

# **Astronism and the Astronic Religious Tradition**

## **Abstract**

A new religion was founded in 2013 that goes by the name of Astronism while its community of followers are known as Astronists. This article gives a rigorous account of the eschatology, soteriology and worldview of this new space religion while contextualising its emergence as part of a broader Astronic religious tradition. This proposed tradition may itself possess prehistoric roots in the Upper Palaeolithic in the earliest human observations of the night sky. Human beings in turn came to establish a relationship with celestial phenomena, one of both spiritual and secular utility that has since produced systems of astrotheism and astrology. In the contemporary, the projection of the Astronist theory of history onto the Astronic tradition has meant that Astronism's salvific doctrine of transcension is established as a grand narrative and universal ethic that unites the cosmocentric Astronic tradition. In essence, this article considers how Astronism, as a new religious movement, is working to revive astronomical religion, albeit in ways relevant in an age of space exploration and appropriate to modern scientific knowledge about humanity's true place in the universe.

Keywords: astronality, Astronic tradition, Astronism, new religious movements, space religion, transcension.

## Introduction

Since prehistoric times, human beings have observed the night sky in wonder and awe which has in some cultures inspired spiritualities and religious beliefs involving celestial phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Examples of astronomical religion from the prehistoric and ancient past include astrolatry (worship of the stars) and astromancy (divination by the stars). This strand of religious activity seems to have emerged again in the modern era with the advent of exotheistic<sup>2</sup> religions in the 20th century.<sup>3</sup> This type of religion formed on the basis of astronomical observation provides the grounds for a category that could encompass and organise the range of belief systems integrating celestial phenomena of one kind or another. The proposed category may be called space religion and would include branches of astronomical or astral religion (in close relation to nature religion) and others more akin to transhumanist traditions like exotheism. The range of religions that have in the past or continue to incorporate astronomy, space exploration, or extraterrestrial visitations in their beliefs reveals a need for the scholarly analysis of space religion. Astronism is one such religion that belongs to the space religion category. With its recent founding in 2013, Astronism has brought with it a clarification of what it means to be a space religion that has in many ways worked to legitimise the category.

## History of Astronism and the Astronist theory of knowledge

Astronism was founded in and around the city of Preston in the northern county of Lancashire in England, a region with a surprisingly long history of facilitating new or marginalised religions.<sup>4</sup> Astronism's origins can be traced to a boy aged fifteen who had been brought up in a Traditionalist Catholic family from the area south of Preston.<sup>5</sup> Astronism began when the boy, known mononymously as Cometan, on the day of his fifteenth birthday (1st July 2013), started to write mystery stories about a fictional teenage detective he named Jesse Millette. Cometan naively envisioned that his protagonist would practice a new religion distinct from all others that would focus on the stars, in part resulting from Cometan's own personal dissatisfaction with available religions, none of which resonated with him. Soon, this fictional religion emerged as a real religion when Cometan began to experience actual visions of humanity's future among the stars coupled with

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald (1951:197-212).

<sup>2</sup> Previously and inaccurately so, the acronym for unidentified flying object (UFO) has been used to refer to all kinds of movements that give a central focus to the notion that extraterrestrials exist and have both the ability and inclination to communicate with human beings to impart revelations, a belief called exotheism. The use of the UFO acronym in this context is confusing as some movements that incorporate a belief in exotheism do not necessarily involve the idea of a UFO. The adjective exotheistic is proposed as a replacement of the UFO acronym. As a result, the category of UFO religions exists as one type of exotheistic religion which would itself reside within the broadest classification of space religion.

<sup>3</sup> Zeller (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Quakerism began with George Fox's vision on Pendle Hill, the earliest English Mormons who travelled to America were from Lancashire, while Catholicism had always maintained a stronghold in Lancashire even during the Reformation era.

<sup>5</sup> Cometan et al. (2022)

intense religious ecstasies when he observed the night sky. During this time, he received dictations to his intellect consisting of peculiar knowledge that all seemed to centre on the notion that space exploration would bring about humanity's salvation, a belief that was indeed far removed from the Catholicism he had been taught during his childhood.

From being fifteen years old, Cometan described his intense connection to the night sky which resulted in a stream of unusual doctrines being transmitted to his intellect that he then labelled with new words which had also been transmitted to him. This body of ideations would eventually come to form the full revelation of transcension that Astronists profess today. The inspiration he received from these astral transmissions gave him the ability to write down in significant detail the fundamental structures of his new religion. Cometan formally began writing down the contents of his ideations in 2015 when he was seventeen years old, writings that in total would come to form the Omnidoxy which was completed in 2019 and sits at 1.7 million words in length, making it one of the longest religious texts. The Omnidoxy has since been labelled by Cometan as the founding text of Astronism, notably not the religion's central text. This label has instead been reserved for Cometan's upcoming work called the Astrodoxy. A pivotal event in Cometan's journey to found Astronism is now called the Dedication which occurred at midnight on his eighteenth birthday during which he described kneeling down before the window in his bedroom, looking up to the clear night sky, and then bound his adult life to founding the new religion that had been dictated to him from a divine source but through the medium of the astronomical world and directly to his intellect.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that Astronism has been a digital religion from its outset has held a significant influence over its formation and development, for example, Cometan began projecting his ideations onto the internet quite soon after receiving them. This has since allowed Astronism access to the global community of internet users with its various websites, video series, and social media platforms dispensing Astronist teachings. This access through technology has already given Astronism matters of concern different from those of other new religions that were founded before the internet such as ensuring that any content online about Astronism is accurate. Just like Astronist doctrines, Astronist practices are also cosmocentric. Hence, a typical Astronist would practice praying to the stars for scope, would meditate under a clear night sky to enhance their astronality, or would simply learn about astronomy, or attempt to contribute to space exploration in some way. Cometan began mastering these practices during the founding years of Astronism which has since established a tradition of ritual and practices that are geared towards invoking scope with the sole purpose of progressing transcension which is Astronism's ultimate goal.

Many of the key events during Cometan's founding of Astronism were religious experiences of three primary types, experiences which gave him the knowledge to produce the Astronist belief system: the first is an 'astral ecstasy', the second he labelled 'indrucy', and the third he described as his 'celestial mode'. Astral ecstasies are a form of religious ecstasy that begin with one's direct exposure to the night sky and subsequent entry into an altered state of consciousness and euphoria that produce visions of the human future in outer space or

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<sup>6</sup> Young (2021).

astronomical phenomena and are followed by a long series of ideations, especially regarding transcension or any cosmocentric doctrine. They are akin to other kinds of religious ecstasies but are experienced as a result of the intensification of an emotion which in Astronism is called astronality. Cometan would experience these ecstasies, would receive a series of ideations, and would afterwards write down these principles transmitted to him which in turn came to form the Omnidoxy. Secondly, indrucus is a series of ideations transmitted through the astronomical world to a person, ideations the person is then compelled to write down. Indrucus is distinct from an astral ecstasy in that an indrucus involves no visions nor any altered state of consciousness, but instead can be understood as a domino effect in which one ideation in a person's intellect leads to the next as part of an incremental inspiration. The word indrucus was coined by Cometan to refer to particularly intensive sessions of receiving ideations to distinguish these sessions from merely receiving ideas as a far more common phenomenon.

The intensity of an indrucus is made evident by both its mental and physical symptoms some of which are unpleasant including one's obsession with the content of the ideations, nausea, headaches, reclusion, as well as sudden impulses to write down the ideations one receives. Thirdly, celestial mode is a state of mind that Cometan described being able to achieve once he had experienced a few years of indrucies. Celestial mode is distinct as it is self-induced through engaging in the aforementioned practices of astral meditation or praying to the stars while a person who experiences an indrucus or astral ecstasy has no control over when or where they occur, or when they end. Unlike astral ecstasies or indrucies, which may possibly last a couple of hours at the very most, Cometan's celestial mode would often take place for weeks at a time during which his mind would be fixated on Astronism or some aspect of it, like transcension for instance, while going about his daily life. The celestial mode describes a constant undercurrent in the mind in which all or the majority of Cometan's thoughts and new ideas were related to Astronism. In this regard, an indrucus or astral ecstasy, for example, may take place during a period in which Cometan is in celestial mode. All three types of these astronomical religious experiences produce what Cometan called afflation which is knowledge or foresight received through the medium of the astronomical world. This type of knowledge is grounded in Astronism's epistemology of the stars which sees outer space and its phenomena as a prime source of knowledge and of religious truth. It is for this reason why Astronism may be viewed as in part naturalistic because although knowledge may ultimately be drawn from The Divine, it is necessary that such knowledge is transmitted to the human intellect (or the intellect of any sapient being) through the astronomical world.

As a result, Astronism self-identifies as an inspired religion rather than one purely revealed or rationalistic. The category of inspired religions mixes together revelation with reason. For example, while the content of Cometan's astral ecstasies may be classified as revelation, their transmission to the limited human intellect means those revelations too become limited, in part limited by reason itself which is a mark of limitation rather than a characteristic of infinitude or divinity. The distinction is that an inspired religion is one in which doctrines are transmitted directly to the intellect rather than having been dictated directly by, for example, the voice of God as is the case in some Abrahamic religions. In essence, the revelations are subjected to cosmic limitation because they must pass through

the filter of the human intellect, must be interpreted and then write down in limited words and explanations before they can be distributed. Beyond this epistemological classification, there are indeed other ways of categorizing Astronism.

### **Categorising Astronism**

Astronism fits into the landscape of contemporary world religion in three primary ways according to its type, theme and theology. Most immediately, Astronism is a new religious movement (NRM) which can bring issues of both theological as well as social illegitimacy, incoherence and unfamiliarity, theoretical discrepancies involving the movement's development, issues of rivalry with other religions, and practical concerns over financing and organisation.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, being a space religion, Astronism must contend with both legitimizing that category and navigating it, namely distinguishing itself from other movements and validating its worthiness as a member. Thirdly, Astronism can be categorised according to its theology which is nestled between panentheism and panendeism<sup>8</sup> which thereby sets it apart from the traditional dichotomy of monotheism and polytheism. In essence, Astronism is a new religion using unfamiliar words and newfound concepts, it belongs to an untraditional and relatively new category of religions, and holds closest resemblance to one of the lesser-known theologies.<sup>9</sup> In combination, these factors isolate Astronism from the broader religious world so explaining Astronist beliefs is crucial in order so that it can be compared and contrasted with other religions.

When it comes to the historical and geographic association of space religions, some notable issues arise. Firstly, there has been no clear historical lineage for space religions set out in religious scholarship which has meant that this category has been left outside of the three main Abrahamic, Dharmic and Taoic traditions. Astronist theory has sought to rectify this issue by formally presenting a religious tradition called the Astronic tradition to encompass the history of the space religion category. Secondly, the unorganised nature of space religions has meant that no institutions have been developed to definitively represent such religions and their followers as a cohesive community. Thirdly, the fact that outer space can be viewed from any point on Earth naturally makes space religions universal but failing to associate with any particular geographic region, people group, or culture has meant that a distinctive identity uniting members of space religions has yet to form. Finally, the condemnation of space-oriented beliefs like astrolatry as idolatrous in Abrahamic religions possibly meant that any such group could not formally establish itself before being suppressed and extinguished.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Barker (1999:15-29).

<sup>8</sup> The panendeism of Astronism affirms The Divine created The Cosmos in which humanity resides as well as an infinite number of other cosmoses, that while The Divine exists independently from these cosmoses it has the capability of interpenetrating them but does not intervene in their overall course and does not physically incarnate in The Cosmos but instead exists in The Cosmos as scope. There is debate over the degree of this 'divine intervenience' allowable before this Astronist panendeism reverts to panentheism.

<sup>9</sup> McDermott & Sullivan (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Seligsohn (1906:527-528).

## Cosmocentric worldview

Any attempt to categorise different religions means they must have some kind of commonality, whether geographic, historical, or thematic. To legitimise a space religion category, Astronist theory has worked to identify similarities among the space religions that convincingly justifies their association. The commonality of all space religions is the theme of outer space, especially when viewed, to varying degrees and with differing effects, as an intermediary to divinity, or as a source of meaning. To whatever degree or effect, space religions share a focus on some aspect of outer space, whether it be humanity's expansion into space, astronomical phenomena themselves, or extraterrestrials visiting Earth and imparting their higher knowledge to human beings. This celestial focus is embodied by the worldview of cosmocentrism which is formalised in Astronist philosophy and is comparable to the theocentrism of the Abrahamic religions.

Although cosmocentrism may be implied in pre-Astronist religions, Astronism is the first religion to establish cosmocentrism as its official worldview.<sup>11</sup> Astronist theory has retrospectively identified that certain groups held a cosmocentric worldview without explicitly using the term 'cosmocentrism' themselves, an example being the Russian cosmists.<sup>12</sup> The main principle of the cosmocentric worldview is to place the astronomical world at the centre of belief, being and doing, in a way that results in the subservience of the self. As a result, cosmocentrism may be understood as the antithesis of anthropocentrism. This principle finds support in Astronism in its belief that humanity has strayed into anthropocentrism at various points throughout history to the disregard of the minuscule role humankind plays in the grand scheme of The Cosmos, a truth advanced by Nicolaus Copernicus and his heliocentric model of the solar system for example.<sup>13</sup>

Cosmocentrism is the principal reason for Astronism's astronomical theme on the basis that outer space is seen as the setting for humanity's quest for salvation. This conveniently leads into a broader discussion regarding the entire foundation of Astronism. Astronist philosophy begins with an observation of the human condition, namely that humankind is intrinsically limited in all ways: physiologically, mentally, and metaphysically. This is a consequence of our necessary existence in a cosmos bound by a pervading law of limitation. The epitome of this limitation is observable in the subjection of all life to time, immorality, decay, death, and extinction, while also in the createdness<sup>14</sup> of The Cosmos itself. Limitation is then seen as the underlying cause of all suffering and evil in the world; a limited amount of resources, for example, leads to starvation, theft, exploitation, and murder. Although the limited human mind does not have the immediate capacity to know how to escape this reality, the Astronist religion asserts that human beings, by consequence of our sapience, in fact possess a quality that provides us with the potential to free ourselves from this limitation. This quality, often referred to as a 'conferment' in Astronist terminology, is called scope. Beyond being a quality

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<sup>11</sup> Astronist Institution (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Gingerich (1973).

<sup>13</sup> Young (2012).

<sup>14</sup> The fact of having been created rather than having always existed.

in a sapient being, scope itself refers to opportunity, especially to transcend limited nature by thought and action.

Astronism presents a solution to the problem of limitation by stating that human beings must both individually and collectively identify and overcome limitedness in its various forms. Astronism differs from Christianity, for example, not in its identification of the human tendency to suffer or to commit acts of evil, but in the identification of what caused this side of human nature to exist and specifically differs from the Christian doctrine of original sin. Firstly, Astronism sees humanity's limitedness and all its consequences as both inevitable, natural, and necessary. Humans are limited because if we were not then humans would be immortal, perfect and essentially divine. Immorality, as a form of limitation, is therefore a necessary element instilled in all beings with limited choices and capacity. It is therefore the lot of humanity to begin in a state of limitation, but Astronism teaches that we need not have to stay this way as human beings possess the potential to become unlimited. Secondly, Astronism sees sin as just one product of the more fundamental problem of limitation; that the issue is not merely human action or inaction but the fact that choices are limited at all. To Astronists, fixing sin as the mission of the Christian church is tantamount to fixing a symptom rather than the cause itself therein never truly resolving immorality. Indeed, presented here are some major hamartiological differences between Astronism and Christianity, namely that in Astronism, human beings are viewed as necessarily limited and so cannot help their failures or immoral acts. The hope of Astronism is that human beings will overcome their limitations which is why transcension orients the Astronist ethic. Human beings therefore suffer and commit transgressions, not as a consequence of any prior wrongdoing that they have inherited, but instead as a fact of cosmic limited existence, a position that sees Astronist belief contrast with the doctrine of original sin. Astronism does not disregard sin, however, in fact it establishes its own distinct doctrine of sin — called repudiate sin — which views sinful nature as a natural part of limited existence from which humans have the scope to escape. Astronists therefore differ from Christians not on the existence of the problem of sin, but on the reasons for its existence and how it is resolved.

The key fact for Astronists is that because humans are sapient, we are receptive of scope and so we have the opportunity to escape from our limited condition while creatures that are merely sentient cannot. In this regard, Astronism fulfils a similar function to almost all other religions in that it firstly observes a problem and presents its solution to that problem while subsequently claiming several kinds of rewards for those who follow its path. This path and the rewards promised at its end are embodied by Astronism's soteriology.

### **Transcension: The Astrosoteriology**

The central endeavour of the Astronist religion is called transcension which gives meaning to the lives of all Astronists and entirely constitutes the purpose of Astronism as a religion with it being Astronism's proposed solution to the problem of limitation. Transcension is a process in which the physical, intellectual and metaphysical elevation of the human species into outer space takes place. It is both a type and method of salvation, but more poetically, it

is a salvation among the stars.<sup>15</sup> The two-pronged claim of transcension is that salvation means to escape from limited existence and secondly, that this escape is available for any sapient species in The Cosmos by proximating itself to the astronomical world. Outer space is chosen as the setting for transcension because it is an intermediary realm between the mundanity of earthly life and the infinitude of divine existence beyond The Cosmos. Essentially, although outer space is still limited, it is less limited than the confines of Earth and so it is conceived that by venturing into outer space, humanity will eventually unlock the secret to unlimitedness. Diagrams called Major Astronist Mechanisms have been produced that visualise and explain the Astronist vision for transcension according to its four dimensions: individual and collective as well as corporeal and post-corporeal.<sup>16</sup>

The essence of transcension is that it involves an endeavour to work towards a complete transformation of the human species by guiding its limited nature through a transition into becoming unlimited. However, the law of cosmic limitation is pervasive and so affects transcension itself. As a result, transcension is considered evitable<sup>17</sup> and, therefore, its management is necessary to ensure it is completed, especially because what it asks of a species — to change its nature from limited to unlimited — is no easy feat. The doctrine of evitability makes transcension vulnerable to human free will and in turn, according to Astronist belief, humans must act in a certain way, namely by following Astronist prescriptions on life, in order to ensure its completion. The management of transcension is manifest in the concept of an Economy of Transcension or Siderine Economy, namely that a specific plan of transcension is conveyed through Astronism that, if executed in the prescribed way, will bring transcension to fruition and manifest the promises intertwined with it. Because transcension is the central part of the Astronist religion, everything that an Astronist does is for the sake of transcension, both for the transcension of the self (called astrosis) and for the transcension of all humanity. As such, transcension is the basis of the Astronist tradition of mysticism. This tradition aims to have individuals achieve an absorption into divinity by working on their stellancy which is the mastery of their astronality (a concept explored later in the paper). The aim of mysticism in Astronism is to achieve astrosis, or corporeal cosmosis, which can be understood as this-life engagement and knowledge of astronomical mysteries. To achieve astrosis is a transformative physical, metaphysical and intellectual union with The Cosmos during one's lifetime through a process of immersion into the astronomical world and is principally achieved by thinking and living cosmocentrically.

Astronism has been created to provide a method for alleviating humankind from its limited state. Its particular doctrine of salvation is specific, linear and astronomical: 'specific' in the sense that the salvific effects of transcension work on the basis of the species as a whole rather than by any sub-group; 'linear' in the sense that transcension works according to a set one-way path, a path that literally points upwards to the stars and therefore does not work cyclically; and indeed 'astronomical' in the sense that outer space is the realm in which the salvific components of transcension will begin to take effect on humanity. The underlying

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<sup>15</sup> Braley (2021).

<sup>16</sup> Astronist Institution (2021).

<sup>17</sup> Able to be avoided or prevented; not guaranteed to occur.



logic of transcension is that the astronomical world is physically closer to divinity than human beings are on Earth and so proximation with and immersion into the astronomical world is regarded to close the gap between humanity and divinity, which will eventually lead to divinosis (divine union). This union can take place between The Divine, the formless, genderless, emotionless, infinite creator of existence, and sapient beings that have endured and completed the trial of transcension. The Divine is not merely a principle nor a metaphor, but an entity in complete contrast to all that is limited. The only characteristic that humans share with The Divine is our potential to become unlimited which is signified through our sapience (intelligence).

Based on the principle that the astronomical world is the portal through which humanity can uplift itself to salvation and come to unite with The Divine, an emphasis is placed on the mastery of one's interactions, observations and knowledge of outer space which additionally includes human advancements in space exploration. It is important to understand that in Astronism, salvation does not include any divine judgements on morality, but instead that the only test to determine worthiness for divinosis is transcension. Moreover, there need not be a separate divine judgement because completing the trial of transcension is itself the judgement. In other words, completing transcension is the mark of morality in Astronism and any species that fails to achieve transcension signifies their unworthiness and immorality. The emphasis placed on the astronomical world as the portal to divinity reveals the underlying rationale for Astronism as a space religion and also provides justification for its alignment with cosmocentrism. Astronism, without transcension, would simply be a philosophy of life based on living in harmony and proximity with the astronomical world. However, the introduction of transcension into Astronism brings with it a solemn venture, one intertwined with the promise of salvation. Transcension gives Astronists both in this life and the next a goal to work towards that will transform the entire species, especially those individuals receptive to transcension's rewards.

The struggle for transcension leads to Astronism's development into a fully-formed religion. Just as Christianity yearns for humanity to be saved in Christ, Astronism yearns for humanity's venture into the astronomical world and the effort to save ourselves (called extrication) by transcending limited cosmic existence. Astronism.com, the official website of the Astronist religion, uses the slogan "heralding the transcension of humanity". This reveals how Astronism sees itself as the essential guide, linking humankind to transcension similar to Christianity's self-perception as the essential link guiding sinful human nature to Christ their saviour. In this sense, Astronism is much the same as other religions in that it provides the key to humanity securing salvation. Consequently, Astronism is exclusivistic in the sense that it sees its path to salvation as singular and true, but is also inclusivistic or universalistic in the sense that its form of salvation works for the entire species regardless of individual religious affiliation and whether such individuals have contributed to transcension or even wish for it to take place. Like most other religions, Astronism has its own distinct understanding of human history and humanity's future that are viewed through the lens of transcension.

### **The Grand World: The Astroeschatology**

The eschatology of Astronism hinges on transcension's completion but in its immediacy, it is focused on directing humanity in constructing what it calls the "Grand World". The Grand World is the Astronist eschatological vision of the human future in outer space in which our species has built an interstellar and multisystemic<sup>18</sup> civilisation. At this point, humanity will have advanced significantly along the path to complete transcension. The Grand World is a midway point between the current dire situation of limitedness endured by humanity and the expectation of the full release of humanity into limitlessness at transcension's completion. Astronism describes humanity's inevitable extinction in a scenario that portrays a continual human aversion to transcension and, consequently, posits expansion into outer space as the only means by which humanity could avoid its extinction.

To understand the eschatology of Astronism, it is necessary to briefly explore the religion's cosmology. The foremost Astronist cosmological principle is that all things within a cosmos are subjected to limitation and so The Cosmos itself is held to be a limited realm. Astronism considers The Cosmos to be expanding into The Universe. The Universe is of an entirely different nature as it is unlimited and, as such, it is the realm in which human beings can come to know and unite with divinity. According to Astronist doctrine, the goal of transcension is for a species to ascend to mental, physical, metaphysical and technological capabilities that will allow the species to transcend the edge of The Cosmos (an act called transcosmisation) and to enter into the universal, limitless existence beyond. Human beings, as products of the limited cosmic realm, cannot escape from The Cosmos until they have undergone the process of transcension. However, oppositely, anything with an unlimited nature cannot exist in the limits of cosmic laws and so although The Divine may interpenetrate, it must do so by lowering its nature from limitless to limited to enter and interact in any cosmos. These divine interventions manifest limitedly in The Cosmos as scope, interventions which form the basis of Astronism's panentheistic theology. In Astronist terms, the lowering of the nature of something from limitlessness to limitedness is called circumscription while the elevation of the nature of something from limitedness to limitlessness is called acroscription. Although it may be easier for a limitless entity to lower itself temporarily to limited existence, it is far more difficult for a limited entity to elevate itself to limitless existence, an act regarded as achievable only by the salvific journey of transcension.

The Astroeschatology is principally based on the belief that the astronomical world is intimately involved in the affairs of life, death and the afterlife — a belief called astrothanasia. This leads to a second belief, that the astronomical world is the abode of the spirits of the dead on the basis that it possesses both a physical and metaphysical aspect. Whenever outer space is interpreted metaphysically it is referred to as the Overworld. Astronism also reignites prehistoric beliefs about the stars and their role in the afterlife with its development of the term 'astranthropy' to refer to belief in the transmigration of the soul to the stars at death. This belief connects to transcension because transcension is regarded to possess two aspects, the first in relation to life and the second in relation to death. This means that the transcensional process extends into the afterlife and that the spirit and consciousness of the sapient person have the ability to influence transcension's course long

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<sup>18</sup> having expanded the civilisation across different star systems; not limited to a single star system.

after the physical body has perished. In fact, the functionality of the Economy of Transcension is dependent on living human beings making contact with the spirits of the dead in the Overworld to try to gain further scope for transcension. This is why scope may be referred to as the currency of Astronism. Humans need scope to overcome their limitations while scope is dispensed by a divine source which streams it through the physical astronomical world and the metaphysical Overworld down to sapient species like human beings who, as a result of their intelligence, can be receptive of it. This process of the dispensation of scope is called divine intervenience. Astronists work to increase their receptivity to scope through the methods laid out in Astronism, one such method being the path to astrosis. Ongoing philosophical concerns of particular importance to Astronism therefore include the potential for humanity's scope to run out whether by natural force or human choice and the fate of the human species as a result.

In Astronism, death is referred to as cosmisation so as to mean that a person becomes one with The Cosmos upon death (a state called cosmosis). Cosmisation marks the natural and necessary end of the body due to its limited condition but results in the release of both the soul and the consciousness upwards to the Overworld. The soul and consciousness are regarded as two separate entities, the former comprising the metaphysical aspect and the latter comprising the divine aspect of the person. Specifically, the potentially limitless consciousness is considered as necessarily encapsulated by the naturally limited soul so transcension actually works to release the consciousness, the only potentially infinite part of the human, from the soul. Due to our sapience, human beings possess a soul that continues to exist after the death of the physical body and because of this, the consciousness, being encapsulated by the soul, also continues to exist which in turn provides an opportunity for consciousness retainment. Retaining consciousness after death is the ability to manipulate scope in the Overworld to effectuate matters for the living. However, non-sapient beings such as non-human animals on Earth do not possess a soul and because consciousness requires a host, these non-sapient (or sentient) beings have no ability to retain their consciousnesses after death and so they enter a state in Astronism called Telluria, or the cessation of the existence of every part of the being.

The process of transcension culminates in the act of transcosmisation. To transcosmise means to physically or metaphysically leave a cosmos and while there are alternative theories as to how this might take place, transcosmisation is principally understood as the act of traversing the accelerative expanding edge of a cosmos. Once transcosmisation has occurred, human beings will be released from limitedness and will rise to a new condition called the Ultimatum. This shall involve the release of consciousness from the living body and soul as well as the release of consciousnesses from the souls of deceased humans detained in the Overworld. The connection between living and deceased human beings must be maintained on the basis that those deceased and having entered the Overworld are not at peace as they remain bound by limitation. As such, what human beings do in their progression or regression of transcension will in turn respectively benefit or hinder consciousnesses in the Overworld from being released of their spiritual confines and therefore released into The Universe beyond. Essentially, the consciousnesses of deceased human beings are locked under an embargo in the Overworld that living human beings must progress and complete transcension in order to release which serves to escalate the

importance of the transcensional endeavour. The spirits of the dead therefore possess the inclination to progress transcension in the understanding that only upon transcension's completion will they be released so that their consciousnesses can reach infinitude and come to be with divinity at last. This approach to understanding transcension's role in the afterlife is called embargo theory. This eschatology is also founded on the prophetic doctrine of returnism, namely that it is the destiny of all sapient species to return to the astronomical world in the aim of reuniting with divinity.

Ultimately, the Astronist religion asserts a set of values that gravitate around the aim to achieve transcension. In their entirety, these values are referred to as suronality which forms the basis of the Astronist axiology. The foundation of suronality involves determining an ethic or morality based on what actions will progress transcension and those deemed to regress it. In general terms, any behaviour perceived to limit or to perpetuate the limitations of the self or others may be deemed immoral in the context of the solemn goal of the Astronist to achieve transcension. On reflection, Astronism sets out a particular vision of the world and this involves the conception of the human situation as inherently — though not hopelessly — limited. Humanity is regarded as stuck in a dire state of limitation, one that it did not ask for but must necessarily endure in order to continue to exist.

Ultimately, human beings are both unfulfilled and lost in their purpose as a result of their limitation while it is the purpose of Astronism to offer humanity an escape. The theme of escaping exists in other soteriologies, namely that humanity is found to be in a vulnerable situation while the religion promises to have the answers to alleviate humans from their situation. This situation may either be viewed as natural, necessary, and unavoidable (as is the Astronist view that the limitation of cosmic reality naturally causes human immorality), or as brought about by the inadequacy of humans themselves by some fatal wrongdoing such as disobeying God (as is the Christian view that humans were originally innocent but then Adam committed the first sin). In both the Astronist and Christian hamartiological views, sin is understood as innate to human beings but the cause of this innateness is what distinguishes the two religions. Astronism, due to the emphasis it places on cosmic limitation, sees sin as just one of many requisite consequences of limitation that humans had no control over the development of. However, Astronism stresses that human beings do have control over the degree to which they indulge in their limited nature which then forms the basis of the Astronist ethic geared towards the pursuit of transcension. In turn, an important element to Astronism's philosophical propositions is its observation in human nature of a series of emotions produced as a result of human interactions with the night sky and how this forms the connection between Astronism and the broader Astronic tradition.

### **Astronality**

Central to Astronist philosophy is the assertion that as a result of our sapience, it can be empirically observed that human beings possess a quality that allows us to discern the night sky, a capacity that all other creatures on Earth are noticeably devoid of. This quality is called astronality. Astronality is a characteristic inherent to human beings that manifests as a psychological capacity to observe astronomical phenomena and to relate or associate that phenomena with divinity, or broader existential matters such as questions regarding the past

and future of humankind. Astronism regards astronality to be innate in all human beings and it is one of the aims of Astronist practice to ignite and draw out this quality in the human person so that humans may better proximate themselves to the astronomical world for the furtherance of transcension. Astronality is therefore both a capacity in human beings that distinguishes our species from all non-sapient beings and a series of emotions resulting from the human ability to make astronomical discernments.

As a result, Astronism regards itself as hinging not on any single event having occurred like the Crucifixion in Christianity, but instead hinges on the existence of astronality for if this quality did not exist in human beings then we would have no capacity to perceive the night sky with any deeper significance. The lineage of human observations and uses of the night sky and the beliefs and practices produced from this activity provide evidence to support astronality's prehistoric origins. Beyond Astronist doctrine, concepts similar to astronality have emerged in literature on psychology, namely the construct 'noctcaelador', which in turn advances astronality's legitimacy due to its discussion in non-Astronist discourses.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, a recent aim of Astronist theory has been to trace the existence of astronality back through time to the prehistoric past which resulted in an Astronist theory for the origins of religion.<sup>20</sup> Astronality has since served as the thread linking together various member religions of the Astronic tradition that have been founded and popularised in different periods of human history.

### **Astronic tradition and the Astronist view of history**

Beyond its various categorisations as a space religion, astronomical religion, new religious movement and panentheistic religion, Astronism principally self-identifies as an Astronic religion.<sup>21</sup> Astronicism carves out a place in religious history that it sees as distinct from the 'Big Three' Abrahamic, Dharmic<sup>22</sup>, and Taoic<sup>23</sup> traditions. In other words, it sees itself as significant enough to constitute a fourth tradition. Although some of its members may be traditionally associated with paganism, as part of its pursuit for recognition, the Astronic tradition asserts a separate collective identity for its member religions. This identity is based on their shared adherence to cosmocentrism and their need for the existence of astronality as the human emotional capacity underlying their religious experience derived from the night sky and astral phenomena.

It could be said that any religious tradition must fulfil three criteria: historical legitimacy, sufficient membership, and a running theme or common belief underpinning the tradition that is shared by all members. These criteria are fulfilled, for instance, by the Abrahamic religions: their historical lineage is chronicled in sacred texts, their members span the globe and they have a common monotheistic worldview. The same can be said for the Dharmic

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<sup>19</sup> Kelly (2006).

<sup>20</sup> Cometan (2020).

<sup>21</sup> Astronist Institution (2020).

<sup>22</sup> Answers 2000 Limited (2022). Available at: <https://dharmic.org/> (accessed 17 January 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Answers 2000 Limited (2022). Available at: <https://www.taoic.org/> (accessed 17 January 2023).

religions: again, their historical lineage is preserved in text and legend, their membership is significant across East Asia and the Indian subcontinent, and they hold a common belief in the doctrines of karma, moksha and samsara. The third major religious tradition, the Taoic tradition, is again legitimised by thousands of years of writings, a widespread membership in China and other countries of East Asia as well as a common belief in the doctrine of the Tao which forms the basis of the tradition's worldview. For the Astronic tradition to ever be considered legitimate, its establishment as a distinct tradition must be measured against these criteria which is the aim of this section of the paper.

There are four identifiable modes of religious activity in the Astronic tradition: astrolatry, astromancy, astrotheology and astroncy. Astrolatry pertains to the worship of celestial phenomena as deities, a practice observed in Palaeolithic, Neolithic and ancient times.<sup>24</sup> Astromancy involves divination by celestial phenomena, a product of which are systems of astrology which surged in their popularity in the ancient world and continue to be popular in the contemporary. Thirdly, astrotheology is the attribution of divine functions to either one or more celestial bodies or to outer space as a whole. Astrotheological systems do not necessarily involve astrolatry but do necessitate a belief in astrotheism: that outer space and celestial phenomena act as portals to divinity although are not themselves literally divine. Finally, astroncy includes any belief system that holds centrally the notion that space exploration possesses redemptive functions and/or outer space is foundational to the religion's eschatology. Astronism is therefore a form of astroncy because it asserts the salvific doctrine of transcension while also incorporating outer space into its beliefs about death, the afterlife and the fate of humankind.

These four modes of religious action encompass the range of Astronic religions united by their cosmocentricity and the different functions they attach to celestial phenomena. Cosmocentrism sees outer space as holding a central function in reality as both the portal to salvation and divinity as well as the primary source of human spirituality.<sup>25</sup> Metaphysical cosmocentrism applies principles of the spirit found in the terrestrial world to that of outer space, then allowing for a kind of astral spiritualism to form. Consequently, the astronomical world is seen as the ultimate source of spiritual energy that humanity is only able to access to a small degree due to our metaphysical limitations and our physical entrapment on Earth. Furthermore, Astronism attaches eschatological function to outer space in its doctrine of the Overworld, for example, where souls await humanity's transcension so that they may be released into limitless existence beyond The Cosmos. Overall, the shared cosmocentric worldview of the Astronic religious tradition attributes either eschatological, soteriological, or theological functions to outer space itself, its phenomena, or its exploration.

Major members of the Astronic tradition, in chronological order of their origins, include:

- Astrolatry (including historical groups like the Sabaeans<sup>26</sup>)

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<sup>24</sup> Sayce (1913: 237).

<sup>25</sup> York (2022).

<sup>26</sup> Al-Da'mi (1997:142-157).

- Astromancy (including all systems of astrology)
- Cosmism (including Russian cosmism<sup>27</sup>)
- Exotheism (including the Aetherius Society<sup>28</sup>)
- Astronism

Like most religious traditions, the Astronic tradition possesses its own series of myths and ancient stories that hold two primary functions: firstly, to influence the formation of the tradition's early beliefs and, secondly, to solidify the tradition's astronomical theme. The most well-known of these astronomical myths is the Cosmic Hunt which is a family of myths, certain branches of which have received greater circulation than others, yet are all linked together by their retelling of an astranthropic story. The general premise of the Cosmic Hunt is that a hunter kills an animal whose spirit ascends to the stars. Varieties of the Cosmic Hunt typically differ on how many hunters there are, the type of animal killed, and what constellation the spirit ascends to form.<sup>29</sup> As an Astronic religion founded in the contemporary, Astronism makes a connection to the Cosmic Hunt by adopting astranthropy as a theme in its belief system such as in its Overworld doctrine. The Cosmic Hunt was probably used as a means to explain the journey of souls in the afterlife and the likeness of star patterns to objects in the terrestrial world. As a tradition of storytelling, it reaches back to at least 15,000 years ago. This high age for the myth is indicated by its prehistoric existence in the American continent, demonstrating that its tellers must have crossed the Bering land bridge during the Ice Age before its detachment. Berezkin observed that a variant of the myth (i.e. that three stars of the handle of the Big Dipper are described as hunters and the dipper itself as an animal) told among tribespeople in what is today Khabarovsk Krai in the Russian Far East is the same variant told among ten different people groups in the North American continent.<sup>30</sup>

The Cosmic Hunt is a product of astromorphism, the most important motif of the early Astronic tradition. Astromorphism is the attribution of constellations or other celestial objects to a god, animals, human beings, or other terrestrial phenomena as based on the belief that the night sky reflects and influences events in the terrestrial world. An example of astromorphism is the Great Star Bull of the Lascaux Caves<sup>31</sup> in which the Palaeolithic artist

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<sup>27</sup> Saliba (1999:1-19). Russian cosmism is a philosophy fixed on the eschatological promise of a resurrection of all the dead by focusing efforts on gaining knowledge through space exploration and the 'divinisation' (to become a god) of human beings by extreme advancements in technological capability. The movement was initially led by philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov in the 19th century, but its ideals of a spacefaring humanity bound for technological advancement among the stars were clouded and halted to a degree by later Soviet politics. The optimistic outlook of cosmism on the human future is dependent upon human advancements into outer space and may be considered as a precursor to the contemporary Astronist dogma of transcension that salvation awaits humanity among the stars. Astronism considers its immediate predecessor to be this form of cosmism with its proto-transhumanist ideals and its philosophy of space exploration.

<sup>28</sup> Smith (2003:78-97).

<sup>29</sup> d'Huy (2013:93-106).

<sup>30</sup> Berezkin (2005:89).

<sup>31</sup> Rappenglueck (2004:93-119).

has attributed a pattern of stars to the shape of a bull conforming to the constellation Taurus. This belief in the astral influence on human life is also clear to see in the development of primitive astromancy and later more complex astrological systems. Astromorphism could easily be proposed as the basis for the theory of an Astronic tradition due to the crucial role astromorphic ideas play in the body of evidence for the tradition's origins, namely in how prehistoric astronomy influenced the development of religious belief and practice.<sup>32</sup> In order to rationalise astromorphism, it is essential to understand that in prehistoric times, there existed an interrelation between the astral and the terrestrial. This relationship is made clear to see by humans placing their trust in the stars for various practical uses: for their navigation of the seas, their cultivation of crops, the alignment of their buildings, and the success of their hunts. Astronomical utility of this kind can be plausibly used to explain the placation of the sky gods by the ancients which in turn connects to the underlying astromantic belief that the stars hold influence over human affairs and the natural world.

Overall, the Astronic tradition makes the following anthropological statement: modern Homo sapiens were drawn to the night sky for answers about their existence, so much so that a proportion of their religious activities gave primacy to celestial phenomena. A growing collection of Palaeolithic and Neolithic astral rock art, cup marks resembling celestial phenomena, engravings of asterisms and constellations<sup>33</sup>, astronomically-aligned monuments and lunar calendars altogether provide compelling archaeological evidence for the Astronic tradition's prehistoric origins. Religious and sacred writings incorporating some kind of belief in or emphasis on astronomical phenomena came later. However, persecution from established religions suppressed free thinking on matters of the stars as demonstrated by the Catholic Church whose Inquisition infamously, in 1600, burnt at the stake in Rome the cosmological writer Giordano Bruno.

From an Astronist perspective, the Astronist religion is working to reignite the spirit of these prehistoric and ancient astronomical beliefs by focusing on pursuits more suitable to the contemporary such as space exploration and by emphasising beliefs more attractive to a rationalistic world rather than solely depending on superstition. Astronism may therefore be understood not only as a new religion, but as a revival of astronomical religion altogether, especially in galvanising an Astronic identity among various groups that hold a cosmocentric worldview. For example, prehistoric belief in star worship and astral divination are considered to be precursors to Astronism that originally progressed the transcension, but these precursors were widely persecuted. The Astronist doctrine of the Controversion encompasses all human activity that has sought to slow down, halt or otherwise reverse the progress of transcension due to our own limitedness. As such, any non-cosmocentric or non-Astronic religion or philosophy could be considered as controversial (meaning contrary to transcension), but any anthropocentric or purely hedonistic position would especially suit this classification as these positions would be viewed as antithetical to cosmocentrism.

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<sup>32</sup> Hayden & Villeneuve (2011:331-355).

<sup>33</sup> Makemson (1954:163-171).



Astronism does not necessarily see the Controversion and the human beings advocating for controversial ideas as immoral, but simply having given in to the limited side of their two-sided nature by either averting or subverting transcension. Therefore, Astronism connects itself to the cosmocentric religions of the past by incorporating those religions into its ethic of transcension in the present and by positioning itself as the religion that will see transcension to its completion, something that past cosmocentric religions failed to do, with cosmism being a recent example from the 19th century. This Astronist perspective presupposes that all prior astronomical religions held the familiar underlying aim of bringing transcension to fruition despite not using that word in particular or even understanding what the transcensional process would entail. Astronism sees itself as the 'herald of transcension' because it has been founded in a time when scientific advancements have allowed for a greater understanding of outer space and humanity's true position in The Cosmos.

This reveals the Astronist view of human history as an entire process of struggling to exceed our limitations to achieve transcension. Astronism underlies its systems of salvation and eschatology with a narrative called the Sideresis. This narrative explains the history of humanity from a cosmocentric perspective and as a result, presents a history of transcension. Astronism's grand narrative begins by affirming a version of the panspermia hypothesis, namely that humankind originated from a 'comet of life' that brought microorganisms to Earth from the furthest reaches of space. In essence, Astronism affirms that humanity came from the astronomical world and that we are made from the stars. This astrogeny (or astral origination) of human life is used as the grounds for Astronism's proposition that humanity's destiny is closely intertwined with the astronomical world and why therefore the cosmocentric view is both justified and true. To Astronists, transcension was not simply founded by Astronism, but is a process that has been in motion for thousands of years. With tracing the origins of the Astronic tradition and humanity's astronomical religious activity back to the Upper Palaeolithic period (50,000–12,000 BP<sup>34</sup>), Astronism pinpoints humanity's transition from sentience to sapience among the Aurignacian culture (43,000–28,000 BP) of Palaeolithic Europe.

Astronism asserts that a significant event occurred during the Upper Palaeolithic, an event Astronists call the scope of humanity. During this moment, a member of the Aurignacians first raised their head to the stars and related what they saw in the night sky to the world around them, their life and ultimate fate. The scope of humanity is regarded as the instance of Homo sapiens being endowed with the quality of astronality (an event called the Enkindlement) which then provided those early humans in the Aurignacian culture the ability and inspiration to create the celestial rock art, amulets and cup marks that have survived to the present day and since been used to show evidence for the Astronic tradition. Much is attributed to the events of the scope of man in Astronism, prime among which are the bestowal of the conferment of scope, whose soteriological functions have already been emphasised, as well as the ensoulment of Homo sapiens. This is to say that before the scope of man occurred, Homo sapiens were regarded to have been sentient but soulless much like all non-sapient animals on Earth today. With humanity's transition from mere sentience to

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<sup>34</sup> Before present.

intelligent sapience, not only did the scopic side of human nature arise but so too did the controversial, the aspect that entrenches limitation. This emergence of the Controversion in turn dislodged humanity's course to transcension as evidenced by the condemnation and persecution of cosmocentric religions ever since. Astronism has therefore been founded to correct this dislodgement by prescribing a definitive way of life to progress transcension.

### **Astronism and other religions**

In Max Weber's<sup>35</sup> approach to the sociology of religion, the ideal-type is an attempt to collect or ascertain the essential features between related identities of belief and practice. Though the grouping of various faith collectives may seem like a classification, the consideration of ideal-types is not a taxonomy of religion but a tool of measurement. In itself the ideal-type does not exist,<sup>36</sup> though in an extended sense religious groups may be categorised to some extent according to which ideal they most closely conform. The ideal-type itself, however, remains a fictional paragon. It is used to determine the similarities shared in common between different spiritualities and to signal differences between any one group and the other competing religiosities. As a tool for the sociologist, employing the ideal-type facilitates the location of areas for explanatory research – for instance, why or how the particular object of study falls short of the ideal. It also helps in determining what features have been borrowed or incorporated from one or more of a faith's competitors. No religion comprises the ideal itself. Some properties that are considered part of the ideal may be missing, and other criteria usually associated with a different ideal may be present.

The quintessential ideal-types of religion appear to be Abrahamic, Dharmic, pagan and secular. The first of these holds to a conviction in a personal god/God and a one-time earthly transition. Dharmic religions entertain by contrast an impersonal godhead as well as a pantheistic illusion from which it is incumbent to escape to end the otherwise continual process of reincarnation. Paganism, apart from its more gnostic expressions, centres instead on this life and corporal existence – honouring the earth or nature and seeing rebirth as a welcomed possibility. The secular (non-)faiths are similar to the pagan but are divested from any belief in or incorporation of the magical and/or supernatural/preternatural/co-natural. In addition to the application of the ideal-type as a measurement tool for the study of religions or religious collectives, another analysis of religion is the division between paganism and gnosticism as contrasting theological ideal-types.<sup>37</sup> The first one is telluric; the other, transcendental. 'In fact, the basic divide between *all* religions may be seen to rest on pagan-gnostic distinctions.<sup>38</sup>' This follows from Catherine Albanese's 1990 consideration of those religions that approach nature, the world or matter as real and those that understand these as illusory – something fictive, worthless or evil.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Załęski (2010;319-325).

<sup>36</sup> York (2003:159).

<sup>37</sup> York (2003:158f).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Albanese (1990: *passim*).

Nevertheless, there is the possibility of a third type of religion which could be designated as *astral* or space religions.

Like paganism, astralism assumes the reality of the tangible or physical world, but it denies the reality of any supernatural horizon whatsoever. In an astral understanding, supernatural entities are translated into some sort of extraterrestrial space beings.<sup>40</sup>

The religions that could be considered here include L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology, Claude Vorilhon/Raël's Raëlism<sup>41</sup>, Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles/Do and Ti/Bo and Peep's Heaven's Gate and most recently Cometan's Astronism. Related groups, all of which can be considered exotheistic and a smaller proportion specifically UFO religions are Guy and Edna Ballard's "I AM" Activity, George King's Aetherius Society, Ernest and Ruth Norman's Unarius/Universal Articulate Interdimensional Understanding of Science, and Joseph di Mambro and Luc Jouret's (Order of) the Solar Temple. Several eschew any connection with the UFO phenomena, and some deny that they are even religions – e.g., Unarius claims to be "inter-dimensional science." Dominant influences on many of these groups appear to have been both Spiritualism and Theosophy. All of these astral faiths, however, may be understood by the clumsy sociological designation of new religious movement. "Marginal religions" might be a better term, for the question always arises for how long is any formulation still new, but the established label for sociologists of religion remains so far as NRM.<sup>42</sup>

The religions or NRMs for which the ideal-type of astralism appears to be the most appropriate are frequently assessed as founded by charismatic leadership. Such is the case with Scientology, Raëlism, and Astronism and in the negative or fatal sense with both Heaven's Gate and the Order of the Solar Temple.<sup>43</sup> Applewhite (Heaven's Gate) came to the belief that by suicide his followers and himself would be able to attain heavenly salvation by being beamed post-mortem to the spaceship travelling in the tail of the approaching Hale-Bopp comet 'to be taken to their new home in space'. The Solar Temple was an exotheistic Knights Templar-influenced group that engaged in both suicide and murder to gain access to the utopic Proxima planet orbiting Sirius.

By contrast, neither Scientology, Raëlism, nor Astronism appear to be destructive practices though they may not always retain a positive attitude toward earthly life. L. Ron Hubbard's teachings and the practices they have inspired are controversial but are centred on the belief that humanity's origins were in extraterrestrial cultures with human beings coming to earth as ancient astronauts or thetans. The thetan is variously explained as either the eternal essence of true self or spirit of each individual, or as an alien spirit from the Galactic Confederacy that adheres to the body and affects it negatively by trapping it with engrams that are required to be "cleared." After death, 'the thetan [when identified as the soul] will

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<sup>40</sup> York (2003:204).

<sup>41</sup> Palmer (2004: *passim*).

<sup>42</sup> Barker (2014:235-256)

<sup>43</sup> Walliss (1988:105-116).

take up a new body and live a new life though there is no way of knowing when or where'. Rebirth, however, appears for the main to be reincarnation on the earth itself. There is no desire to escape the world or incarnation as there is with Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, returning to life on this planet is similar to the belief of many if not most contemporary Western pagans.

Astronism reveals little indebtedness to the transcendental ideology of Theosophy. With Astronism and its belief that the intended purpose for humanity is not being fulfilled,

[it] is only through the physical and spiritual exploration of the cosmos that true existential achievement will be attained. Outer space represents the place where humanity will find answers and become elevated to what is presently still unfathomable.<sup>45</sup>

Salvation for the naturalistic astronomical religion of Astronism is linear – something that distinguishes it from paganism's cyclical regeneration. Whereas the pagan is primarily telluric and focused on the earth, the Astronist contemplates the cosmos 'for its spirituality, faith, destiny, hope, future and existential purpose'.<sup>46</sup> He/she entertains transhumanist, transcensionist and transtellationist possibilities, that is, that humanity can evolve beyond current limitations through science and technology, that it can achieve its heights through exploration of space, and that it can reunite with the cosmos upon death.<sup>47</sup> It is only through the revelations of its founder that Astronism has affinities with Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Alice Bailey or Edgar Cayce. The future for followers of Astronism lies with space exploration and colonisation. To some respect, this has affinities with contemporary Western paganism. For instance, Church of All Worlds founder, Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, while concentrating on the evolutionary steps that humanity must undertake to regain balance with our planet, he likewise envisions,

our greater purpose, capability, and destiny as agents of planetary reproduction via extraterrestrial colonisation and terraforming'. ... The Church of All Worlds is a religion with roots deep in the Earth and branches reaching out to the stars.<sup>48</sup>

In understanding what he accepts as the primary function of the evolution of a technological species, Zell believes that 'humanity has evolved specifically to become the agents of Gaia's reproduction in the form of space colonisation and terraforming other barren worlds'.<sup>49</sup> In this, he exhibits a remarkable similarity to the views of Astronism's founder, Cometan.

## Conclusion

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<sup>44</sup> For Scientology in general, see Lewis (2009).

<sup>45</sup> York (2021).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Zell (2022:106 & 123).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

This article has worked to achieve its three principal aims: firstly, to explain the main beliefs of the Astronist religion, then to explain how Astronism fits into both the category of space religion and the religious tradition of Astronicism, and finally, to complete a brief analysis of Astronism in relation to other religions. The Astronic tradition, or Astronicism, is a whole religious tradition comparable to the Abrahamic, Dharmic and Taoic, that seeks to establish a common thread between Astronism and its predecessors that holds eschatological and soteriological significance. The historical legitimacy of an Astronic tradition is proposed to have been established in its prehistoric roots.<sup>50</sup> Human beings have long associated the astronomical with the spiritual and have sought answers from this astral source about the pressing questions of their limited terrestrial lives. The theory of an Astronic tradition is that astronomy and religion have developed a symbiotic relationship since the dawn of sapient humanity.

The Astronic tradition follows the course of human history in close consideration of how human observations of the night sky have come to influence beliefs about God, the meaning of life, salvation, the afterlife, and the ultimate fate of the human species. Meanwhile, the general category of space religion is instead an anthropological and sociological observation of the existence of various types of human activity involving astronomical observation and contemplation that have in turn produced beliefs and practices oriented towards outer space. Space religion may be accurately understood as a derivation of the broader nature religion category but is instead concerned with extraterrestrial nature rather than the terrestrial.

In essence, Astronism is a new religious movement and philosophy that claims to do what many religions have done before: to save humanity and end our suffering. The unique method employed in Astronism of how this is to be achieved distinguishes Astronism as a whole new religion rather than simply a derivative of another. Astronism uses unique terminology, espouses a distinctive new revelation, and makes no reference to the importance of any other prophetic figures from the past as other new religious movements have tended to do.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the test for Astronism is one postulated to all new religions. Will it survive its founder? In recent times<sup>52</sup>, there have been attempts made to establish a distinct Astronist identity which will be crucial in Astronism's ability to pass its survival test. This test will hinge on whether its philosophy can resonate with people in a way that forms a lasting and dedicated community of Astronists that take the religion forward into future generations.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Smith (2003: 78-97).

<sup>52</sup> Space Renaissance International (2021).

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