupian religion elaborated by Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro in Brazil. In sum, the essay puts forth an anthropological and theological reflection on Tupian

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4. "I am inclined to believe that presence is the norm of human existence, including religion, and absence is an authoritative imposition" (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 6).

5. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 35.

religious life as being essentially oriented towards a radical openness to alterity or difference, in order to probe two critical assumptions in Orsi's theology of presence.

My argument is twofold. First, I will sustain that a given theological analysis of early modern Christian doctrines formulated during, and in view of, the colonization of Latin America provides relative support for the thesis of the "substitution" of deities. More specifically, I invite the thought of Willie James Jennings in order to suggest that the Church's self-invention as a figure of universal sovereignty and its attempt to inscribe contingency or openness upon all peoples and their lands intended to fold a Christian identity between Amerindians and all beings inhabiting native realities. Jennings argues that the colonization of Latin America suscitated new theological questions and respective efforts to inscribe a Christian reality on native lands. His view may partially endorse the thesis of a violent divine "replacement" that is particularly emphasized when situated within a broader colonial narrative of acculturation phenomena. However, the ecclesial project to inscribe contingency and a new identity universally can neither explain nor evince adequately the empirical loss of a native sense of self and community.

Second and foremost, I examine more closely the justifying principle underside the historical hypothesis of the religious "substitution" in Amerindian lands during the sixteenth-century. Here, I introduce to the discussion on "ontological anxiety" between Amerindians and missionaries an anthropological and philosophical notion derived from Viveiros de Castro's studies of the Tupinambá religion. Viveiros' notion of Tupian "ontological incompleteness" emerges both from his perusals of early Jesuit descriptions about Tupinambá societies in Brazil and his ethnographical work with the Araweté – a contemporary group which descends from the Tupinambá. The Amerindian notion of ontological *incompleteness* challenges Orsi's assumptions on "Indigenous" realities, "ontological similitude," and the "substitutions" of deities. Consequently, it also questions his theological aspiration to normalize "divine presence" universally. Specifically, the Jesuits misperceived the Tupinambá as a people who lacked a 'king,' 'law,' and 'faith,' which tacitly signified their fundamental incapacity to conceive and participate in "organized" forms of religion.

In four interpretative steps, this essay weaves a comparative analysis of missionary and Amerindian theologies: First, I introduce the basic

historical and political sources of Orsi's argument about "presence" as a privileged "metric" for interpreting the doctrinal and practical "realities" of all religions.[6] Second, I confirm with Willie Jennings' historical-theological study the hypothesis of the substitution of religious identities in early colonial South America. Under this view, Orsi's notion of "presence" may suggest a positivist appreciation of Amerindian religions. Third, I probe both hypotheses – i.e., the "substitution" of gods and corresponding religious identities, and the positivist view that Amerindian religions are ontologically similar to Catholicism – with the support of Viveiros de Castro's study on the Tupian religious "identity." According to Viveiros, the chief mark of the Brazilian Tupinambá identity was a radical orientation to alterity or difference. He conveys the primary value of Tupian life as the existential necessity to incorporate the Other, in her or his full alterity, into its *socius*. Such a predisposition or valence also reveals what Viveiros considers the central Tupian spiritual condition: a radical openness to expand both individual and collective human realities through the incorporation of difference. To this condition, Viveiros de Castro assigned the term "ontological incompleteness."[7] Fourth, after comparing Orsi's argument about missionary "ontological anxiety" with Viveiro's notion of Tupian "ontological incompleteness," I conclude by identifying a few acute epistemic problems in the essentialist character of Orsi's theology of presence. Lastly, I suggest that the Tupian disposition towards incorporating other ways of being in the world enables a critique of rigid or insular concepts of identity.

Being comparative in essence, this essay inevitably evolves out of a mode of analysis that consists in contrasting hermeneutical and ontological notions of fundamental realities as understood by missionaries and the Tupinambá. However, the arguments here articulated neither infer nor rely on supposedly immutable, comprehensive, or universal truth-claims about the nature of reality or realities. Instead, Amerindian and Christian

6. Orsi argues that "presence' in the Catholic sense slipped the bounds of confessional specificity and became a category of religious analysis and otherness not exclusive to Catholics (cf. *History and Presence*, 9, 249).

7. I primarily articulate the notion of ontological incompleteness in the format and content delivered in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul: the Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-century Brazil*, trans. Gregory Duff Morton (Chicago: Prickly-University of Chicago Press, 2011).

"ontologies" are here portrayed as cultural and religious matrixes of meaningful and mutable relationships that inform particular socio-political conditions, ways of living in community, and negotiating encounters. Thus, the essay focuses on the public role that two specific views of "reality" and "truth" assume, particularly when such views provide individuals with key elements with which entire communities of culture make existential or spiritual sense of their intersubjective ties and social situations.

However, the anthropological concept of Tupian ontological incompleteness emerged during the birth of the anthropological debate on the possibility of multiple co-existing worlds, realities, or ontologies. Hence, the fourth section of the essay accommodates a concise background note about the substantial epistemic move at stake in the "ontological turn" of anthropology. With such a note, I hope to succinctly indicate the basic theoretical structure that the argument of the multiplicity of ontologies provides to the notion of ontological incompleteness.

1. The Sources of Orsi's Theological Argument that "Presence in the Catholic Sense" Provides a Privileged Metric for the Interpretation of All Religions

Robert Orsi's *History and Presence* presents an emboldened interpretation of some cultural and political effects stemming from an old and somewhat caricaturized theological dichotomy. Orsi suggests that Reformation dissent from the doctrine of transubstantiation[8] inaugurated a theological split that would ultimately produce intellectual, cultural, and political changes during the following centuries.[9] A host of new interpretations of religious phenomena that rejected metaphysical claims – about divine physical interventions, spirit apparitions, transubstantiation, altered psychological conditions, and so forth – contributed to the generalized dismissal of the "real presence"[10] of "the gods"[11] in people's daily lives. In view of such a

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8. Or, the doctrine of the real or material presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

9. "The internecine controversy among Christians about the nature of the Eucharist turned into the theoretical lens for the modern study of religion" (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 9).

10. In *History and Presence,* the expression "real presence" is supposed to communicate an assortment of interpretations on religious events correlated to metaphysical phenomena, which makes "presence" a highly ambiguous notion. Cf. *History and Presence*, 8-9.

11. Orsi employs the word "gods" to convey all deities external to Christianity. Cf. *History and*

dichotomy, Orsi proposes that the divide between "presence" and "absence" became the "metric for mapping the religious world of the planet."[12] Such a "metric," he argues, would have been used "wherever Europeans and Americans in their global adventures found the gods really present."[13]

After the sixteenth-century disputations on the ontological nature of the Eucharist,[14] Catholics would have become the "people of real presence par excellence."[15] In that stage of Christianity, different ontologies duelled over the feasibility of the conditions needed for the phenomena of transubstantiation and divine interventions in the created realm. Orsi argues these disputations ultimately overemphasized doctrinal divides between Catholics and Protestants. Later on, during the Enlightenment, that set of theological divergences amplified the impact of the formation of values directing the intellectual and political pursuits associated with the modern ideals of progress and evolution. The influential incredulous view of religion was then propelled by the secular pursuit of freedom, scientific methodological rigor, and philosophical scepticism.[16]

Altogether, Orsi thinks Enlightenment principles facilitated a widespread denial of metaphysical explanations for divine or spiritual interventions in the tangible. Especially after Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" and Hume's *The Natural History of Religion,* many disqualified metaphysical religious beliefs as irrational. Consequently, the refutation of metaphysical theories also generated a normalized view of some religious peoples as "irrational" and morally impoverished. "Irrationality" was then a trait also attributed to cultures perceived as incapable of thinking critically, in the Kantian sense. The "irrational," indicates Orsi, were "people of color, women, the poor and marginalized..."[17] Irrespective of the marginalization of peoples and cultures on the basis of such "critical" assessments of their humanity and religious ideas, Orsi argues that "presence, in the Catholic

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Presence, 4.

12. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 249.

13. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 249.

14. Is the presence of Christ in the host to be symbolically, materially or otherwise interpreted? What is the grammatical function and the semantic value of the words "is" and "this" in the New Testament phrases "this is my body," "this is my blood," and "do this in memory of me"?

15. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 9.

16. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 3-4, 38, 41.

17. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 41-42.

sense," still constitutes a better metric of "religious analysis and religious otherness not exclusive to Catholics."[18] Thus, a certain version of the modern Catholic interpretation of divine "presence" is supposed to easily explain all religious cultures, including those that, Orsi thinks, were "substituted" for Catholicism.[19]

Within *History and Presence*'s geographically and culturally narrow historical scope,[20] Orsi argues that modern "authorities and powers" imposed on people the category of "absence." Such authorities would have been influenced by a feeling of anxiety caused by others' beliefs in the "real presence" of "gods."[21] Among the greatest theological expressions of the anxiety caused by "presence" is Luther's critique of the idea of the embodiment of Christ in the host. Although he was contemptuous to the thesis of the symbolic presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Luther abhorred the idea that human teeth could pierce Jesus' actual body, which would represent a form of cannibalism. The reduction of divinity to corruptible matter seemed both macabre and aberrant: a "gruesome and visceral immediacy"[22] between humans and their Creator.

Scholars such as David Hume, Jonathan Smith, and Clifford Geertz, agreed that Modernity existed "under the sign of absence."[23] Sociologists researching "Indigenous" societies only confirmed in Latin America what other scholars had previously established about the social phenomenon of religion: religion is (always) best described as an assemblage of symbols with socio-cultural relevance.[24] The intellectual and institutional "removal

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18. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 9.

19. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 249.

20. A few fragmented narratives about particular events in the history of modern Christianity, coupled with a set of contemporary USA-based stories chiefly involving Irish- and Italian-American Catholics, compose Orsi's cultural horizon.

21. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 8.

22. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 19.

23. Orsi cites Hume, Smith, and Geertz. Cf. David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1757, repr., Stanford: Stanford, 1956) 56, in Orsi, *History and Presence*, 38 (n. 42), 268; Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Twice-Told Tale: The History of the History of Religion's History," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 363, in Orsi, *History and Presence*, 38 (n. 43), 268-269; Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 91, in Orsi, *History and Presence*, 38 (n. 43), 269.

24. Orsi cites Clifford Geertz's definition of symbols (*History and Presence*, 38 (n. 43), 269.

of gods" from their respective communities contributed to the growth of a certain normalized "moral narrative of modernity."[25]

One example of the political effects of the modern "moral narrative" of absence can be found in the event of the liberal revolutions. Above all, the concept of the nation-state reconfirmed the need for a certain public sensibility that seems conditioned by an inward sceptical orientation towards religions. For Orsi, such an orientation was germane to the worldviews that fomented the formation of the figure of the "good citizen."[26] Only a rational and sceptical citizen could satisfy the political condition necessary for the inauguration of the modern state. Outwardly oriented and uncivilized subjects were believed to lack basic critical skills and the capacity of self-organization. "Naturally," the political category of the "good citizen" also necessitates a culture that is conducive to the realization of utmost democratic values and ideals. Accordingly, some political theorists have argued that the transformation of mores and manners, as well as of governmental institutions, frame the "natural," "rational," and "just" motive for the constitutional option that has privileged the values of freedom and equality.[27] Thus, liberal democracy inheres also in a specific culture that feeds on the logic and meanings produced in the negative interpretations of "liberty" embedded in prevailing historical narratives, language, social behaviour, national aspirations, and religious scriptures.[28]

In sum, Orsi raises attention to two interrelated assumptions stemming from the problems caused by the "imposition of absence" upon religious cultures. First, the choice to conceive religion as a cognitive function or a symbolic system contributes little to the hermeneutical task of understand-

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25. Orsi refers to Webb Keane's concept (*History and Presence*, 40-41).

26. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 41.

27. Jack M. Balkin, *Constitutional Redemption: Political Faith in an Unjust World* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2011), 24.

28. For example, John Rawls' definition of liberty, as deduced from his theory of justice as fairness, indicates that individuals were bestowed with the *negative* power to reasonably curb state interference in their life projects according to certain limits, parameters or standards. In abstract, Rawls defines liberty with a pragmatic threefold negative structure. Freedom implies (a) free agents, who are (b) free from given limitations or restrictions, so that they are (c) free to do or not to do something in particular. Constitutionally, liberty implies a certain reasonable structuring of institutions, a certain system of public rules defining rights and duties according to public reason (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge: Harvard, 1999], 179).

ing the intersubjective interactions between gods and humans,[29] and among humans.[30] Yet, Orsi still believes religions bear the power to underwrite hierarchies of power, reinforce group solidarity, and serve as a medium for political liberation. The idea proposed here is that whenever religion is either categorized as a social construction or a symbolic system, its capacity to explain particularly essential public tenets becomes debilitated, if not emptied.

Second, Orsi claims there would be political "benefits" entailed in the particular feature or quality of "cultural illegibility" (i.e., incomprehensibility) that he ascribes to those religions in which divine beings hold the power to tangibly intervene in the world. For Orsi, "the gods," never departed from humans' lived experience. Instead, and despite modernity, "the gods" "insistently reached through the bars of language, law, and theory" erected around them.[31] So, he proposes that being religiously "legible" or identifiable in the public sphere signifies being vulnerable to the schemes and demands of "officialdoms," "laws," and "technologies" of control.[32] Accordingly, the politically subversive potential of "Indigenous gods" would rest exactly upon their "invisibility and illegibility" vis-à-vis modern thought and public life. Conclusively, Orsi attributes to early modern intellectual and political movements the confinement of culturally identifiable "gods" to inner subjectivities, the mind, and the past.[33] According to him, a different destiny was reserved for culturally undetectable deities, who could pass unnoticed through the "laws and technologies that have been developed to control the gods…"[34]

However, if Orsi's version of history is to be coherent, it must consistently address the fact that Catholic theology was the first "science" that attempted to reduce Amerindian religions to a form of cultural primitivism, in addition to submitting correlated claims that Amerindian civilizations were irrational and morally inferior.[35] For some reason, Orsi's historiography

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29. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 42.
30. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 58.
31. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 251.
32. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 5, 250.
33. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 41.
34. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 250.
35. Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), 96-97, 102-103; Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History,*

moves too fast from the Reformation to the Enlightenment and the liberal revolutions, unabashedly leaving untouched an immense spectrum of scholarship about religious encounters in colonial Latin America. Yet, Orsi's theology of presence substantially relies on two major, causally-linked notions, the first of which is empirical and the second, theoretical: (a) Amerindians and Catholics shared "ontological similarities" about divine "real presence", therefore (b) "divine presence" constitutes a potentially universal metric (norm) for understanding religion and human relations.

Despite these assumptions, *History and Presence* misses the role of Catholic missionaries. Even more absent are the narratives of colonial encounters as retold from the perspective of Amerindians. If Amerindia and colonization are deployed as two essential elements in a given argument about religion in modernity, then Amerindian cultures and their versions of colonialism *must* be investigated. If Amerindia is somehow a part of modernity,[36] it is epistemically inadequate to warrant, even if only partially, an emboldened theology of presence on colonial assumptions that eschew Amerindian perspectives about colonialism.[37]

In order to trial Orsi's argument, each of the following two sections of the essay brings a different view of religious conflicts in early colonial encounters. In part, the first one aligns with the idea of the "substitution"

Marxism, and Liberation Theology, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 207-213; Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2013), 25; Walter Mignolo, Introduction to *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, by José de Acosta, ed. Jane E. Mangan (Durham: Duke, 2002), xxi, xxiii, xxvi; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 147-148, 152-156.

36. In this essay, I assume Amerindia and the Atlantic slave trade are constitutive parts of modernity. Enrique Dussel argues convincingly that modernity roughly began in 1492 when Amerindians were "discovered" (Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, 33, 35, 37). Supporting Dussel's argument, Walter Mignolo explains that Acosta's work would have largely contributed to "building the imaginary of the Atlantic commercial circuit as [a] planetary consciousness," the *Orbis Universalis Christianus* (Introduction to *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, by José de Acosta, xviii, xxi, xxvi). Also, cf. Walter Mignolo, "José de Acosta's Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias: Occidentalism, the Modern/Colonial World, and the Colonial Difference," a commentary on José de Acosta, in *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, 452, 254.

37. Orsi briefly engages Acosta and Las Casas. In footnotes, he obliquely mentions Anthony Pagden, Stephen Greenblatt, Tzvetan Todorov, and Daniel Castro (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 33, 34 [n. 33], 34, 35; 267).

of Amerindian religious identities that *History and Presence* espouses. The second view then challenges the hypothesis of the ontological similitude between any Amerindian religions and sixteenth-century missionary Catholicism.

2. A Theological-Historical Narrative that Confirms the Hypothesis of the "Substitution" of Religious Identities in Colonial Brazil and Assumes a Positivist View of Amerindian Religions

Among all philosophical reductions characteristic of modernity, Enrique Dussel thinks the "negation of the corporeality of…subjectivity"[38] was the worst one for Africans and Amerindians. Dussel proposes that the colonization of the Americas represented the encounter of Europeans with the first kind of "radical barbarians." This historical event functioned as a prerequisite in the process of a surging European self-definition as the model to be followed by the whole planet. With the colonial praxis of domination, new theological and philosophical considerations gushed.[39] One of them was the denial of the humanity in the "exteriority" of other peoples. To a considerable extent, colonial difference plundered Africans and Amerindians of their subjectivities and humanity on the basis of a misconstrued theological judgment on exteriority. From this point onwards, theology sought theoretical and empirical grounds with which to develop and galvanize theories that could support grand civilizational and commercial projects. In the Western European societies of that time, theology and philosophy provided the overarching conceptual frames for all knowledge making. Similarly, the actions of social agents and institutional accreditations depended on criteria deeply embedded in traditions of theological and philosophical reflection. Catholic missions were not an exception to this condition. Hence, as a myriad of new "beings" and peoples unfolded in the vast ontological horizon inaugurated by colonial expansion, theology also concerned the ontological nature of Amerindians themselves, in addition to the consequent need to convert them.

However, both theology and philosophy – and later on, science too –

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38. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion,* 37.
39. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion,* 35.

bracketed their geo-historical and linguistic foundations. As Wittgenstein would put it, the everyday life of the theorist and historian becomes the ground for judging the experience of others.[40] As Dussel explains it, theological knowledge was mistakenly accredited as being able to sufficiently conceptualize the newly found bodies, geographies, and cultures.[41] At this moment in the history of modern thought, the realities of the "Other" were effaced by the urge to invent a European intellectual and religious identity. In contemporary terms, Cora Diamond depicts a similar problem and explains it in the field of moral philosophy: when people with different sensibilities and ideals come into conflict – or inaugurate a system of oppression where conflict is invisible – the modern philosophical language of scepticism may deflect one's own self-representation and the representation of the Other as well.[42]

Black theologian Willie James Jennings explains how processes of dehumanization and erasure of Amerindian and African identities epitomize the attempt to wipe-out their religions. Ecclesial and commercial interests were tied together in the exploration of the Portuguese colonies.[43] Pope Nicholas V applied the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*[44] in order to formulate two basic hermeneutic principles that supported the colonial enterprises. Since the world was created by God, and "out of nothing," the ordered or created realm contains infinite possibilities of continuity and discontinuity. Under this construction, human nature is inherently vulnerable, instable, and malleable because it integrates the realm of creation. Consequently, humans exist without fixed or permanent identities and places. This invented principle, argues Jennings, was intended to inscribe contingency in Amerindian and African souls, so that they could be moulded.

The second hermeneutic principle inaugurated the possibility of

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40. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, trans. A. C. Miles, ed. Rush Rhees (1979, repr.; Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1991), 36.

41. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion,* 33-37.

42. Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" in *Philosophy and Animal Life,* ed. Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Ian Hacking, and Cary Wolfe (New York: Columbia, 2008), 54, 55.

43. Jennings convincingly argues that the jointure of economic and theological ambitions enabled the translation of a soteriological radicalism—for the "salvation" of Amerindians—into a racial radicalism (Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination:* 27).

44. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 28.

conflating the figures of the Creator and the Saviour. Once incarnated, the apex of revelation finally ingresses into the unstable temporal dimension. It follows that the event of the incarnation generated a point of stability potentially extendable to all humans.[45] Since the Creator was made manifest as an embodied human-God, all things and peoples in the world now belong to this incarnated God, i.e., to Jesus Christ. As a result, all peoples ought to be spiritually and materially retrieved to their Creator-Saviour. In brief, God's incarnation transferred to the human dimension the stewardship and authority over all created beings.[46] In turn, Christ's rights over the world bestowed the Church a colossal authority upon all peoples, their lands, and religious imaginaries.[47] According to the whimsical rule promulgated in the bull *Romanus Pontifex*,[48] the powers of the pope, the king, and the incarnation merged, in order to manifest to the world an exceptionally potent Sovereign. Invested in canonical, political, and religious entitlements, Pope Nicholas V decided to delegate to the Portuguese King the right to act on his behalf, for the purposes of converting Africans and Amerindians.

For the colonized subject, however, disruption and mutilation of the paths of wisdom necessary to live in the world[49] may eliminate a fine web of memory, language, place, and a sense of wholeness with the cosmos[50] that constitutes meaning and sustains identities. For humans whose collective self-understanding relies essentially on their conditions and roles within ecosystems and the whole environment, the events of territorial conquest, geographical dislodging, and enslavement signify an attempt to interrupt the ancestral continuity of life that makes them part of humanity. By

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45. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 28.
46. Humans can only participate in God's life through Christ.
47. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 28.
48. The bull *Romanus Pontifex*, from January 8, 1455, "granted" the Portuguese Crown the right and the duty to religiously and physically reshape the recently "discovered" landscapes, their peoples, and gods: "To invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all… and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever… and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery… The said King Alfonso… justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed… these islands, lands, harbors, areas..." (Cited by Jennings: "Bull Romanus Pontifex, January 8, 1455," in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies to 1648*, vol. 1, ed. Frances Gardiner Davenport [Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1971], 23, 17).
49. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 58.
50. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 58.

means of creating a universal figure of sovereignty and trying to inscribe contingency upon all peoples and lands, the Church and the monarchy stood between Amerindians and the beings inhabiting their realities. For Jennings, this operation attempted to define a new relationship between the land, its inhabitants, and Amerindian identities. Amerindian religions, like all others, became potentially included in the universal "horizon of theological identities."[51]

Two major factors suggest that this doctrinal genealogy offered by Jennings tends to support Orsi's thesis of the "substitution" of deities by Catholic missionaries. First, Jennings' account communicates a positive or presential character in ancestral and modern territorial occupation, non-anthropocentric relationships, and the cultivation of ancestral languages, memories, and ways of being in the world enacted by Amerindians now and then. Second, the three aforementioned elements of Amerindian life – namely, land occupation, non-anthropocentric relationships, and ancestral appreciation and self-identification – seem to qualify or typify most Amerindian religious identities.

However, while the narratives of displacement, enslavement, and cultural effacement may be empirically conditioned by the geographical, religious, and cultural "substitutions," they might fail to demonstrate that the historical actuality of "substitutions" was inevitable. One may be geographically dislodged, enslaved, and apparently deprived of one's key cultural identifiers, and yet, one may still maintain a full sense of self, community, and universe that remains indisputably informed by ancestral forms of religious wisdom and modes of existing in the world. Therefore, Jennings' doctrinal analysis only partially and theoretically supports Orsi's thesis of the substitution of deities in Latin America.

3. The Ontological Incompleteness of the Tupinambá: A Challenge to the Hypotheses of "Ontological Similitude" and the "Substitution" of Religious Identities

This section rehearses the case of the Jesuit-Tupinambá encounter in order to expose the essentialist character of Orsi's theology. More specifically, it challenges Orsi's assumption of Catholic-Amerindian ontological

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51. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 29.

similitude by articulating a given anthropological view of the Tupinambá as a culture whose main sign of distinction is a radical exteriority and openness to alterity. Thus, this section seeks to demonstrate the ontological *dis*similitude between the Tupinambá and the Jesuits.

Viveiros de Castro argues that Jesuit missionaries were incapable of understanding a different form of sociability and a religion that dispensed from the figure of the sovereign. Because they seem to ignore the notion of culture as a system of beliefs, Viveiros thinks the Tupinambá have "inconstant souls" who inhabit a cosmos where the nature of reality is permanently open. To such a condition of openness, he assigns the expression "ontological incompleteness." According to him, openness to alterity was the chief reason why the Jesuits thought the Tupinambá lacked the notion of culture, construed as a system of beliefs that can be enforced. So, Viveiros' view of Tupinambá's religious and social life poses a radical contrast between the basic Tupian ontology and the ontological purview of the Thomist-Aristotelian Catholicism that the Jesuits brought to Brazil. Such a difference leads to the basic hypothesis that the Tupian ontology is open or "incomplete," while the Catholic is immutable or "complete." Incompleteness, though, is not a synonym for absence.

Orsi argues that Catholic missionaries viewed Amerindian religious practices in terms of "metaphysics of real presences."[52] The commonalities identified in key practices such as cannibalism and the sacrament of the Eucharist would indicate an ontological similitude between the two groups.[53] I suspect Orsi's position falls short of a closer analysis of Brazilian-Amerindian religion, since he advances his "substitution" of Amerindian deities thesis by means of assuming a generalized notion of "ontological proximity."

Before comparing the notion of ontological incompleteness with Orsi's thesis on ontological similitude, it is helpful to introduce the principal theoretical development in recent anthropology of religion that accommodates Viveiros' argument. The "ontological turn of anthropology" is a set of common and intersected debates that surround an original argument about the empirical and theoretical conditions necessary for the simultaneous existence of unique realities. Although it does not form nor align with any

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52. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 33.

53. As a result, the Portuguese sought to substitute "Indigenous" idols for Christian symbols and icons (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 35).

strictly unified theory, the influential ventures by Philippe Descola, Marilyn Strathern, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and Bruno Latour support the argument of ontological plurality – the simultaneity of uniquely singular realities. They share understandings and concepts that can be associated with the intellectual legacy left by the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[54] Some anthropologists working mainly in the USA, such as Veena Daas, Eduardo Kohn, Stefania Pandolfo, and Elizabeth Povinelli, also address similar questions.[55] It is noteworthy that all of them demonstrate a special interest in describing and advancing new forms of pluralism. Yet, what exactly is at stake in the ontological turn?

What Viveiros de Castro's series of lectures given in 1998[56] and Philippe Descola's *Beyond Nature and Culture* have most fundamentally in common is the claim that there are multiple, irreducible forms of thought that count as ontologies. These world-conceptions are not reducible to cultural practices or rituals. With their respective claims, the two anthropologists argue that these "alternative" ontologies exist and that they are coeval and contrastable with, though not fully "translatable" to, modern science and philosophy.[57] If their partaken argument on multiple ontolog*ies* – in the plural – sustains, then it becomes unthinkable for anyone to claim the prerogative of a putatively superior logical or existential, phenomenological or hermeneutical epistemic position. That is, it becomes impossible to defend the exclusivity of epistemic loci of reflection that operate within the paradigms of modern knowledge, in tandem with the claim that all other forms of knowledge are inauthentic or non-rigorous. The ontological turn sustains the capacity of "observed" subjects to define their own thought about the nature of reality. Under Viveiros' contribution, anthropologists and other scholars are unable to master and assess how "native" concepts alter the anthropologists' own concepts about their point of view as observers.[58]

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54. They also find inspiration in Roy Wagner's scholarship. For a perspective on the ontological turn, cf. Pierre Charbonnier, Gildas Salmon, and Peter Skafish (eds.), *Comparative Metaphysics: Ontology after Anthropology* (Reinventing Critical Theory Series; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

55. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 18.

56. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (Chicago, IL: Hau, 2015).

57. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 4.

58. On perspectivism, cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Os Pronomes Cosmológicos e o Pers-

He rejects the reduction of human thought to a *dispositif* of recognition and defines anthropology as the "ontological self-determination of collectives."[59] Since "observed" subjects can better define their own realities, some would argue anthropology is now "generating metaphysical perspectives not obtainable through other intellectual means."[60]

Some critics of ontological pluralism suggest the ontological turn's major argument consists in but a permissible code for cultural diversity. They displace the original claim about multiple ontologies to the broader register of cultural life in a manner that dispossesses anthropology from the power to raise ontological truth-claims. Other critics would argue that the idea of ontological pluralism threatens anthropological reflection with the much undesirable regression to primitivism, essentialism, or a vague relativism.[61] Alternatively, the shift of the recent ontological investiture by anthropology may be perceived as a renewed attempt to reconnect with the discipline's subversive disposition towards the pluralisation of culture.[62]

Aside from the disciplinary discussion of anthropology's power to generate truths, Viveiros de Castro's foremost goal may be to demonstrate the capacity of the "observed subjects" to define their own realities: anthropology serves a "permanent exercise in the decolonization of thought."[63] The relative epistemic autonomy conferred to the "subject-object" of ethnography, then, becomes essential for the proposal of ontological plurality. Consequently, the stirring disputes about which are the "truer" loci of observation and reflection seem less significant than the acknowledgement that ontological and conceptual thinking is not a privilege of a few.

Thus, the argument about the multiplicity of ontologies matters for the present discussion inasmuch as Viveiros aims at preserving ontological difference between Amerindian thought and modern metaphysics. One way to understand the treatment of Amerindian thought as expressions of

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pectivismo Ameríndio," *Maná* 2, no. 2 (1996): 115-144; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3 (1998): 469-488.

59. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, ed. and trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014), 43.

60. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 12.

61. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 4.

62. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 4.

63. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 47-8.

worlds that remain not entirely liable to modern approaches is to prioritize its denunciation of a certain arrogance in the scholarship that purports to comprehensively translate and exhaust – likely reduce – Amerindian metaphysics.[64] This way, the notion of ontological incompleteness relies on the argument for the multiplicity of worlds: if there are multiple realities, they can neither be conflated nor equated, although they can be partially communicated.

Granted that anthropology (also) bears the power to communicate truths pertaining to the realities of the "observed," what would be the "truth" of ontological incompleteness for the Tupinambá? What distinguishes Tupian from Catholic realities? In the Catholic world of the sixteenth century, religion, sociality, and politics were intrinsically dependent upon the language and categories of belief. In contrast, the Tupinambá religion and society of that period, argues Viveiros de Castro, were not rooted in the "normative experience of belief."[65]

For Viveiros, the modern notion of culture emerged from a theological reduction of the category of religion. Like religion, the concept of "culture" and that of "cultures" – the set of practices, values, histories, languages – were both theologically understood. When observed through the lens of chief theological constructions, such as the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, any given culture would disclose itself to the modern examiner as a self-preserving system of beliefs and ideals.[66] Barbarians of the "third class,"[67]

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64. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics,* 197-8.

65. Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View*, 45.

66. This proposition comes from Pierre Bourdieu (Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 12).

67. Viveiros refers to the "barbarian typology" and hierarchy crafted by José de Acosta in *De Procuranda.* On the top were the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Eastern Indians. This group could be converted through reason and advanced technologies. Inferior to them were the Mexicans, the Peruvians, and the Incans, who possessed elementary writing, accounting systems, and communication systems. This group ought to be converted through mechanisms of language appropriation and the translation of rituals and symbols. On the bottom line of barbarism were the Caribs, the Chuncos, the Chiriguanes, the Moxos, the Yscayingos, all Brazilians, and the Floridians. These peoples lived like wild beasts, and lacked both human feelings and an elementary writing system. Therefore, it was argued, they ought to be converted by force and an imposed pedagogy facilitated by the Christian government (José de Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute: Pacificacion y Colonizacion*, ed. L. Pereña et al., 2 vol. [Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas-CSIC, 1984], 108).

the Tupinambá lacked a written history, "king," "law," and "faith." Their different modes of social and political organization indicated to the missionaries the incapacity to follow beliefs on a regular basis.[68] Hence, the apparent absence of "law" and "king" among the Tupinambá bespoke to the Jesuits their inability to believe.[69] In *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*,[70] Viveiros argues that the Jesuits failed to identify "religion" among the Tupinambá because they were thought to be incapable of understanding the category of belief.[71] The lack of belief would have implied the lack of religion too. Many pieces from the vast Jesuit archives of the sixteenth century describe Amerindian groups as people who do not understand religion. A quote from José de Anchieta, the most intellectually prolific Jesuit in Brazil, is illustrative:

> If they had a king, they could be converted, or if they worshiped something; but since they do not even know what believing or worshiping is, they cannot understand the preaching of the Gospel because it is based in making people believe and worship only one God, and serve Him alone; and since these heathens do not even worship anything, everything one tells them turns into nothing.[72]

The missionary logic could be condensed in the following sequence: a society that lacks a sovereign and a legal system will also lack a culture because values and ideals need reinforcement; therefore, without law and culture, such a society will necessarily lack religion too, since a religion, as much as a culture, is a system of beliefs that requires some sort of moral, legal, or political reinforcement. Since religion implied the reinforcement of mores by a sovereign, it is possible to link the missionary concept of

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68. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 13.
69. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 12.
70. In this essay, I focus on Viveiros' work about the Tupinambá people. For his anthropology of the religion of the Araweté, cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Araweté: Os deuses canibais* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Jorge Zahar Editor and ANPOCS, 1986). Also, cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Araweté: o povo do Ipixuna* (Lisbon, Assírio & Alvim, 2000). In English, cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, trans. Catherine V. Howard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
71. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 14.
72. José de Anchieta's *Dialogue of the Conversion of the Heathen* is quoted by Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 44.

religion to a kind of theocracy: without some sovereign political power, a society could not bear solid commitments to whatever beliefs. Under this logic, beliefs depend on strong commitments, which, in turn, must be enforced. Accordingly, Jesuits in Brazil concluded that the Tupinambá had superstitions and bad habits, but not religion.[73]

So, the three "constitutive absences" of Brazilian Amerindians, namely, lack of law, king, and faith, had a causal interconnection. This position, defenced by missionaries, contradicts Orsi's arguments about "presence" being the paradigm of both Catholicism and Amerindian religions. Orsi assumes all missionaries thought Amerindian religions are (also) based on what he calls "metaphysics of real presence." So, inasmuch as the Jesuits reported an "absence" of religion among the Tupinambá, and the category of "belief" is not a cornerstone in Tupian life, Orsi's thesis of ontological similitude between missionaries and Amerindians falls short of empirical and theoretical grounds in Brazil.

Irrespective of missionary accounts, the Tupinambá do hold a religion. In Tupian religion, ontological incompleteness is the disposition to incorporate difference or alterity in the *socius*. It communicates the incompleteness of a form of sociability and an identity that promotes the constant expansion of humanity.[74] The fact that the Tupinambá believed the separation between humans, non-humans, and divine entities was a question of condition, and not one of nature, undergirds their "incompleteness." On Tupinambá lands, humans are consubstantial and commensurable with deities and indwell their reality.[75] Moreover, generally, Amerindians hold that humans are not exceptional enough to secure a foundational specific human relation to the entire gamut of beings.[76] So, the nature of reality pertaining to both human and divine forms of existence in the Tupian universe differs from its correlate in the Christian cosmology, where humans are neither consubstantial nor commensurable with God. Such a gap or difference would have led the Jesuits to misapprehend and misrepresent Amerindian religion.

This way, it is possible to identify something in common between Orsi's view of religion and early modern Jesuit theology. Orsi frames religion as

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73. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 12.

74. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 47.

75. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 30.

76. Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*, 13.

a cultural system that originates and guides interpretations of relationships and phenomena that positively display a metaphysical source of authority, the "metaphysics of real presence." Similarly, Jesuits in Brazil thought religion was a system of socially positive beliefs and norms about the nature and functioning of the world, souls, and God.[77] However, according to Viveiros' anthropology, neither Orsi's nor the Jesuits' theologies can capture the essence of the religion of the Tupinambá, because the latter is premised on an open relationship with the Other.

On a foundational level, Viveiros takes issue with a conception of society that depends on self-preservation mechanisms and an external, political, and transcendental figure of authority. In his understanding, modern European societies are organisms that fight to preserve the ideals constitutive of their own reflected being. In this vein, a culture would be a system of beliefs that reflects its social group's own form of being. Thus, the notion of a modern, organized society implies that thought, memory, and the preservation of beliefs are cardinal instruments with which groups protect their own reflexive forms of being throughout generations.

Differently, for societies where the relation to the Other is an elementary directive, the substantial transformation of cultural values is not necessarily perceived as dangerous.[78] So, the right question is no longer "were Amerindian gods and religious identities substituted?" Rather, the question is "what if 'identity' itself is conceived as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging the subject?"[79] Under this concept of identity, the category of "substitution" seems illogical because there is nothing to be replaced. For example, the Tupinambá were spontaneously disposed toward some Christian practices and ideas, even though they would refuse moral reinforcement by the Jesuits. This was the reason why, according to Viveiros, the Jesuits did not feel the need to substitute the Tupian gods: Amerindians would not hold strong beliefs about anything, regardless of the religious sources. Simply, they were inconstant, did not understand the concept of "culture," did not know how to believe according to the Christian connota-

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77. "Religion as a cultural system presupposes an idea of culture as a religious system" (Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 12).

78. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 18.

79. Viveiros borrows the provocation from James Clifford. Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 18.

tion, and absolutely refused to commit to any fixed identity.

I am by no means suggesting that the Tupinambá lacked culture and religion. Instead, their culture appears to have been essentially an open set of potential explanations of traditional *and* new ways of being in the world. It follows that their open culture constantly needed to capture and incorporate alterity.[80] For this reason, more than towards Christianity, the Tupinambá were "inconstant" in relation to their own religion.[81] It seems reasonable, therefore, that such a religion – without rites, idols, and priests[82] – could never have been subsumed into either the Jesuits' or Orsi's positivistic concepts of religion. Orsi speaks the theological language of presence, identity, and erasure or substitution. In contrast, the Tupinambá speak the language of inconstancy, incompleteness, exteriority, and exchange.

Missionaries realized firsthand that a simple "substitution" of the Tupian "gods" for the Christian God would be unrealistic, because the Tupinambá were incapable of believing, in the Catholic sense. However, as Orsi argues, there were indeed similarities between Catholicism and Tupian religion. For instance, the Tupinambá were familiar with eschatological narratives about the end of the world and appreciated the idea of spirits and souls dwelling in their lands. They even sought conversion to Christianity. But, due to their lack of consistency, they would soon and easily forget the Gospel, the Eucharist, and any promises of eternal life.[83] The Jesuits finally decided that the prior introduction of some sort of civilizational foundation was a precondition for the conversion of Brazilian Amerindians, a historical fact which only reconfirms that the notion of public religion was, at the time, unconceivable without the notions of "king" and "law."

As Hélène Clastres also argues, the Tupi-Guarani cosmology is characterized by the notion that the human and the divine are not severed by an unbridgeable ontological gap.[84] Humans and gods are commensurable and consubstantial with one another. For this reason, humanity is seen as a condition, not a nature. In this case, Orsi's point that the gods "break into

80. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 34.
81. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 15.
82. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 16.
83. In particular, they detested missionary prohibitions on drinking *cauim*, practicing polygamy, celebrating cannibalism, promoting wars, and executing vengeance.
84. Hélène Clastres is cited in Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 30.

time" would rather seem tautological to the Tupinambá. After all, their gods had always dwelled in the temporal realm. Overall, Amerindian gods are embodied beings. Yet, in Tupian religion, the condition of being human can and ought to be overcome. Because deities are consubstantial with humans and dwell in the world, divinity is a becoming, a condition to be achieved through the expansion of one's own humanity, and exercised in the social integration of difference. These notions contrast with the early modern theological refutation of the reduction of divinity to corruptible matter. In Brazil, the visceral immediacy between humans and deities did not represent an eschatological scandal, as it did for Luther.[85] Instead, such immediacy would be the real engine of salvation, since the goal of humanity was expressed in terms of social and individual expansion of consciousness, rather than some sort of metaphysical transmutation or bodily resurrection.

The encounter between the Tupinambá and the Jesuits also poses a serious challenge to the normative model of human relationality that Orsi's theology entails. Orsi posits the existence of an "ontological anxiety" among Catholics and "other peoples." In fact, Jesuit letters from Brazil describe how a few "bad Christians went native:" they established polygamous marriages, killed native enemies, and even participated in cannibalistic ceremonies.[86] Viveiros de Castro rejects the notion that these "native conversions" were the fruit of the imposition of a Tupian identity upon Europeans.[87] In fact, the Tupinambá would perceive gods, enemies, and Europeans as figures of affinity and sought to establish relationships with them precisely because of their difference. Difference invited affinity, which attracted the Tupinambá.

The human and divine partaking of the same nature in Tupian religion can provide a hermeneutical key for understanding the Tupinambá's seemingly paradoxical need or desire for alterity. Although they failed to understand Tupian religion, the Jesuits noted a remarkable consequence of this Amerindian concept: the Tupinambá did not know how to properly feel religious reverence and fear in the way missionaries demanded of them. "They

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85. Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics" (1527) in *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 37, ed. Robert H. Fischer and Helmut T. Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961), 2-150, esp. 33; cited in Orsi, *History and Presence*, 19 (n. 14), 259.

86. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 32.

87. "The Indians had no maniac desire to impose their identity... Rather, they aimed…to transform their own identity" (Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 30).

do not feel anything strongly, neither spiritual loss, nor temporal, there is nothing for which they have a very sensitive sentiment, nor that lasts them long…"[88] The spirit of Paganism did not speak the same theocratic language as the missions in Brazil. In this exact sense, the Tupinambá seem to have lived in another religious and social world, one lacking the sort of normative experience of belief proposed by missionary Christianity. Did this different mode of sociability derive from Amerindians' self-perception as beings who are ontologically similar to their own gods?

Such a "similarity" could also explain why the Tupinambá seemed to be free from the social constraints of bearing culturally encumbered religious identities. To doubt that Amerindians worshipped idols and that such (absent) worship ought to have been the prime expression of their social organization is to cast suspicion on an anthropological frame of society as a reflexive and identitarian totality.[89] In brief, the cultural and religious sources of a Tupinambá mode of interiority entailed nothing but a movement toward exteriority.

Perhaps for the same reason, the broader Tupi-Guarani peoples avoided the arrogance of self-proclaiming themselves the "chosen" peoples. Accordingly, they also did not succumb to the compulsion of submitting the Other to their own image.[90] Inversely, the Tupinambá desired the Europeans in their full alterity, including some elements of Christianity.[91] Only the missionary reinforcement of Christian mores and values would unabashedly fail. For Viveiros, they received the Portuguese as an opportunity for self-transcendence, as a sign of a reunion or being capable of expanding their humanity by means of absorbing alterity.[92] They did not feel the need to reject the Other in favour of their own ethnic "excellence," because they would not see the Other as a reflexive mirror, but instead, as a destination. A society operating on the basis of such a radical engagement with difference could not automatically exclude.[93] As Viveiros puts it, the exterior was constantly engaged in a process of interiorization and the interior was

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88. These are the words of the Jesuit priest Luís de Grã (Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 43).

89. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 46.

90. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 30.

91. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 31.

92. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 30.

93. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 47.

a movement towards the outside. The practice of cannibalism, for instance, reflects this principle of movement.[94]

4. Conclusion: Ontological Incompleteness and a De-colonial Critique of Orsi's Theology

History and Presence ultimately aims to provide a "unique critical purchase on the study of religion and history" which, according to Orsi, the Catholic imaginary played in shaping "modern consciousness."[95] As exposed in the previous sections, a few papal theological constructs based on an ambitious reading of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* corroborate Orsi's point that missionaries successfully apprehended Amerindian religion "positively." Subsequently, according to Jennings' readings of missionary theology, the Jesuits might have also attempted to substitute Amerindian religious and cultural identities without securing further details about the principles underlying their native worldviews. However revealing and sophisticated, theological-historical genealogies of colonial conflicts – such as Jennings's – tend to deliver overly-broad pictures of the major theoretical and empirical effects emerging from the complex entanglement of intercultural encounters and the inauguration of political systems and moral institutions for colonial domination. Because of its geopolitical breadth, such a mode of theological analysis also tends to miss deeply encrusted and particularized nuances in Amerindians' perceptions of what colonization meant and still means for their peoples.

In any event, it is interesting to highlight that the papal attempt to inscribe "contingency" on all peoples of the world seems to resonate partially with Viveiros' understanding that the Tupinambá were spontaneously an "inconstant" people. In this regard, it remains important to inquire as to

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94. Tupian cannibalism secured the eternal inter-group nexus. Eating the member of the enemy group would prompt the enemy group's revenge. As a consequence, the infinite cycle of capturing and eating each other's warriors guaranteed memory and a constantly open soul that was ready to incorporate the enemy Other into the *socius*. For Levi-Strauss too, cannibalism revealed an excess of sociability based on the fundamental identification with the Other. Both the killing of an enemy and the loss of a warrior determined individuals' social statuses, conferred rights to marry and have children, prompted new attacks, and maintained a collective memory about warfare. Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 47, 53-88, 101.

95. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 250.

whether the Tupinambá truly were spontaneously inconstant and ontologically incomplete or, instead, this view offers a misconceived representation of some reductive form of Amerindian identities that the Jesuits conveniently accepted as true in their colonial writings. In any event, the papal project to inscribe contingency and a new identity upon Amerindians failed to eliminate a native sense of self and community that was irrefutably enlivened by ancestral forms of Tupinambá wisdom and existence. To what degree can vaporous doctrines permanently erase actually embodied ancestral wisdom and their place in social life?

Irrespective of a few methodological issues in his philosophical anthropology, Viveiros' wider panorama of a given colonial encounter sufficiently attends to both Amerindian and Jesuit sources. The contrast of ontological incompleteness with Orsi's proposal that "presence" is the norm of religious phenomena[96] reveals the essentialist and generalized character of Orsi's theology. In Brazil, Jesuit missionaries failed to perceive the religion of the Tupinambá, so, the norm they inaugurated was one of "absence," and not "presence." No "idols" were worshiped. Consequently, no "substitution" of deities was detected during early contacts either. In Viveiros' interpretation, Jesuit missionaries failed to recognize the category of "religion," because they misjudged the core organizational principles conducting Tupian life: ontological incompleteness and the inconstancy that it reveals. Due to the epistemic limitation correlated with one's incapacity to question one's own political, religious, and cultural identities, the Jesuits ignored even the possibility of a religion without a sovereign and with a particularly "illegible" mode of welcoming the neighbour into a different reality.

Orsi argues that some non-modern and non-Christian religions "survived" the institutional "imposition of absence" conveyed by legal orders and political regimes, especially after the liberal revolutions.[97] However, prior to the Enlightenment and the bourgeoisie revolutions, it was precisely the absence of "king" and "law" that seem to have prevented the Jesuits from acknowledging Tupian religion in Brazil. In the Brazilian case, these two absences among Amerindians in fact stimulated the Portuguese Crown to promulgate the colonial regime only many years after it established territorial *dominium* over Amerindian land. Such a historical fact corroborates

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96. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 6.
97. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 40-42, 250, 251.

Viveiros' argument that the absence of "law" and "king" among the Tupinambá led the Jesuits to conclude that Amerindians needed a juridical-political organization before they could even comprehend the idea of religion.[98] Thus, the absence of either an Amerindian or monarchical figure of sovereignty over the Tupinambá prevented the Catholics, not the Tupinambá, from recognizing the religion of the Other. This fact plays contrary to Orsi's claim that "presence" and religions survived the "laws." In Brazil, the accepted historical narratives retell that Brazilian-Amerindian religions were most directly attacked *after* the promulgation of the Portuguese colonial rule and not prior to it. To a great degree, the colonial rule aimed at delivering "civilization" and, with it, Christianity. So, also contrary to Orsi's argument, with the advent of "laws" and "theories," the religion of the Tupinambá became neither "illegible" to structures of power, nor by them "substituted." Instead, Tupian religions were illegible only *before* the promulgation of the colonial legal regime.

Finally, Orsi calls for a critical rethinking of the study of history and religion, beginning with the question of how history is constituted. However, his own historiography of colonialism in the Americas also projects on other peoples the theological notions he extracted from his study of a small sample of contemporary Italian- and Irish-American Catholics. In view of this problem – i.e., the scholarly temptation to essentialize religion – it is important to ask whether the Tupinambá's "ontological incompleteness" could possibly bespeak a different logic capable of supporting the pursuit of a (de-colonial) critique of theology and democracy. In a world where "identity" is the norm, it seems dangerous, and yet necessary, to inquire into the moral and religious meaning of that courage to welcome difference in the forms of opposed political sensibilities, seemingly inimical rationalities, and religious commitments. The disposition towards welcoming and incorporating new ways of existing in the world into our cultural and social life does not necessarily signify a threat to gradually empty identities and traditions. For instance, the Tupinambá's ontological incompleteness does not signify the "absence" of tradition and identity. On the contrary, it bespeaks the pursuit of a certain human advancement that runs against the dangers of cultural or religious ossification. While ontological incompleteness is surely not a promise of politically "harmonious" intercultural exchanges,

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98. Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 44.

it also does not signify cultural devastation.[99] The disposition toward being culturally, politically, and spiritually transformed by one's neighbour can also preserve a special kind of religious knowledge of the self that is only contained in its full exteriority in the public life.

Perhaps, the cannibal interpreted separateness and scepticism as legends within Christian mythology. Perhaps, they interpreted the conditions of shared exteriority and the need to embody alterity as mutable, malleable, religious semi-truths. In any event, and against the totality of an eventual illegitimate sovereign, their religion seems to have evaluated evolution according to the achieved levels of a spontaneously undertaken transcendence to a state of becoming (within) the neighbour.

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99. In a similar guise, Jonathan Lear weaves an interesting argument in his *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).