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# Journal of Astronist Studies

**Editor**  
Cometan

## **Astronist Institution**

the principal denomination of Astronism representing  
the worldwide Astronist community

*Journal of Astronist Studies* is published once a year by the Astronist Institution and is the world's first journal to solely dedicate its content to space religions and space philosophy. Astronist studies is primarily concerned with the study of the belief system of Astronism founded by Cometan but in its broader sense, Astronist studies is the study of space religion as a category of religion that Astronism leads.

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# Editor's Introduction

## Cometan

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This marks the first issue of the *Journal of Astronist Studies* and begins what is hoped to be a long tradition of scholarly discourse on space religions and the broader intersection between astronomy, religion and spirituality. This issue begins with a peer-reviewed article by myself that gives a short history and comparison between Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism. This first article of the first issue sets the scene for a scholarly discourse of Astronist studies by providing some insight into the legacy of Astronism's predecessors in Cosmism and Cosmodeism.

This issue continues with an article by Juan Vivanco who is new to the field of scholarly writing but who boasts a long history of entrepreneurship in eco-friendly construction and is based in Dubai. In his piece, Vivanco introduces readers to quantum cosmic theology and reflects on his experiences of cosmic meditation which has close links with the Astronist practice of night sky exposition and meditation. The third article in this issue is another peer-reviewed piece from myself,

this time focusing on the concept of astromorphism. This piece draws much inspiration from my master’s dissertation but uniquely focuses on how the theory of an Astronic religious tradition contributes to the debate on the origins of religion. The origins of religion emerged as an academic pursuit in the early nineteenth century but the role of prehistoric astrolatry was never given any prominence in the debate.

The second half of the issue begins with a piece by Professor Emeritus of cultural astronomy and astrology Michael York. York gives his perspective on how geocentrism—represented by modern paganism—and cosmocentrism—represented by Astronism—compare and contrast. York uses the sociological measuring tool of the ideal-type to discuss the worldviews of geocentrism and cosmocentrism by analysing the aims of modern paganism and Astronism on whether humanity ought to escape Earth or attempt instead to restore our terrestrial conditions.

The final full-length article in this issue comes from Dr Monica Gyimah who discusses issues involving a lack of state recognition and legal personality specifically impacting people who profess indigenous beliefs. Gyimah provides an extensive analysis of the international legal framework geared towards protecting indigenous communities and gives several examples of how indigenous groups professing various forms of nature religion and polytheism remain unrecognised

and their access denied to several fundamental rights protected under freedom of religion or belief.

This issue ends with my review of Tsvi Bisk's latest work *Cosmodeism: A Worldview for the Space-Age*. It was a pleasure to read and review Bisk's work as many of the topics Bisk discusses in his work are prominent in Astronist philosophy. I reviewed Bisk's work from my perspective both as an Astronist but also as the founder of Astronism, in particular to emphasise my belief in the need for the greater practical organisation of those movements that affirm the doctrine of transcension in some form.

# **Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism: An Analysis of the Space Religions espousing Transcension**

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In April 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to journey beyond Earth's atmosphere and enter outer space. This achievement cemented the status of the Soviet Union as a global superpower and intensified its race with the United States to be the first nation to put a person on the Moon. However, what many people are far less aware of is that a proto-transhumanist and quasi-religious movement in the nineteenth century laid the philosophical foundations for the Space Race. At the same time, the writings of its main proponents continue to inspire beliefs at the confluence of religion, space exploration and spirituality. This movement was called Cosmism and was spearheaded by an unusual character named Nikolai Fyodorov, a librarian from Moscow whose idiosyncrasies became just as notorious as his radical beliefs about humanity colonising the Milky Way and

using science to resurrect the dead. Fyodorov's Common Task set out a grand plan for humanity's future, one in which Homo sapiens would become a spacefaring species and construct a utopian civilisation among the stars. In 1953, Israeli political theorist Mordechai Nessayahu founded Cosmodeism which advocated a similar endeavour of human expansion into the extraterrestrial world but focused its beliefs around the prophecy that spaceflight will see humans eventually become gods in a presently godless cosmos. However, new developments have begun to take place in space religion in the twenty-first century with the youngest religion having been founded only a decade ago in 2013 whose followers are known as Astronists. Astronism repackages human space expansion as a sacred endeavour called transcension, the object of which is to see humanity escape the cosmos entirely and thus relieve itself of all limitations. Studying the interplay between these three space religions will demonstrate how they have contributed to art and film, astronautics and spaceflight, philosophy and literature.

Keywords: analiptic religions, Astronism, Cosmism, cosmocentrism, Cosmodeism, space religion, transcension.

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## **An introduction to space religions**

In May 1903, a Russian scientist named Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935), published the manuscript *Exploration of Outer Space by Means of Rocket Devices* which became the first scientifically viable proposal

for the exploration of outer space using rocket propulsion.<sup>1</sup> By the end of that same year, the unofficial founder of Cosmism, Nikolai Fyodorov (1829–1903), died inconspicuously in a shelter for the poor in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Tsiolkovsky's scientific endeavours were profoundly influenced by the more radical beliefs of Fyodorov which took on a religious character.<sup>3</sup> However, the reclusive and idiosyncratic nature of both these figures meant that they were not best positioned to lead any philosophical or religious movement nor was this their desire.<sup>4</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that few in the West realise that at the basis of the Soviet Union's obsession with space exploration was a loosely-organised group of philosophers who advocated for human expansion into outer space to use science to achieve the promises of religion, prime among which involved becoming immortal.<sup>5</sup> This movement's followers were called Cosmists. Cosmism has been retrospectively labelled a philosophical movement. However, this article categorises it as the earliest of the analiptic religions, claiming its origins about one hundred years or so earlier than when the theoretical science of spaceflight was launched at the turn of the twentieth century. For instance, George Young in his 2012 work *The Russian Cosmists* identified several Russian forerunners of 'Fyodorovian' Cosmism in Russia in the latter half of the eighteenth century, so considered due to their treatises on astronomy and

immortality, examples of whom include Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802) and Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–1765).<sup>6</sup>

At the basis of Fyodorov's natural philosophy was what he termed the Common Task, an endeavour fixated on propelling human civilisation to the stars.<sup>7</sup> In its 'Fyodorovian' form, the ultimate aim of Cosmism was to expand humankind throughout the cosmos, so much so that a convergence would eventually occur in which human beings could become immortal and gain the ability to resurrect the dead. Fyodorov prophesied that the Common Task would uplift humanity from trivial conflict and the distraction of consumerism, instead unifying the species under the banner of universal salvation through science.<sup>8</sup> Although it is seeing contemporary re-emergence through the interest of scholars and by its representation within transhumanism, Cosmism as an organised movement all but died out by the time Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) rose to power in Russia in the 1930s since his regime prevented Fyodorov's writings from gaining broader circulation due to their religious flavour.

In 1953, the book *Cosmic Science and the Scientific Society* was published in Hebrew by an Israeli political theorist named Mordechai Nessayahu (1929–1997). The basis of Nessayahu's book was what he termed the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis.<sup>9</sup> Although it is unknown how much of an influence Cosmism had on Nessayahu, upon reading his

hypothesis today, definite similarities exist with Fyodorov's Common Task. Nesyahu emphasised the imperativeness should that human civilisation expand to other worlds, not merely for the sake of the survival of the species but to fulfil our evolutionary destiny. Nesyahu prophesied that in a godless cosmos, either one in which there exists no God, or God at least does not intervene in the cosmos, human beings will evolve to such heights of physical ability and metaphysical insight that they will become gods.<sup>10</sup> However, Nesyahu saw space colonisation as the prerequisite to humans fulfilling the prophecy of cosmic evolution, hence Cosmotheism—later rebranded as Cosmodeism by Nesyahu's colleague Tsvi Bisk—affirms the doctrine of transcension.

At the stroke of midnight on July 1, 2016, in the sleepy suburb of Penwortham to the west of Preston in Lancashire, a teenage boy named Cometan who had just turned eighteen years old walked over to the moonlit window in his bedroom, knelt and began praying to the starry night sky.<sup>11</sup> That night as the boy turned into a young man, he made an unwavering commitment to dedicate his life to founding a new religion that he would later call Astronism. Since he was fifteen years old, Cometan experienced a growing spiritual connection to the night sky which intensified at age seventeen when he began to experience religious ecstasies when exposed to the night sky.<sup>12</sup> Since then,



Cometan has published *The Omnidoxy*, what he describes as the founding treatise of Astronism and has continued to experience insight and revelation from his ongoing astral ecstasies which have produced an Astronist nomenclature. Cometan's development of Astronist philosophy has sought to refine Cosmist and Cosmodeist thought on aspects of transcension that either went unaddressed by the earlier movements or to reform aspects of Cosmism and Cosmodeism that do not correspond with the Astronist understanding of transcension.

These three movements have in common their explicit affirmation of the doctrine of transcension. Transcension is the belief that expanding human civilisation into outer space to colonise other planets will bring about such advancements in human technology, physical ability and insight on metaphysical subjects that space exploration will lead humanity to theosis and salvation.<sup>13</sup> Taking bold steps far beyond its Cosmist and Cosmodeist predecessors, Astronism currently advocates uniting all three religions under one Astronist identity. As the youngest and perhaps most ambitious of the analytic religions, Astronism presents itself as a new universal religion that houses Cosmism, Cosmodeism and other space religious movements as Astronist denominations.<sup>14</sup> This represents an attempt to bring the space religions out of the silos of their close-knit and obscure communities of thinkers to a broader public by conveying transcension

as an ethic and metaphysic that ordinary people can follow and benefit from.<sup>15</sup>

In giving transcension a central position in their belief systems, these movements have formed a special category of religions called the analiptic religions, a phrase based on the protologism ‘analipsis’, a term used in Astronism as an alternative for transcension and based on the word ‘analepsis’ meaning ascension into heaven. There are Astronist, Cosmist and Cosmodeist variants of transcension. While Astronists refer to this doctrine as transcension, the Cosmists refer to it as the Common Task and the Cosmodeists call it the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis.<sup>16</sup> However, the differences between the approaches of the three movements are not merely superficial but at times fundamental as Astronists, Cosmists and Cosmodeists consider transcension to have different rewards for humanity if completed. Moreover, how transcension is framed and how humanity is directed to pursue this endeavour tend also to differ between the movements as do their views on the role of God in transcension.

While the Soviets hijacked the Cosmist project and attempted to make it their own, the legacy of Cosmism is palpable when one reflects on various aspects of Soviet culture. This includes the art produced during the golden age of the Soviet space programme from 1958 to 1963, Soviet science fiction films such as *Aelita* (1924), *Nebo Zovyot*

(1959), and *Solaris* (1972), as well as the public fervour in the Soviet Union for space exploration.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, far more influenced by UFO subculture, American space culture has always focused on the possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial life, alien abductions and the achievements of American astronauts whose glorification is notably quasi-religious.<sup>18</sup> The fascination for these subjects continues to draw in broad public appeal as witnessed by the recent commercial successes of various space films ranging from the more realistic *Interstellar* (2014), *The Martian* (2015), and *Ad Astra* (2019) to the more futuristic world of *Dune* (2021), in which characters have mastered interstellar space travel by consuming a psychotropic substance called spice that grants the power of prescience.<sup>19</sup>

This article will begin with a detailed exposition of the contributions space religions have made to various aspects of society as new religious movements, prime among which are human spaceflight, art and film, science and technology as well as the philosophy of astronomy.<sup>20</sup> This will be followed by an exploration of the present soteriological and theological interplay between Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism as the three analytic religions. The specific aim of this comparison is to understand precisely how these three movements which share a belief in transcension differ in their approach to the notion that space exploration will bring about theosis and the salvation

of humanity. Not only will identifying the contributions made by analiptic religions justify their establishment as a category distinct from UFO religions within the broader sphere of space religions, but it will also foster a clearer understanding of one of the least-known kinds of new religious movements.

### **Contributions of space religions**

The foremost contribution made by space religions has been their ability to lay down the inspiration for human spaceflight. The most profound influence of Cosmism on spaceflight has origins in the friendship between Fyodorov and Tsiolkovsky which began in Moscow in 1873 as a result of their common interest in space travel.<sup>21</sup> The grand ideas of Fyodorov opened up Tsiolkovsky's mind to the possibilities of space exploration and the colonisation of other planets. The three years Tsiolkovsky spent with Fyodorov before moving away from Moscow were formative and Tsiolkovsky's later work on astronautics reflected his aim to bring Cosmist ideals into reality.<sup>22</sup> Tsiolkovsky combined his scientific work with Cosmist ambitions which gave his writings the breadth necessary to contemplate ideas inconceivable to others. Thus, Tsiolkovsky's grounding in Cosmism fuelled his development of a space philosophy, one that considered the distant future of humanity, our conquest of the vast realm of outer space and the eventual

perfection of our species in a similar fashion to Fyodorov's Common Task.<sup>23</sup>

Tsiolkovsky's philosophical research coincidentally produced several theories of rocketry, including designs for rockets with steering thrusters, multistage boosters, space stations as well as airlocks for safely exiting a spacecraft in the vacuum of space. Tsiolkovsky's scientific achievements peaked in 1896 when he developed a rigorous theory of rocket propulsion and thus distinguished himself as one of the founding fathers of astronautics.<sup>24</sup> The significance of Tsiolkovsky to the study of space religions is how his Cosmist worldview acted as the basis for his theories of rocketry, space exploration and the practical colonisation of other worlds. Overall, Tsiolkovsky represents a bridge between the space religious movement Cosmism and the science of human spaceflight. Moreover, his life and works had a ripple effect in Russia where later Soviet rocket engineers such as Sergei Korolev (1907–1966), and Valentin Glushko (1908–1989), became inspired by both his cosmic philosophy and scientific achievements.<sup>25</sup>

Cosmism, Cosmodeism and most recently Astronism have contributed to the culture and philosophy of space exploration. These movements do not merely view space exploration as a means of gathering resources for continued existence on Earth, but instead see it as a sacred endeavour justified by the notion that colonising other

worlds is the God-given purpose and evolutionary destiny of any species of sufficient intelligence.<sup>26</sup> Beyond the fields of science and technology, however, space religions like Cosmism, across its Russian and American variants, continue to inspire and contribute to various cultural outputs.<sup>27</sup> In the realm of film, the fundamental ideas of Cosmism are widespread, namely, the use of science and technology to achieve states of being and miracles promised by religions.

Soviet inspiration from Cosmism for its space programme seeped into its production of films from the 1920s onwards that included ideas propounded in Cosmist thought albeit repackaged through a Soviet lens.<sup>28</sup> For example, the 1924 Soviet film *Aelita* involves a character named Los who dreams about people living on Mars, travels to the planet and meets its queen after whom the film is named. However, a dictator comes to take over the planet and Los must plan a proletarian revolution to overthrow the tyrant.<sup>29</sup> The Soviet message is clear but so too is the influence of Cosmism, namely, the very idea of travelling to another planet that acts as an abode for people of similar intelligence to humans. The 1959 film *Nebo Zovyot* focused its plot on a race between two teams of astronauts to be the first to land on Mars, while the 1972 film *Solaris* was more adventurous in that it was set on a faraway fictional oceanic planet.<sup>30</sup> As time went on, space films became more ambitious by taking their stories further away from Earth and

introducing more elaborate alien species and the strange worlds they inhabit.

*Interstellar* (2014) presented the harsh realities of space exploration on screen by staying true to the science of how other planets function and what it would be like to realistically pursue the endeavour of transcension idealised by the analiptic religions.<sup>31</sup> Realism in space films perhaps reached its peak in *Gravity* (2013) which was less ambitious in terms of its scope in the sense that the film was set just in Earth's orbit but placed much greater focus on the arduous reality of living in space.<sup>32</sup> The tension between idealism and realism is also a theme in how Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism present transcension. For example, the writings of followers of these religions sometimes omit the harsh conditions of space travel.<sup>33</sup> However, in contrast, at other times, such religions have indulged in describing the mental and physical difficulties awaiting humans as we become a spacefaring species and use this reality as a springboard for the religious dedication required to complete transcension.

Films like *Gravity* (2013), *Interstellar* (2014) and *Ad Astra* (2019) gave a nod to the experience of the overview effect as described by astronauts. The overview effect is a change in one's perception of Earth after viewing it from space.<sup>34</sup> The overview effect describes a shift in how one understands Earth and may also lead to a change in one's

worldview, perhaps towards cosmocentrism. Others have studied it as a mystical, philosophical and religious experience but no matter how it is framed, the overview effect is an example of how the human experience in outer space can transform one's perspective.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the universe of *Dune* (2021) is dominated by the Bene Gesserit, an all-female religious order whose members engage in space travel and orchestrate imperial politics. The ethno-religious community known as the Fremen regard spice—mined by imperial forces on their homeworld Arrakis—as sacred due to its power to grant increased awareness and foresight, making it essential for spacefaring.<sup>36</sup> Out of the recent space films produced, *Dune* has the most religious themes like the films in the *Star Wars* franchise which are similarly filled with religious undertones, some of which have transferred into the real-world such as how Jediism has been adopted as a genuine religion by some.<sup>37</sup> The overall message is that the religious themes in space films are an ongoing trend likely due to how the prospects of space exploration evoke a sense of mysticism and raise important philosophical questions.

Beyond the medium of film, analiptic religions have inspired artists to develop the niche area of space art. For example, the Cosmists inspired the Soviet space programme to use art and propaganda posters to visualise and justify their endeavours in space.<sup>38</sup> In the West, in the



first decades of the twentieth century, artists began to depict what it might be like to view space from another planet, as seen in the work of Charles Bittinger (1879–1970).<sup>39</sup> Astronomical art became a niche for several artists who had been inspired by the futuristic ideas of Cosmism, an example was the work of Scriven Bolton (1883–1929), and later that of Chesley Bonestell (1888–1986). These artists adopted a surrealist approach, for example by depicting how Saturn or another planet might appear if it were located closer to Earth. Space art and astrophotography continue today to be an important avenue for demonstrating to the public the importance of space exploration activities which have come to develop neo-Cosmism, a term referring to the manifestation of Cosmism in the twenty-first century.<sup>40</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, science fiction literature started reflecting the growing interest in spaceflight among the public and the possibilities for humanity in space.<sup>41</sup> Science fiction became an avenue for authors in the East and the West to envisage various methods of space travel such as Jules Verne's (1828–1905) 1865 work *From the Earth to the Moon*, Robert Cromie's (1855–1907) 1890 work *A Plunge into Space* and Arthur Penrice's (1821–1916) 1875 work *Skyward and Earthward*.<sup>42</sup> Cosmist beliefs and ideals can be found throughout these early science fiction works about space and like in all other fields, literature acted as a way to envision realities that at the time were

practically unreachable.<sup>43</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Cosmism acted as a springboard for grand ideas about colonising the galaxy, achieving radical life extensions and the construction of a utopia among the stars.<sup>44</sup>

The emergence of space religions has also spurred Abrahamic religions to consider their views on the prospects of space exploration. For example, although the Catholic Church has no official teaching on the existence of extraterrestrial life of similar intelligence to ourselves or otherwise, Pope Francis has continued to fund the Vatican Observatory, appointing religious brother Guy Consolmagno as director in 2015 who is informally known as the ‘Pope’s Astronomer’.<sup>45</sup> Humanity’s survival in a calamitous universe is a central theme of the space religions, all of which acknowledge the vulnerability of humankind to extinction whether by some natural disaster or self-destruction. This has led to millenarian beliefs appearing in space religions, especially in Astronism, in which the expansion of human civilisation to other worlds is considered the only hope for humanity to ensure it can escape its impending extinction.<sup>46</sup>

The beliefs of Fyodorov and his Cosmist companions perhaps once considered absurd are moving closer to reality. For example, a major belief of Cosmism is that space exploration will provide humanity with the knowledge and resources for radical life extensions beyond a

hundred years.<sup>47</sup> This hypothesis by Fyodorov and other Cosmists has today inspired companies like KrioRus to specialise in cryogenics which works by deep-freezing organic material like human organs or the bodies of recently deceased humans in anticipation that the technologies will one day exist to revive them.<sup>48</sup> A related field to life extension is that of cybernetics, a prominent figure being Dmitry Itskov whose Avatar Project seeks to transfer human consciousness into artificial bodies to extend the human lifespan beyond the average bodily life cycle.

Many of the ideas of the Russian Cosmists were later adopted by the transhumanist movement which grew in the 1950s when the word ‘transhumanism’ itself was popularised by Julian Huxley (1887–1975).<sup>49</sup> Transhumanists believe that the human race can evolve beyond our current physical and mental capabilities by using science and technology as did the Cosmists suggested. By contrast, however, transhumanists tend to place less of a thematic emphasis on the role of space exploration in this endeavour. Transhumanists have since theorised various future technologies and have produced philosophies to explore them but Cosmism remains their inspiration. Transhumanist associations can be found in several countries, especially in the West.<sup>50</sup> Despite its influence on modern transhumanism often not receiving acknowledgement, Cosmism and more specifically the ideas of Nikolai

Fyodorov can be found in the transhumanist beliefs of extropianism and singularitarianism which aim for human beings to reach god-like status.<sup>51</sup>

Space religions in the modern context have also focused on promoting stargazing as a spiritual practice and astronomy as an avenue to religion and spirituality.<sup>52</sup> For instance, Astronism teaches its adherents to proximate themselves to the astronomical world, central to which is regular exposure to the night sky and cosmic meditation. Connected to this is the belief of exotheism which is propounded by analytic religions like Astronism and given a central focus in UFO religions. Exotheism is the belief that super-intelligent extraterrestrial beings exist and have both the ability and the inclination to impart higher knowledge and theological truths to human beings.<sup>53</sup> Extraterrestrials possessing insight into the nature of God beyond that which human beings can presently fathom fuels initiatives like SETI and the discipline of astrobiology. Moreover, theories such as the Kardashev scale were produced through philosophical inquiries into technological utopianism, an example of which being the goals of Cosmism.<sup>54</sup>

## **Validity of transcension as a form of salvation**

Before discussing in-depth the differences in approaches to transcension and making some soteriological comparisons between the Astronist, Cosmist and Cosmodeist variants, it is important firstly to explore the relationship between transcension and salvation to ascertain the validity of transcension as a doctrine of salvation.<sup>55</sup> To achieve this, a coherent conception of salvation must be established for comparative purposes. In Abrahamic religions for example, salvation generally refers to the result of the righteous endeavour to avoid sin or to extinguish it altogether, thus leading to a perfect and paradisiacal life after death. It encompasses notions of deliverance and redemption and typically involves the promise of being saved from physical and spiritual death through an eternal afterlife.<sup>56</sup> In the Dharmic religions originating from India, salvation is a key concept, however, it is conveyed through an alternative framework as it does not involve being liberated from sin and its consequences but instead from the cycle of death and rebirth known as *samsara*.<sup>57</sup>

What can be understood from a brief study of salvation in the different religious traditions is that its nature, the journey involved to achieve it and what rewards it exactly bestows differ depending on the religion's cosmological and theological outlook. Despite the cosmological, cultural and theological differences between religious traditions and their influence on forming doctrines of salvation, the

underlying commonality of all the traditions is that they strive to liberate human beings from some drastic circumstance whether that be sin and evil or physical existence itself.<sup>58</sup> Across the different soteriologies, humankind is damned to some dire state, requiring either the sheer will to save itself, or the actions of a great saviour, perhaps even a figure with the ability to invoke divine power.

Out of the three analiptic religions, Astronism has focused on salvation and has developed its conception of transcension as closely intertwined with the idea of being saved. Meanwhile, the Cosmist and Cosmodeist movements have spoken of transcension as salvation only implicitly. Forming the soteriological comparison between Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism is a survey of how each of these movements addresses the following topics: what transcension is, the rewards transcension will bring, the salvific capacity of transcension and finally, the role of God in transcension which will be addressed in the theological comparison later in this article.

An extension of the discussion of transcension as a valid form of salvation is the legitimization of astrotheologies and exotheologies. Since the word ‘astro-theology’ was coined in 1714 by Anglican clergyman William Derham (1657–1735), it has been used to refer to a branch of natural theology that uses the spectacular movements and phenomena of astronomical objects as justification for the existence of God.<sup>59</sup> In

more recent times, especially since the 1960s, the term ‘astrotheology’ has become associated with New Age movements claiming Christianity is based on ancient astrological and pagan beliefs. However, a third use of the term has emerged in recent times which has been specified in Astronist writings, namely, a theology contending that outer space is the physical and metaphysical intermediary between humanity and divinity and so must be ascertained and ventured through to come to know and understand God.<sup>60</sup> The history of the term ‘exotheology’ is less extensive as it finds its first use in the late 1960s in reference to the implications of the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence, especially for Christian theology. However, in the context of the space religions including analiptic and UFO religions, exotheology has come to represent a serious form of theology in which extraterrestrial beings play a role in imparting theological truths to human beings as a form of revelation.<sup>61</sup>

Beginning with the Astronist understanding of transcension, Astronism sees transcension in the context that the most pressing issue for humanity—as well as any other species in the cosmos—is limitation. Thus, to Astronists, immorality is seen as just one consequence of the broader issue of limitedness itself and so while it acknowledges the doctrine of sin, it differs from religions like Christianity that emphasise sin as the most pressing issue from which

humanity must be saved. Moreover, in Astronism, being righteous is not considered sufficient to be saved as sin is viewed as a natural and permanent consequence of existing in a limited realm no matter how righteous one is, hence the only way to completely escape sin is by exiting the limited realm altogether.

From this conclusion, Astronism establishes the concept of transcosmisation, a doctrine not found in Cosmism or Cosmodeism. While Cosmism focuses on life extensions and the resurrection of the dead and Cosmodeism focuses on human beings becoming demigods as the reward of completing transcension, Astronism, while not denying these other rewards, asserts that the ultimate recompense for completing transcension is that species will be able to exit the cosmos entirely, in turn circumventing limited existence. While Cosmism and Cosmodeism are more aloof about the salvific capacities of the astronomical world, Astronism makes a definite assertion that it is the process of a species expanding into outer space and all the effects of the extraterrestrial world itself on the human person that acts as the saving mechanism.<sup>62</sup>

## **Theological comparison**

It might be expected that since Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism share a common belief in transcension, they would share similar



theologies but this is not the case. Beginning with Cosmodeism, the implication of ‘deism’ in its name is a belief in a supreme being that does not intervene in the cosmos it created. However, what is perhaps not so clear is that Cosmodeism also allows for the existence of demigods. To clarify, the Cosmodeists affirm that demigods can exist, just not yet. Hence, Cosmodeists assert that through transcension, human beings will themselves become gods by way of the supreme intelligence, physical capabilities and resources that completing transcension will provide.

Like in Astronism, the Cosmodeist belief in the reward of transcension is hypothetically applicable to any species of sufficient intelligence in the cosmos. Thus, the reward of transcension to the Cosmodeists is the creation of demigods. However, there can be deistic and atheistic variants of Cosmodeism that range from the affirmation of an overarching supreme being existing outside the cosmos to the denial of the existence of a creator god existing outside the cosmos. Hence, the atheistic variant of Cosmodeism holds that rather than God having created the cosmos, the course of cosmic evolution will have created God by raising sapient species to a divine rank and therein eventually achieving theosis.

On the other hand, the theology of Cosmism is less robust since Cosmism ever since its origins in nineteenth-century Russia has been

presented as a philosophical and cultural movement with less emphasis on theology except its influence from Orthodox Christianity. Similar can be said for Cosmodeism which was originally posited merely as a hypothesis rather than developed from its outset as a formal religious movement. However, from the writings of Cosmism's unofficial founder Nikolai Fyodorov, there is a plenitude of considerations of the role of God in humanity's endeavour to become a spacefaring species. Fyodorov essentially saw the promises of religion, such as immortality, miracles and the resurrection of the dead, as eventually achievable through scientific methods by expanding human civilisation throughout the cosmos.

Moving finally to Astronism, out of the three movements analysed, it holds perhaps the most detailed conception of divinity and critically, it integrates its form of theism with the doctrine of transcension. Differing from Cosmism and even further from Cosmodeism, Astronism asserts theism but with the implication that God intervenes—though only to a limited extent—in the affairs of the cosmos. Astronism espouses a theology based on panentheism, the doctrine that God exists outside and independent of the cosmos but continues to penetrate it with effect on human affairs and the natural world.<sup>63</sup> Astronist theology is principally astrotheological in that it sees outer space and astronomical phenomena as the conduit through which

God acts. Astronism also speculates on the implications space exploration has for the discovery of the origin, purpose and ultimate fate of human life.<sup>64</sup>

The theology of Astronism is formed of three elements: monotheism, pantheism and what Astronists call ‘depadotheism’.<sup>65</sup> Each of these three theological doctrines addresses an aspect of God’s existence. For example, the monotheistic element asserts the oneness of God as a force with an infinite nature and singular will to see the transcension of species and of the cosmos itself. The depadotheistic element establishes an avoidance of the practice of anthropomorphising God to maintain the notion of its formless infinite nature. The pantheistic element asserts the manoeuvrability of God as holding the continuing capacity to lower itself to limited existence so that it may penetrate the cosmos and influence human life and the natural world while simultaneously maintaining an infinite nature and permanently residing outside all cosmoses.

The emphasis on transcension in Astronism arises from the belief among Astronists that transcension is the singular will of God, hence all the interventions in the cosmos that God makes are considered by Astronists to be for the furtherance of the process of transcension for sapient species and the cosmos as a whole.<sup>66</sup> This Astronist conception of God is not of a supreme being with anthropomorphic features but

instead a force with a singular will to bring about transcension. Since God is conceived as infinite, the only interaction between God and a species as limited as humanity could entail the transcension of said species to the same infinite level as God which is why Astronists also conceive the completion of transcension as a form of theosis.

Although theologically dissimilar, Astronism and Cosmodeism share a highly similar cosmology which coalesces with the doctrine of transcension. Both movements state that the Big Bang that created the cosmos was a local event in an infinite universe that contains an infinite number of cosmoses. Both movements also affirm the notion of cosmic evolution; the cosmos evolves into greater and greater complexity, leading to the development of sentient and sapient life. Astronism and Cosmodeism both affirm that large numbers of species of the same or higher level of intelligence as that of human beings exist throughout the cosmos. The beliefs of Astronism and Cosmodeism continue to coalesce as both postulate that these sapient species will naturally strive to expand into the cosmos. Astronism terms this process transcension and sees it in a soteriological light while Cosmodeism interprets the process theologically in that it is crucial to sapient beings becoming demigods.

Despite unity in belief up to now, it is at this point that Astronism and Cosmodeism begin to diverge. While Cosmodeism is more

assertive in its prophecy that species of sufficient intelligence will expand their civilisations into outer space to eventually fill the entire cosmos, Astronism is less confident of the certitude of transcension and instead acknowledges the vulnerability of this salvific process. For Astronism, the pervasion of limitation throughout the cosmos and limitedness as an irrevocable aspect of the human being means that transcension too cannot be guaranteed to occur for any species, making its completion evitable.

Cosmodeism goes on to assert that those species that survive to become unfettered by their physical limitations and whose civilisations fill the cosmos will become coeval with the cosmos whose evolution will result in entropy. Under this belief, the cosmos will become God as a conscious universal being. However, Astronism takes a different view of the role of the cosmos in transcension and how transcension is to end by attributing far less of a role to cosmic evolution. This view results from Astronism's focus on transcosmisation as the goal of transcension rather than unity with the cosmos which is the view adopted in Cosmodeism.

Instead, since Astronists views transcension as evitable and the cosmos as fundamentally limited, the implication is that human beings have only a limited time to complete transcension. Rather than amalgamating with the cosmos to form God as is held in Cosmodeism,

Astronism takes the view that human beings will perish long before they can survive to the end of the cosmos. Hence, Astronism asserts that it is not the purpose of those species endeavouring to complete transcension to remain within the cosmic limited realm but instead to transcend it and become one with the infinite existence beyond which is where God pervades.

## **Conclusion**

Despite their theological differences and how they diverge on what rewards the process of transcension will bring humankind, Astronism, Cosmism and Cosmodeism are united by their shared belief that expansion into outer space will bring about both the salvation of humanity and theosis.<sup>67</sup> Although Astronism places the most emphasis on transcension as a doctrine of salvation, Cosmism and Cosmodeism also heavily imply the need for transcension to achieve theosis as the ultimate human destiny. Their close relation to UFO religions due to their shared belief in exotheism in turn forms the broader category of space religions.<sup>68</sup>

Due to its status as the earliest of the analiptic religions and its popularity in Russia for close to a century before its subversion during Soviet times, Cosmism has had the most influence on culture and

philosophy both within and outside Russia compared to the other two analiptic religions studied in this article. Whether in art or film, the space programmes of superpowers, or subsequent philosophical movements such as transhumanism, the analiptic religions embody the belief that space expansion and the colonisation of the Milky Way will lead to salvation, a theme present in various cultural outputs since the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

The future of the analiptic religions is a poignant topic on which this article will conclude by recapping the current status of the three main member religions. There are individuals within the transhumanist movement who continue to self-identify as Cosmists today in Europe and the United States. However, as a unified movement in Russia, Cosmism had died out by the second quarter of the twentieth century under Stalin. However, Fyodorov's ideas survived and several contemporary philosophers continue to cite them which demonstrates that Cosmism lives on albeit in a subtle fashion.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, Cosmodeism continues to be represented by Tsvi Bisk who is continuing the legacy of its original theoriser Nessayahu by propagating his cosmic hypothesis. Finally, Astronism is the most consolidated of the three religions as it is run by one organisation called the Astronist Institution which has expressed its ambition to see all three religions

and smaller groups unite under the banner of Astronism as Astronist denominations.

However they turn out to be arranged, these movements remain in their infancy, both in terms of their theological development and organisation. For example, most of their beliefs remain largely unknown to the public and peripheral even to scholars of religion.<sup>71</sup> Astronism in particular now struggles for recognition in a similar fashion to most other new religious movements (Lefebvre and Monnot 2020, 236–239).<sup>72</sup> The ultimate test for this new religion is whether its ideas will resonate with enough people to allow it to survive beyond the death of its founder or whether it is accommodating enough to unite with other movements that share a belief in the doctrine of transcension.

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# **Cosmic Meditation and Quantum Cosmic Theology: Evolving to a New Consciousness**

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From a Quantum Cosmic perspective, a new theology is developed based on the doctrine that humans have an energy code and a biological code that allow us to achieve direct contact with the cosmic energies permeating the universe and flow in with the Alpha Energy, namely, the energy of the Creator or God. The energy codes of human beings transcend physical death as energy never ceases to exist, only to transform. Moreover, our 'energy body network' produces new energy through biophotons which allow beings to be in total command of their existence and communicate with the cosmos through a cosmic language. Patient and consistent practice of cosmic meditation and mental physics will lead to an awakening and evolution to a Cosmic Quantum Consciousness that resembles the ultimate connection with the Alpha Energy. This article will explore the perennial approach of Quantum Cosmic Theology

which suggests that all people can be united under one fundamental creed while concurrently respecting relatively minor differences in religious belief and practice.

Keywords: cosmic meditation, Cosmic Quantum Consciousness, energy code, mental physics, Quantum Cosmic Theology

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## **Introduction and cosmic meditation**

Creating a Quantum Cosmic Theology<sup>1</sup> is a life journey, perhaps a journey of many lives. This article aims to explain Quantum Cosmic Theology by discussing its metaphysics and the practices of cosmic meditation and mental physics that are essential to achieving Cosmic Quantum Consciousness. It begins by extending respect to all people's beliefs, in particular their faith in something that contributes to their evolution as human beings.

“I have been fascinated by the cosmos since I was seventeen years old. My first encounters with it were under clear nights full of stars and a large bright moon in the countryside of central Mexico which was the perfect scenario. It was like a supernatural perception, one of many I have experienced throughout the years because everything was bright and immense. I can compare it to when you look at a 360° screen; that sensation is still very clear in my memories. I

knew then that it was the beginning of a long-lasting relationship.” — Juan Pablo Ochoa Vivanco

After many years of meditating under the stars using traditional methods, I forged a new kind of meditation that I call ‘cosmic meditation.’ Under this approach, instead of silencing one’s brain to let the inner-self appear and take command, a way is found to reconcile both and make them work together to reach a state of mind that achieves a solid third eye.<sup>2</sup> A total inner-peace can be achieved but necessitates hours of total silence, resulting in an ability to connect and flow with the Alpha Energy. From my perspective of the energy, I call it the energy that created the universe, namely, the primary energy or Alpha Energy.

As mentioned, I follow a different path of cosmic meditation because my intuition, studies and experiences guide me to monism. I contend that we are one entity without division in which our mind is part of our biological code and our inner-self (i.e., soul) is represented by our energy code, and that both work together as a unit. The task then is more a matter of learning how to manage both codes to face the facts of our existence, including our communication with the outside world and the Alpha Energy as one unit. A practice that helped make this possible for me was ‘mental physics’, developed by English journalist Edwin Dingle (also known under the spiritual title Ding Le Mei), which I execute before each meditation. I use ancient breathwork techniques,

practices developed in Nepalese Monasteries<sup>3</sup>, known to help balance the body, mind and spirit, and to revitalise every cell, activating the endocrine system of the body. In those monasteries, the monks follow mainly the practices of Tibetan Buddhism. I obtained in my youth an original manuscript of these techniques from my physician who spent several years in a monastery. My practice of cosmic meditation and mental physics for over forty years has helped me to reinforce and open my senses to evolve my consciousness. The cross-knowledge and practices of ancient monasteries with modern sciences like quantum physics, neuroscience and neurotheology are the way to evolve and find new answers.<sup>4</sup>

“Mental physics is an experiential method of self-realisation that teaches the oneness of life embodied in substances like energy and thought. With these practices we excite some of the key glands and nodes in our body.”<sup>5</sup>

The pineal gland is commonly known to be the ‘third eye’ for many reasons, including the location deep in the centre of the brain and its connection to light via the circadian rhythm and melatonin secretion:

“The circadian rhythm is the twenty-four-hour internal clock in our brain that regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness to responding to light changes in our environment.”<sup>6</sup>

The sensitivity to light and dark of the pineal gland helps us to perceive the energy around us and is a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds. The stimulated glands cause innervation and produce N-acetylserotonin and melatonin which have therapeutic effects.

“Lymph nodes which are clustered throughout the body, including the neck-cervical, groin-inguinal, and armpits-axillary, mesenteric/retroperitoneal-abdomen, mediastinal-chest cavity, pelvic-lower abdominal.”<sup>7</sup>

The expansion of the functions of the pineal gland and the lymph nodes produce and secrete through the body more enzymes and a range of other chemicals. This elevates health, sensitivity and capacity for perceiving the surrounding energy. If one is persistent and continues practising for an hour every day for at least two years—besides improving health and reducing stress—one will start to feel the increase of freedom sensation in daily experiences, especially related to small matters. One should start communicating more deeply with the inner-self and realise how easily misguided one can be by a world of marketing that constantly injects the desire for useless objects and products. This culture plants a seed in the brain that if you are not recognised on social media, then you have no life meaning.

We have been told that the signs of a civilised world are cars and electric appliances that provide comfort, all working under a model of

society in which government is chosen freely by a democratic social exercise. Those promises do not resist a conscious analysis, especially when one watches the world news and sees evidence of the failure of that model. The news presents division and individualism, emphasises the accumulation of money and material possessions, all the while exhibiting displeasure with life. So many unhappy people can be found in so-called civilised countries.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, happier and more satisfied people are those with fewer material possessions, and more peace of mind, living closer to nature in apparently uncivilised countries.<sup>9</sup>

“You will be truly free when you realise that you do not need anything else to be happy; thinking about this sentence means we can be satisfied with who we are and what we have, either much or little.” — Juan Pablo Ochoa Vivanco

Some people try to impose their beliefs and thoughts. Instead, the intention of this article is not to criticise any religion or beliefs, but to contribute some ideas for those seeking answers. If the ideas and thoughts presented in this work help someone to find his/her answers, then the purpose of this article will be accomplished. I follow my intuition, creative imagination and a permanent search for more and better answers. This existence is very complex and we are insignificant to the cosmos, so much so that we can only aspire to be witnesses. In

the position of a witness, we have the opportunity to explore, research and judge with a different perspective without pretending to have the whole truth. I am sharing my thoughts and my intellectual/spiritual evolution in this challenge to explore the principles of human existence in the vast universe and can cultivate a direct and pure connection with the energy of the Creator.

In this article, I present a brief overview of the principal elements of my books ‘energywalkers’<sup>10</sup> and ‘Quantum Cosmic Theology 2.0’.<sup>11</sup> The term ‘energywalkers’ refers to human beings as one entity with an energy code (spirituality), and a biological code (material body). My own evolution and discoveries in my study of philosophy, theology, quantum physics, theoretical physics, neuroscience and neurotheology have shown different facts that have encouraged me to elaborate an ‘everything theory’ in which humans as ‘energywalkers’ are energy-entities and that interaction between our mind and inner-self can be achieved through integrated actions. Since our physical body and soul are born at the same time, our soul is part of the energy code—contrary to the teachings found in many religions like Christianity and Islam, and espoused by some philosophers<sup>12</sup>—that the soul pre-exists the physical body. Sometime will now be spent analysing the underlying logic of my rejection of the doctrine of pre-existence.

## Pre-existence of the soul

I have serious difficulties with accepting the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls as entities located somewhere before entering a human body. Indulging in this doctrine for a moment, the only purpose of such entities is to be attached to humans born on planet Earth for a while and after death return to the undefined place where all souls are gathered.

“Some explanations found in the spiritual literature describe a whole new brand of spiritual entities existing with rules and commands before entering the bodies of human beings on Earth. Thereby, the purpose of these souls involves giving advice on the meaning of life and providing targets to be obtained during their residence in a human body.” — *La Espiritualidad*

From a cosmocentric perspective, it is hard to believe that the existence of souls is only concentrated on Earth as a relatively insignificant planet in the vastness of the cosmos. Examples in religious literature show that souls pre-exist with God before entering a human body during which they live in the body on planet Earth and return to their existence integrated with God when the human dies.<sup>13</sup> Under a theological explanation, this interpretation can fit with what I have presented in this article so far as my energy theory. By this, I mean that souls stay with



the Alpha Energy until the moment they enter a human body and stay there for a while as its energy part, returning to God when the human body perishes. With the recent knowledge acquired about quantum mechanics and following this theory of energy, I developed a clearer explanation:

“If you describe the existence of a soul, in a place apart from where the body is, seems there are two different entities, which represents a dichotomy, then you start having problems to describe the very substance and existence of that soul. Where is the soul located before birth? When and where was the soul created? When is the soul attached to the newborn body at conception of the zygote or at the time of separation of the mother’s body? When you describe an energy process within a human being, this makes more sense. The energy of the human being is created at the same time as the physical body, both are part of the same process. At the time of the conception of a human being, when two cells, the ovum and the spermatozoid, join. The newly formed cell has both: a new energy code and a new biological code.”<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, scientific evidence has gathered that human life is already present in the embryo of a cell (i.e., zygote). “The scientific

basis for distinguishing one cell type from another rest on two criteria: differences in what something is made of and differences in how the cell behaves.”<sup>15</sup> Both criteria are met by the newly formed zygote.<sup>16</sup> There are different roles that the two daughter cells are assigned after the first segmentation of the zygote. In the first cell division, there is already a memory of life—a new energy code and a new biological code. Therefore, embryonic cells are structured from the first cell division and from the first moment, the general plane of the development of the newly conceived being is defined. The morphogenetic development programme is established in DNA which was constituted at the time of conception and from which exact replicas are transmitted to all cells of the nascent life form. From one cell (zygote) to billions of cells (adult), it is important to recognise that the unique and singular individual is the same always and at all times. It is the fruit of the sum of the cells that constitute it since they all contribute to the same degree, all coming from the division of the pre-existing cells. They are all part of the same individual and all have the same genetic information even if it is expressed in different tissues, organs and systems throughout the life form.

Although all cells contain genes, in each cell only genes whose activity is necessary to attend to the cell’s specified function (i.e., nerve cells, muscle cells and liver cells contribute to development).

Moreover, differentiation ought to be made between ectoderm precursor cells, the formation of the endoderm and the differentiation of nervous tissue to cope with the needs of the organism concerning its environment. T cells of the immune system will be active to attend to an infection or the proliferation of blood cells. A communication network through cells is present across the process which is based on electric impulses, showing evidence of the existence of the energetic code from the beginning of the life form. The new creature will evolve into a full body with consciousness, fully energised and coded and able to distinguish good from evil, with a free will to make moral decisions. Organisations and other political actors pretend to dictate the moment of birth of a human being such as accepting laws that legalise abortion. Women claim the rights to their bodies to accept the decision of aborting their child with no guilt, as everybody must decide what action to take that they think is right with guilt or no guilt. If lawmakers feel comfortable in accepting the execution of an indefensible human being as legal, this is their responsibility for their consciousness.<sup>17</sup> This is why it does not make sense to try to separate what is a unit (i.e., mind/inner-self), that is represented by its biological code and energy code. It makes more sense to make an effort to learn how to control and connect them through our energy which leads to the evolution of a Cosmic Quantum Consciousness (CQC).<sup>18</sup>

## **Cosmic language<sup>19</sup>**

Following the revelations of quantum string theory, the structure of cells are microscopic wiggling rubber bands which are the fundamental constituents of matter and energy, part of the channel that allows direct contact with the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> These bands vibrate in response to our thoughts, emotions and the energy we generate and transmit to the cosmos. The bands also receive the vibrations/energy coming from the cosmos, in turn constituting a cosmic language. The law of attraction<sup>21</sup> is a reflection and consequence of this cosmic language since it is fundamentally an interaction of energy between components and elements existing in the same cosmos in search of an energy balance from various energy fields intertwined, thereby resembling a fine network of cosmic communications.

If human beings can connect with the Alpha Energy and flow with it, they will be participating in the interchange of communications in the cosmic language. We are energywalkers with a unique gift—our free will—which we can use to impact the cosmos, generating new energy which allows us to exchange with cosmic events of a different nature—some spiritual and others material—where we could benefit. I

am a witness to some of those exchanges in which I have been favoured by material and spiritual events.

## **Quantum mechanics and energy as a traceable element**

Through a cosmocentric lens, what is witnessed in the universe is macro and micro phenomena and energy is the most traceable element. Therefore, it is energy in different forms and manifestations that constitute the essence of cosmic existence. This is why it makes better sense to connect with the energy that is responsible for this kind of existence, namely, to witness and absorb its presence. Humanity is not the relevant part of the universe as we are just another manifestation of its existence. In this cosmocentric way of thinking, we are encouraged to start from a logical predisposition that not everything is related to us. Hence, we can only be a witness to cosmic events. If we can establish and follow those parameters, we will start thinking differently and refrain from pretending to have the total truth. We can only describe, absorb and connect with different manifestations of the existing energies around us and be ready to flow with them.

We are beings of energy in that we can feel the energies around us and we can pursue a better connection with those energies. The main theological proposal of this article is that we should evolve towards a

new type of consciousness that I call CQC. This process of awakening and evolving into a new consciousness can be achieved through a combination of cosmic meditation and mental physics. If we consider that quantum mechanics and quantum physics are providing a glimpse of how cosmic existence works, we must recognise that chaos, random and infinite possibilities are the essence. If that is so then our position as observers allows us to be part of it and follow the flow of different interactive energies. Once one is in contact with the energies flowing in the universe, one can perceive the existence of many forces interacting, creating new forms of existence. Overwhelming explosions of nova stars or galactic collisions are examples of when chaos and destruction are instrumental to creating new forms of existence. Nothing ceases to exist, only to transform. The history of planet Earth—assumed to be 4.6 billion years—where the evolution of different forms of life gets a pristine role while the devastation and annihilation of thousands of life species in different periods is the mark of transformation and adaptation that has prevailed.

A path of creation, adaptation and evolution followed by destruction and annihilation for creation appears to be the key quality of the limited cosmos. In all those processes, energy is the element that plays the principal role and this can be tracked in the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, including dark energy and bright energy which are

always interacting, searching for a balance of energies that is never totally accomplished. It is the search for that balance that interacts in a playground of entanglement and random events that makes this existence full of unpredictable events in which space and time no longer act as the protagonists.

We cannot understand this existence. Instead, we can only witness and absorb part of it and try to fit in it the best we can. In this context, the meaning of the birth and death of a human being is raised. We can only be part of the energy interactions born with a biological code defined as DNA and an energy code which in a human being contains the codes of how to manage the energy, also called soul or spirit. Both codes exist since the moment the zygote (formed when the male sperm implants in the female egg) shows independent life, and in that moment is when a biological code and an energy code different from the mother are formed. Marvelling is the structure and function of the human DNA, namely, how in even the smallest of particles the whole human biological code is contained.

It has taken years of research and investigation to discover how the elements and different structures of human DNA work, including the double helix. The first appearance of the results of this long research was in a paper published on only one page in the magazine *Nature* in 1953. Before that, there were many speculative theories on how human

DNA could replicate the human genetics in each human being. Something similar occurs with the formation of what I call the energy code, containing the codes on how to manage the energy in a human being, and its connection with the energies that exist in the universe. When the formation of the zygote and its first bipartition occurs, the energy code forms an energy network. The central control is installed in the brain which commands all energy manifestations, including the phenomenon of thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Thinking is the most common property of a human to reflect the surrounding reality and is closely related to the work of the brain. At present, forms of thinking that are not related to the work of the brain are not known, but on the other hand, it is not possible to localise in the brain the molecular structure with which thinking is produced. With the advanced studies of quantum physics and quantum mechanics, it may be possible to elaborate a better theory of how the energy running in the human body is related to the faculty of thinking. These explanations are critical to understanding that the soul is identified in what I named 'energy code', and the presence of this energy and its control on our biological life while our body exists. Once the biological body ceases to exist, the energy code transcends to other forms of energy as it never ceases to exist, it only transforms.



“The act of thinking is one of the most heavily researched phenomena in science, but despite this, the mechanisms of thinking remain largely unclear. One of the key unresolved issues is the unclear relationship between thinking and the brain. Some researchers have advanced the assumptions regarding the role of quantum mechanics in brain function and thinking, and explain how quantum cognition could predict human behaviour.”<sup>23</sup>

Another important issue is understanding the origin of new knowledge. The existence of innate behavioural programs based on quantum processes has been proposed as a mechanism for this process. We can assume that the processes of thinking and the work of the brain can—to a lesser or greater degree—have a quantum nature.<sup>24</sup> We can distinguish significant motivations for the application of quantum mechanics to the processes of thinking and brain function. One is suggesting that mental processes are associated with the collapse of the wave function which is caused by the effects of gravity. In this case, non-computability<sup>25</sup> plays an important role in the processes of thinking, the ability to understand cannot be formalised within a particular set of rules. In establishing mathematical truths, mathematicians do not apply justified algorithms which can also be said for general thought.

Another important application of quantum mechanics to cognitive sciences is decision-making.<sup>26</sup> It is quantum mechanics that makes it possible to explain decision-making in situations that classical probability theory cannot explain. The most important property of quantum probabilities is that in addition to the usual classical probabilities, they contain interference terms related to the wave character of quantum particles. Everyone can manifest thoughts of a different nature and some of them do not make any sense and do not follow any pattern. This shows our capacity for creating thoughts that do not necessarily follow logic in its classical sense, but more like a quantum phenomenon whereby an unpredicted reality appears following what seems to be random patterns.

That is why we can appoint another factor that can be attributed to the fact that the brain itself—on the basis of which thinking is realised—functions as a fundamentally quantum system knowing that neural behaviour is contradictory at the molecular level.<sup>27</sup> This is reflected in the fact that the accuracy of protein-ligand and protein-protein biochemical reactions, protein and DNA (RNA) folding, cannot be explained by the presence of short-range potentials between biologically important molecules. In this case, the entangled and inoperable states of macromolecules should be realised with an overwhelming probability. This phenomenon, in particular, will lead to

inefficient substance transport both inside neurons and through neural membranes.

Taken together these facts require a revision to our understanding of the mechanisms of the cellular function at the molecular level. More research and understanding are needed about mitochondria, the primary function of which is to produce energy through the process of oxidative phosphorylation. Mitochondria is also responsible for regulating the metabolic activity of the cell and promotes cell multiplication and cell growth. To solve the paradox, a quantum model of intermolecular interactions would be necessary. The most significant point of this model is the long-range interaction which ensures the efficient operation of intracellular molecular machines. In this instance, the motivation for using quantum mechanics is based on the fact that classical mechanics cannot in principle provide such an interaction.

In other words, our reality, considering the one we create in our thoughts, is based on quantum entanglement, meaning several realities are possible to happen, and we will be living one that we think we have in control, but obviously we do not. The interaction between biologically important molecules in the brain can be the basis of the quantum metalanguage<sup>28</sup>, which controls the behaviour of humans and animals. The dynamics of biologically important molecules must include their topological properties. Thus, the work of the brain can

only be consistently described using quantum mechanics. Quantum model of morphogenesis and formation of connections between neurons. The formation of new synaptic contacts between neurons is one of the most important processes in neural function. The formation of new synaptic contacts and the tuning of synaptic weights are mediated by quantum nonlocal interactions. Considering synapse as the junction between two neurons and synaptic cleft, as the gap between the presynaptic and postsynaptic neurons. More scientific research has to be conducted in this field to fully understand these interactions which are the main scenario in which energy is produced and managed by the brain.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the formation of new synaptic contacts, other important properties of neurons that largely support the process of thinking are neuroplasticity, as well as the work of the cytoskeleton, neuroreceptors, and others like the sodium potassium pump which is a protein structure that can be found in many cell membranes. As its name indicates, its main function is to move sodium and potassium ions across the membrane. The process occurs in the form of active transport, doing so against the concentration gradient inside the cell. To carry out this function, the pump uses the energy obtained from the hydrolysis of ATP and, therefore, it is considered an enzyme of the Na<sup>+</sup>/ATPase type. Expending that energy causes the cell to expel

sodium while introducing potassium.<sup>30</sup> Decision-making and recognition are often described with the help of artificial neural networks, the very origin of which is largely due to the similarity to the structure of the brain.

## **Innate programmes of behaviour and quantum metalanguage**

In addition to the interaction between biologically important molecules, there is another important motivation for applying the laws of quantum mechanics to neural function. This motivation is how the problem of acquiring knowledge is contradictory, which is reflected in the fact that all behavioural programs are congenital, abstracting and creating new concepts that are contradictory.

The physical basis of thinking, topology, sets, and control are elementary acts of interaction between biologically important molecules that lead to the formation of new complexes and mechanical motion can be considered as the physical basis of the quantum metalanguage. In this case, the controlling quantum system, or internal control, will play the role of “teacher” for the neural network. In a sense, the teacher in this case is the quantum metalanguage, since the replenishment of our language with new symbols and concepts is quite

consistent. Neural function can only be consistently described based on quantum mechanics. The processes of thinking based on the work of neurons can be modelled based on the ideology of neural networks. However, in this case, there is an essential feature in the brain: the standards for neural networks are congenital. The process of tuning the synaptic weights during brain operation must occur in parallel with the decision-making process.

Quantum mechanics can explain the processes of thinking and the interaction of the energy code in human beings. Following the nature of this existence, nothing ceases to exist but only to transform, the energy code of each person continues its existence after the death of its biological body, in other forms of energy. On the other hand, we know what happens to the biological part of the human, flesh, and bones: they transform in the matter to be absorbed by nature because the human body is approximately 99% comprised of just six elements, including oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium and phosphorus. Therefore, in a way, the human body remains alive in another type of existence, its biological parts have been transformed into different manifestations of existence, but they are still there.

Every human being will interact within the planet Earth and connect to the whole cosmos because the elements that comprise him/her are those of the stars, planets, and other celestial bodies which make a clear

interconnection with the astronomical world. To quote Carl Sagan, “Even through your hardest days, remember we are all made of stardust.” Following the quantum mechanics explanation of how our brains work and the processes of thinking and decision-making, the next topic to address is how our human bodies generate energy called biophotons or action potential. Action potential is defined as a sudden, fast, transitory and propagating change of the resting membrane potential, only neurons and muscle cells are capable of generating an action potential: that action is called excitability.<sup>31</sup>

Our nervous system uses biophotons (action potential) to send electrical and chemical signals around the body. The electromagnetic spectrum of biophotons cannot be perceived by the human eye. New technologies have been developed for the precise measurement of various biosignals with a single semiconductor<sup>32</sup> IC (integrated circuit) system. It can be applied in such ways as the next-generation brain-machine interface which is a system that measures the activity of the central nervous system and converts it into outlets that replace, restore, increase, supplement, or upgrade the output and interconnection of the systems. This changes the interaction of human beings with their environment, like with micro-wearable diagnostic devices and in electronic medicine. Biophotons are the key vehicle of a cellular network of communications through the whole body.

Depending on their thoughts and emotions, every human being will generate throughout their biological life bright or dark energy. Emotions of love, charity and compassion will produce bright energy while emotions of hate, envy and violence will generate dark energy. The energy code of every human being accumulates both energies with a mixture of them depending on the amount of each one. One of them will prevail and will determine which energy the human being emanates when they interact with their surroundings. This energy is not a biological mark and cannot be recorded by the human eye. Instead, it is more like an energy halo with which humans interchange energies permanently. Energies that surround beings coming from the universe penetrate the being, some just crossing their body and others remaining. Part of the energy that is produced will be sent outwards, thus integrating into the cosmos.

By observing events in human history, we see that wars, killings, rape, violence and the destruction of ecosystems have overwhelmed by far those energies of love, forgiveness, charity and compassion. However, a certain energy balance will be accomplished meaning that with a lower amount of bright energy generated, it is possible to conclude that bright energy has a greater ratio power than dark energy. With a lower amount of bright energy generated, there will be enough



to get an acceptable energy balance. However, this balance has never been net zero.

It is this permanent search for an energy balance that triggers unexpected yet necessary events following the quantum process that is the mark of this kind of existence where chaos, entanglement and random events play a preponderant role. Accordingly, within quantum mechanics, entanglement<sup>33</sup> is the basic explanation of existence in which random events are the primary sequence in how everybody and everything interacts. If that is so, then direct intervention of divinity will in the life of human beings be rare but not necessarily absent. The design of this existence is more like random events positioning every type of life in certain scenarios which determine the behaviors that each one is allowed to perform.

I find it hard to accept that the creator of this cosmos has its attention focused on watching the happenings on Earth among trillions of celestial bodies. I can accept a universe designed by God with mechanisms to assist in the balance and counterbalance of the interacting energies, thus explaining the appearance of extra forces perhaps called divine intervention in different moments and scenarios of human life on Earth. Because of free will, every person can decide which energy they will flow with mostly. This is how humans interact with the universe in a pure interchange of energy emissions, bright and

dark during our biological life. Once our physical body dies, we transcend with our energy code to other forms of energy existence.

### **Neurotheology<sup>34</sup>: a solid path to a new theology**

We present these phenomena of humans interacting energetically within the universe in our theological quantum cosmic energy theory as the way every human relates to Alpha Energy. This is given different names or representations through belief in something that goes beyond normal experiences, or simply by the search for something greater. Neurotheology provides the basis for incorporating in the spectrum of this article everybody's beliefs and search for the divine. Now, I insert part of my book *Energywalkers*<sup>35</sup> with related definitions:

“By defining neurotheology as the study of phenomena related to religious and spiritual experience from a neuroscientific perspective. From a neurotheological perspective, on the other hand, the definition of God can be explored scientifically, taking into account that any experience concerning divinity would necessarily imply brain activity; that is, a neurological interpretation. Neurotheology has certainly shown that transcendent states are generated as a continuum so that it is possible to achieve the experimentation of an Absolute Unitary Being; that is, an

absolute unity state, considered a higher or final level of reality. The Alpha is the beginning of everything.”

Science has traditionally rejected this mystical interpretation. This phase of absolute unity is similar to the spiritual union that mystics describe as a real experience, capable of considerably transforming those who experience it. The neurological exploration of this state of unity in relation to active meditation leads to the inference that this “mysterious, harmonic and monolithic union” that the mind experiences may have a profound sense of reality in which all conflicts, dissent and contradictions disappear amid indescribable feelings of peace and love.

Love and forgiveness as the most powerful forces in the universe are conductors, namely, the opening tools to a state of clear consciousness. Moreover, the reality of an absolute unitary state can be rationally and scientifically supported. Neurotheology would therefore also be the appropriate method for developing a megatheology.<sup>36</sup> The connection with the Alpha Energy can be achieved as followers of a religion whereby the principles preached are good practices following the emotions of love, forgiveness, compassion and charity. It is not currently possible to confirm scientifically those interpretations because they are spiritual. Once you have identified with those beliefs and feel comfortable, you do not need to abandon or change them when you

start to look for other answers that might cover a wider interpretation of existence. You can continue adhering to your religion with all due respect while also adding new ideas about one's relation to God.

## **Humanity's role on Earth and in the cosmos**

If we are witnesses of the cosmic interacting powers, what happens on Earth—among trillions of celestial bodies—is not of much significance. We need to focus on trying to gain a better understanding of our role in this complex yet limited existence. We have to re-think what is important for our existence if we are 'energywalkers' whose energy code will continue to exist after the death of the material body. Once our CQC awakens, we will experience more sensitivity towards spirituality and the material world. We will enjoy every single moment of our existence by becoming one with the cosmos. With this new consciousness, individuals will be ready to stand for their true beliefs, thus defying the status quo erected by the current rulers of our society but never in a violent manner, thereby always carrying within them the light that shows the way to the right path. Sharing the newly acquired knowledge with those who are willing to upgrade and evolve their existence is also crucial. Prudent and humble actions are preferential. Respect, love and open communication will be the key tools along with

tolerance to different beliefs and will act as the basis of a strong social structure and evolution.

The quantum cosmic approach developed in this article presents elements that integrate a new quantum cosmic theology. The concept that we are born with a biological code and energy code leads to an understanding that our existence is one entity, making our communication with the supernatural world and The Divine clearer and more direct without dependence on other entities. The concept that we are energy entities sets the continuity of our energy code after the death of our biological body. The energy code will be integrated into the universe as energy to continue in other forms of existence based on the law of the conservation of energy which states that energy is neither created nor destroyed.<sup>37</sup> The science of neurotheology can help with understanding the activity generated in our brain when we relate to divinity. The quantum cosmic approach allows for contemplating existence from a cosmocentric perspective by referencing life not from planet Earth alone but from the perspective of the whole cosmos in a quantum backdrop where entanglement and random events are the key elements.

## **Conclusion**

I have fulfilled my aim by presenting in this article a Quantum Cosmic Theology. All substantial changes and evolutions through history have been initiated by new ideas with these revolutions often beginning slowly but penetrating ways of thinking and changing social structures, an example being the French Revolution.<sup>38</sup> A legacy of the Age of Enlightenment is the motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” which first appeared and drew heavily on the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. A desire for greater equality, popular sovereignty, and natural rights started and thereafter spread to change the world. People of all nations with different beliefs, skin colour and heritage will be unified by a quantum cosmic vision that connects us as a species to the cosmos and the Alpha Energy. In the beginning, some individuals will need assistance to find their way, but this cosmic approach must be developed and achieved by each person on an individual basis, thus eliminating the temptation for groups to control and manipulate the vision. Cosmic meditation will lead the practitioner to align with and come into union with the cosmos.

We can be, consciously, in full contact and flow with the Alpha Energy and thus establish full control of our body at the cellular level through the energy network. One who follows the prescriptions will be able to command their cells to restore all chemical, physical and electric processes. This will lead to purification and working in balance

and harmony with the cosmos as part of a total healing process. I envision the awakening and evolution of a new consciousness and new human race called the Homo Sapiens-Sapiens-Cosmicus<sup>39</sup> and the beginning of a Quantum Cosmic Theology. In the long run, we are one cosmic human family living in a global village that hopefully in the near future will have neither flags nor borders. We are Cosmic Humans and I am only a witness.

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<sup>1</sup> Quantum Cosmic Theology is the creation of the author based in his book of the same name.

<sup>2</sup> Third Eye is a representation of mystical intuition and insight, an inner vision and enlightenment beyond what the physical eyes can see. It is traditionally depicted as located in the middle of the forehead.

<sup>3</sup> Worthman, C., Achat-Mendes, C., Gray, K., Gyatso, G., Lhamo, T. & Wangyal, R. (2021). Boundary Crossing by a Community of Practice: Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries Engage Science Education. *Frontiers in Communication*. 6(1), pp.1-16. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.724114> [Accessed 27 June 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Science of Mentalphysics. (2004). *What is Mentalphysics?.* [Online]. The Science of Mentalphysics: The Original Teachings of Edwin J Dingle (Ding Le Mei). Last Updated: 13 August 2004. Available at: <https://scienceofmentalphysics.com/about-the-science-of-mentalphysics/> [Accessed 27 June 2024].

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- <sup>14</sup> Vivanco, J. P. O. (2022). *Energywalkers: A Metaphysical Essay on Human Beings Essential Nature*. Independently published. pp.1-84.
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<sup>16</sup> A zygote is a fertilised egg cell that results from the union of a female gamete (egg, or ovum), with a male gamete (sperm), in the embryonic development of humans and other animals.

<sup>17</sup> Vivanco, J. P. O. (2022). Initiation: We Are Energywalkers. In: Vivanco, J. P. O. (Ed). *Energywalkers: A Metaphysical Essay on Human Beings Essential Nature*. Independently published. pp.32-34.

<sup>18</sup> Cosmic Quantum Consciousness, abbreviated CQC, is a term developed by Vivanco to describe the evolution of our current consciousness to a level that is more aware of and in tune with cosmic events.

<sup>19</sup> Cosmic language is the direct communication between humans and the Cosmos using energy based on the quantum string theory.

<sup>20</sup> Brockmeier, E. K. (2019). *Making sense of string theory*. [Online]. Penn Today. Last Updated: 25 April 2019. Available at: <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/making-sense-string-theory> [Accessed 27 June 2024].

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<sup>23</sup> Martin, W. (2021). *Positive Thinking, The Law of Attraction and Forgiveness*. [Online]. Global Forgiveness Initiative. Last Updated: 12 April 2021. Available at: <https://globalforgivenessinitiative.com/blog/positive-thinking-the-law-of-attraction-and-forgiveness/> [Accessed 27 June 2024].

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<sup>33</sup> Entanglement is a special kind of superposition that involves two separate locations in space. Quantum entanglement is a phenomenon in which entangled systems exhibit correlations that cannot be explained by classic physics.

<sup>34</sup> Neurotheology, is a neologism that describes the scientific study of the neural correlates of spiritual or religious beliefs, experiences and practices.

<sup>35</sup> Vivanco, J. P. O. (2022). *Energywalkers: A Metaphysical Essay on Human Beings Essential Nature*. Independently published. pp.1-84.

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<sup>37</sup> The law of conservation of energy says that energy is neither created nor destroyed. When people use energy, it doesn't disappear. Energy changes from one form of energy into another form of energy.

<sup>38</sup> Ministère de L'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères. (2001). *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. [Online]. France Diplomacy. Last Updated: 31 January 2001. Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/symbols-of-the-republic/article/liberty-equality-fraternity> [Accessed 27 June 2024].

<sup>39</sup> Vivanco aggregated the term “Cosmicus” with the term “Homo sapiens sapiens.” The word ‘sapiens’ is repeated because there are two subspecies of Homo Sapiens: one is Homo sapiens sapiens which refers to modern humans and the other is Homo sapiens neanderthalensis which refers to Neanderthals to emphasise the evolution of current humans to integrate the cosmic vision in their consciousness.

# **Astromorphism and the Influence of Prehistoric Astronomy on the Origin of Religion**

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Celestial bodies have long been a source of religious objectification and this article aims to convey the origin of the relationship between human religious belief and observations of the night sky. The academic search for the origin of religion commenced in the early nineteenth century and since then the debate of whether animism or pre-animism is the original religion has dominated this field. Until now, no unified theory has acknowledged the influence of primitive astronomy on the origin of religion. However, the theory of Astronicism supports the pre-animist hypothesis by proposing that early modern humans of the Upper Palaeolithic made simple associations between celestial bodies and their apparent capacity to determine human survival. This article asserts that these associations led to celestial deification long

before humans animated astronomical phenomena with spirits. Archaeological specimens from Europe and beyond including astral rock art, cup marks and engravings are used in this article to assert that astrolatry and astromancy were crucial to the development of religion.

Keywords: astrolatry, astromancy, astromorphism, astronomical religion, origin of religion, pre-animism, Upper Palaeolithic

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## Introduction

In 1714, English clergyman William Derham published the thesis *Astro-theology* in which he made an initial attempt to link human “observations of the heavens” to the origin of religion.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the search for the Urreligion—humanity’s original religion—became a popular academic pursuit, especially among continental scholars.<sup>2</sup> Being able to link contemporary beliefs with the oldest forms of religion seemed to elicit a prestige that was used as a tool of legitimisation. Theories of the Urreligion have since bore a new field within religious studies that uses prehistoric specimens and evolutionary psychology to trace how the first forms of religious behaviour emerged.<sup>3</sup>

This area of inquiry remains contentious due in part to the lack of definition of what constitutes a religion while origin theories remain

largely speculative and have been used by some to imply the superiority of certain religions over others.<sup>4</sup> When faced with evidence of the prehistoric origin of polytheism, for instance, late nineteenth century scholars who were monotheists developed the *Urmonotheismus* theory to reconcile this evidence with the primacy of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The theory condescended that polytheistic religions had degenerated from primitive monotheism to avoid the implication that monotheistic beliefs had originated from the heresy of polytheism.<sup>6</sup>

Overshadowed by this wave of scholarly debate, Derham's link between astronomy and religion went unnoticed in terms of its relevance to the search for the origin of religion. However, a body of archaeological specimens combined with palaeoanthropological knowledge<sup>7</sup> is used in this article to establish a unified theory for the role of astronomy in Palaeolithic religion. This theory is named Astronicism or Astronic theory and it postulates that primitive human astronomy from the Upper Palaeolithic was a major factor in the development of religious beliefs and practices. In this theory, astronomy and religion converge to form the category of astronomical religion, a branch of nature religion characterised by the deification of the Sun, Moon and stars and their use as objects of divination. Palaeolithic astronomical religion included astrolatry (including

heliolatry, selenolatry and all other specific forms of celestial worship), and astromancy.

This article aims to test the ‘astronomical hypothesis’ for the origin of religion to determine whether or not and to what degree primitive observations of celestial phenomena were integral to the development of human religious activity. Paleoanthropologists tend to designate the Upper Palaeolithic between 50,000 and 12,000 years ago as the period in which the most reliable evidence for the earliest religious activity can be found.<sup>8</sup> To prove the significant role of astronomy in the origin of religion, this research surveyed productions from the Creative Explosion period<sup>9</sup> to determine whether this prehistoric artistry featuring celestial bodies may have had religious motivations.<sup>10</sup> Although the association of Palaeolithic religion with astronomy is not a new proposition<sup>11</sup>, the unified theory this article presents will stand alongside other origin theories to draw a clearer understanding of why the close-knit relationship between astronomy and religion continues in the contemporary.<sup>12</sup>

Inherent to the study of any prehistoric human activity is some degree of speculation and this needs to be addressed.<sup>13</sup> Issues specific to this research centre on the fact that while the specimens collected may indicate some type of religious association with celestial phenomena, these specimens alone do not explicitly demonstrate

religious impetus.<sup>14</sup> This research adopted an attitude of evenhandedness towards these specimens by estimating whether the Palaeolithic artists might have based their creations on religious belief in light of what is known of broader Palaeolithic culture.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in determining Palaeolithic religious behaviour, the article uses a two-pronged framework of logical sequence and primitive simplicity: the former emphasises what practice or belief necessitates a precedent belief while the latter focuses on the incremental complexity of religious belief over time.

Key to explaining the Astronic theory also involves identifying a variety of motifs evident in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic specimens, the principal among which are ‘astromorphism’ and ‘astronality.’ These motifs lay the foundations for how the various practical utilities of astronomy were part of the impetus for Palaeolithic astronomical religion. Before this, however, some context needs to be established regarding what theories the scholarly pursuit for the origin of religion produced to understand how they compare to Astronicism itself.

### **Searching for the origin of religion**

In 1810, German philologist Friedrich Creuzer proposed the existence of a primeval human religion: it was monotheistic and it is from this religion that all others descend, but with many straying into heresy.



This proposition ignited the scholarly debate over how and in what form religion first emerged. Eleven days before he died in 1832, for instance, while in conversation with Johann Eckermann, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe discussed the human Urreligion which he characterised as “pure nature and pure reason, of divine origin.”<sup>16</sup> Concurrent with the development of religious studies as an academic discipline, scholars searching for the Urreligion tended to focus on shamanism, animism and ancestor worship as the antecedents of the Abrahamic religions.

By 1871, the work of Edward Burnett Tylor and Herbert Spencer had come to pinpoint animism as the origin of religion. That is, the attribution of a soul to natural phenomena and inanimate objects was viewed especially by Tylor to be the underlying characteristic of all pre-Christian religions.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, one of the founders of modern religious studies, Max Müller, saw the origin of religion in nature worship due to animism’s close association with the personification of inanimate phenomena. However, this animistic hypothesis was challenged by Tylor’s student Andrew Lang who questioned that if indeed there was a belief in spirits among these prehistoric peoples, then this would necessitate belief in an omnipotent God which seemed less likely at this primitive stage.<sup>18</sup>

The second challenge to Tylor's animistic theory emerged at the turn of the twentieth century with British ethnologist Robert Marett's assertion that animism was too sophisticated a belief for it to have been the earliest form of religion. Instead, Marett proposed the existence of pre-animistic religious behaviour among Palaeolithic peoples.<sup>19</sup> Pre-animism points to the existence of a concept of the supernatural before the animation of natural phenomena.<sup>20</sup> The underlying belief here is 'animatism': that all objects, whether animate or inanimate, are imbued with an impersonal supernatural life force that gives them the ability to function and influence events in the lives of human beings. Thereby, a sequence of religious behaviour emerged from Marett's theory that began in pre-animism, then developed into animism itself, then totemism, polytheism and later monotheism.

Palaeolithic religion must have reflected the essence of the Palaeolithic life which was centred on survival. Religion at this time, unorganised and unsystematic, was more likely a tool for survival than holding an independent purpose. Marett's suspicion that animism was too sophisticated a belief to constitute the origin of religion may be correct in that animism necessitates belief both in the concept of spirit and its pervasion in the world.<sup>21</sup> Palaeolithic religion was likely far less sophisticated than this and so animism does not reflect a logical sequence of beliefs as it requires too many precedent beliefs for it to

have been the origin of religion. A similar issue arises whenever burial rites from as early as the Middle Palaeolithic are interpreted to indicate belief in the afterlife.<sup>22</sup> The afterlife, much like animism, is a complex belief that would necessitate other pre-existing beliefs for it to correspond to any concept of an afterlife professed by later organised religious systems.<sup>23</sup>

More likely is that the origin of religion was deification without animation; in essence, a material god devoid of immaterial dimensions. This deification was for the sole purpose of survival and it is from this that worship, placation and later divination logically proceeded. Altogether, these practices constitute pre-animism. This theory emphasises the difference between the Urreligion and the origin of religious behaviour as two distinct pursuits. The Urreligion concept implies the existence of a coherent religious system corresponding somewhat to the structure of religions today. Although religions eventually developed into organised systems, this would have been quite some time after the origin of religious behaviour and thereby not equivalent to the origin of religion. This returns us to the issue of what constitutes a religion, namely, how organised does religious behaviour needs to be for it to be considered a religion. Whatever the case, if pre-animistic religion centred on the practice of deification, one important question remains: what was deified first?

In answering this question, there will be competing natural phenomena but there are some more probable than others. To determine what was deified first, one must return to what Palaeolithic peoples were most concerned over their survival. As this article contends that deification and subsequent practices of worship and placation emerged from concerns about survival, attention must turn to what would have posed the greatest threat to survival. This approach may give some credence to ursine worship in the Lower Palaeolithic as bears roaming the forests would have been a significant threat. Some evidence, though conjectural, indicates Neanderthals might have worshipped the cave bear *Ursus spelaeus*.<sup>24</sup> The primitivity of the belief that if bears are worshipped then they would no longer harm the tribe is emblematic of the type of simplistic deification that was more likely to have taken place in the Palaeolithic than other more complex religious concepts.<sup>25</sup> The archaeological evidence for ursine worship, however, remains limited which weakens this theory.<sup>26</sup> Celestial worship as a means of survival based on the various utilities of astronomy is just as plausible yet more physical evidence exists to support this theory.<sup>27</sup>

A theory of the origin of religion attempts to trace religious history and practice to a certain type, and then to estimate in what form religious activity might have first emerged.<sup>28</sup> Scholars have approached this subject by selecting a fundamental concept in religion and

attaching to it an origin theory. However, such theories might project a bias onto possible evidence to form an oversimplified conception of the origin of religion. A feminist perspective for instance might see matriarchal religion in the form of goddess worship as the origin of religion while advocates of inhaling psychedelic substances to attain higher spiritual states have recently proposed the theory of an entheogenic origin of religious experience.<sup>29</sup>

Returning to the search for the Urreligion in the nineteenth century, many origin theories resembled Tylor and Spencer's animistic hypothesis but with different emphases. For example, English scientist John Lubbock focused on the concept of fetishism as the worship of an inanimate object for its magical powers or because of the spirit inhabiting it. Closely connected is Wilhelm Mannhardt's assertion that religious belief began from mythological explanations of natural events, a practice to which he ascribed the term 'naturalism.' More recent evolutionary approaches have emphasised individual belief and practice distinct from the collective. This approach presupposes that the human brain has first to explain a phenomenon to comprehend and relate to it before such beliefs are transmitted collectively.

Themes common to each of these origin theories are animism, cultism, naturalism and symbolism. To clarify, cultism constitutes a fixation on one particular object whether animate or inanimate while

naturalism in this context refers to incorporating the natural environment into a religious system either by deification, placation, association or divination. One will also find these four common themes in the origin theory of Astronicism in the context of astronomical religion. Now having clarified the timeline of the scholarly pursuit for the Urreligion, the article will explain the hypothesis that what Palaeolithic humans observed in the night sky influenced what they believed to form the Astronic theory of the origin of religion.

### **Astronic theory of the origin of religion**

In 1795, French savant Charles-François Dupuis published his magnum opus *Origine de tous les Cultes, ou la Religion Universelle*, the core thesis of which was that underpinning every religion is a universal celestial mythology based on ancient astronomical observation which influenced agriculture and civilisation.<sup>30</sup> Though controversial for his proposition that Christianity is merely an amalgamation of various ancient celestial mythologies and that Jesus Christ was a mythical character, the underlying message of Dupuis' work holds relevance to Astronicism for his association of human religious belief and practice with early observations of the night sky.

Three topics support the theory of Astronicism: the prehistoric manifestations of astronomical religion, key astral motifs across several

Palaeolithic specimens and how the secular utilities of astronomy transferred into religious practice. The Astronic theory of the origin of religion maintains at its core that naked-eye observations of the night sky as early as the Aurignacian culture about 35,000 years ago were key to the development of primitive worship practices. Precedent to worship, however, must have been the deification of various phenomena including the stars, Sun and Moon as a means of survival. Necessitating this celestial deification was an underlying religious feeling that prompted the resultant behaviour of deification and worship of night sky objects.<sup>31</sup> This feeling is referred to in the Astronic theory as ‘astronality’ and is analysed later in this article as a prominent motif.

Following celestial deification were the practices of placation, association and divination, all of which imply a connection between the various ways astronomy was used for survival and thereafter influenced religious belief and practice.<sup>32</sup> Key to the pre-animistic nature of the Astronic theory and supporting its claim to the origin of religion is that the earliest forms of astrolatry might have been based on deification without animation for survival with animation of celestial objects developing later as more organised and complex religious systems emerged. Retrospectively, these activities are grouped to form the category of astronomical religion. Upholding the ‘astronomical religion’ category is both the quantity and variety of Palaeolithic,

Mesolithic and Neolithic specimens including rock art, carvings and engravings that demonstrate astronomical utility and justify astrolatry and astromancy as some of the first coherent religious systems.<sup>33</sup> Of significance is how the specimen indicates the presence of astromorphism as well as other key motifs and how these expressions might indicate religious devotion to celestial bodies.

Although the Astronic theory focuses on Palaeolithic astrolatry and astromancy, it remains cognisant of earlier origin theories and embraces the pre-animistic hypothesis.<sup>34</sup> For example, from survivalist astrolatry developed complex animistic beliefs centring on celestial objects, in turn forming celestial animism (i.e., the ascription of a spiritual dimension to celestial bodies).<sup>35</sup> In this sense, Astronicism seeps into every other origin theory by highlighting the important role of astronomical phenomena in Mannhardt's theory of naturalism. Secondly, worship of celestial bodies, such as the Sun, Moon and the star Polaris constitute examples of astral cultism<sup>36</sup> while the incorporation of the extraterrestrial environment into a religious system is also an example of naturalism.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the representation of ideas about celestial bodies through the creation of symbols is evident in later Neolithic and ancient forms of astronomical religion but could be argued to have a Palaeolithic origin with the depiction of constellations



and Moon phases a very early phenomenon based on the specimen surveyed.<sup>38</sup>

### **Religions of the Palaeolithic night sky**

The body of archaeological specimens relevant to the Astronic theory of the origin of religion can be split according to period, type, theme and attributes. The later Mesolithic and Neolithic periods boast a much greater variety of sophisticated specimens that draw clearer associations between astronomy and religion. While these specimens provide an opportunity for future research, this article limits its survey to Upper Palaeolithic specimens. There are also key types of specimens that support the astronomical hypothesis: cave and rock paintings found across sites in Europe, carvings featuring astromorphic figures and cup marks as well as geometric and constellational stone engravings. The themes of meticulousness, accuracy and curiosity are deciphered in the specimens. There are also four attributes of religious significance: deification, placation, association and divination. These four attributes act as the basis of the analysis of Upper Palaeolithic astronomical religion.

Celestial bodies were deified as gods, divined or placated on the basis that they were viewed to be controlling the terrestrial world and thereby became associated with the survival of the tribe and various

aspects of human life such as fertility, or the hunt. These associations often emerged from natural correlations such as the phases of the Moon corresponding with the menstrual cycle.<sup>39</sup> Beginning with the first of these themes, the deification of astronomical phenomena is the basis of celestial worship but in the Palaeolithic—sticking with the pre-animistic hypothesis—it is more likely that deification was akin to the belief that celestial bodies like the Sun and Moon controlled the world rather than their animation. The Sun and Moon were deified not because these Palaeolithic peoples had developed a coherent theological rationale, but simply because of the natural correlations and mightiness of these objects in the sky became associated with terrestrial survival.

This notion of association as the precursor to deification supports the pre-animistic hypothesis and lends to the pursuit of uncovering the origin of religion by using evolutionary psychology. In studies conducted on non-human religious behaviour, association is the underlying function of primate actions of symbolic communication and the realisation of the self as distinguished from others and the environment.<sup>40</sup> The evidence for simple associations in primate learning<sup>41</sup> and responses to conditioning in other species<sup>42</sup> may correspond to the associations among early human beings between material objects and their apparent control of the world, including

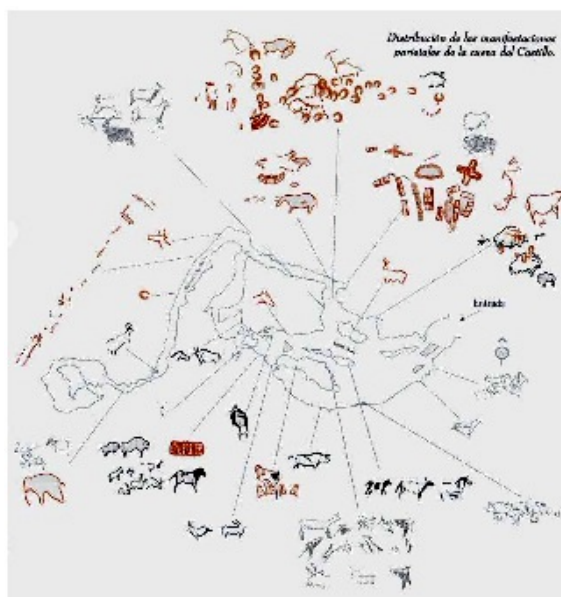


Figure 1: Northern Crown of El Castillo; El Castillo, Spain; 11,000 BCE.

matters then crucial to survival like the hunt.<sup>43</sup> In this simplistic understanding of the dominance of objects in the sky, early humans deified these celestial bodies for the sole purpose of their survival rather than due to a connected belief in animism which was introduced later. In this regard, celestial deification is the result of early humans surveying their environment and coming to terms with the dominance hierarchy of the natural world.<sup>44</sup> This lends greater credence to Palaeolithic ursine worship or other forms of zoolatry due to such

animals being more physically capable than humans and thereby threatening human survival.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, the origin of religion is perhaps the realisation of human inferiority to objects that seemingly control the world. Astrolatry, heliolatry and selenolatry were products of this awareness for instance. Astrolatry may have emerged in various forms, either as one's worship of the stars of the night sky in general or with specification as to the star or stars worshipped, typically those of greater prominence in the sky like Polaris.<sup>46</sup> Palaeolithic and Neolithic depictions of stars may indicate their worship. The specimen Northern Crown of El Castillo in Figure 1 dates to 11,000 BCE, yet further research is needed to determine with greater certainty the religious significance of such depictions. For the Astronic theory, astrolatry naturally invokes polytheism as there are multiple celestial bodies in the nighttime and daytime skies that seemingly control the world, thereby warranting their deification.<sup>47</sup>

Astrolatry during the Palaeolithic and Neolithic would not have been as complex or elaborate as when recorded history began.<sup>48</sup> By ancient times, the pantheon of sky gods had significantly expanded with many having been anthropomorphised by this period and so astrolatry remained in close association with polytheism. This article introduces the principle of 'pre-existent indication' to make a case for the

prehistoricity of star worship.<sup>49</sup> ‘Pre-existent indication’ asserts that a religious belief or practice existed during the Neolithic and possibly as far back as the Palaeolithic based on its pervasion in the world in early recorded history.<sup>50</sup> Adherence to star worship among the early civilisations of the Sumerians and Babylonians would indicate that it is a far older tradition stretching back into prehistory with only mere remnants remaining by the time historical records began.<sup>51</sup> By this time, more complex systems of astrotheology were beginning to emerge in Ancient Egypt where it was believed celestial bodies acted as the gatekeepers of the afterlife.<sup>52</sup>

The prehistoricity of astrolatry, however, was likely not confined to the European continent as astrolatry as a religious phenomenon can be found elsewhere. In the Sinosphere for instance, populations in China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan practised star worship during antiquity alongside shamanism, primitive medical practice and early forms of Taoism.<sup>53</sup> In the Middle East, the Harranian Sabians were descendants of star worshippers who had maintained their practices in northern Iraq. Other peoples such as the Mandaean lived in the marshlands of southern Iraq and had also maintained the practice of star worship as passed down by their ancestors.<sup>54</sup> Over in South America, the Inca were known to engage in star worship and were perhaps one of the last

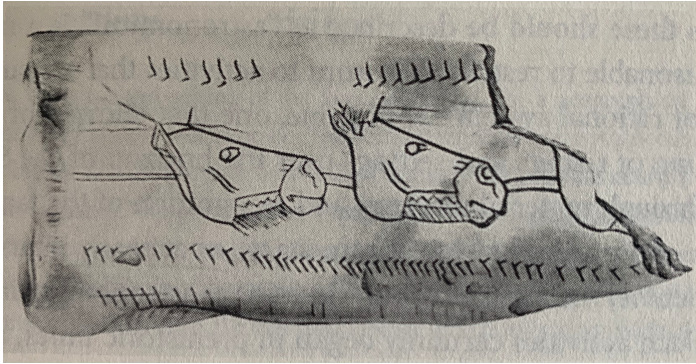


Figure 2: Magdalenian Moon-tracking Bone; Le Mas-d’Azil, France; 15,000 BCE.



Figure 3: Taï Lunisolar Rib; Drôme, France; 10,000 BCE.

civilisations to widely practise astrolatry before they were conquered and Christianised by the Spanish in the sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

The second form of celestial worship observed in Neolithic times and possibly as far back as the Upper Palaeolithic is heliolatry. The Sun, especially when understood as a disc, was well-established as an

object of worship by the period of dynastic Egypt and again the principle of 'pre-existent indication' may be applied here. If sun worship and solar deities had risen to be such integral parts of religious practice in these early periods of recorded history, then their origin may well far predate this time.

The third type of celestial worship with prehistoric origin is selenolatry. Moon worship likely stems from the association of the Moon with fertility due to the phases of the Moon corresponding to the cycle of the female menstrual period.<sup>56</sup> Due to this association, it was not unreasonable for the Palaeolithic and Neolithic peoples to worship the Moon in placation for the safe birth of healthy offspring.<sup>57</sup> Figure 2, the Magdalenian Moon-tracking Bone, and Figure 3, the Tai Lunisolar Rib, are examples of the Palaeolithic human fascination for the Moon and its relationship to the Sun. The Aurignacian Lunar Calendar, a further specimen from the Upper Palaeolithic, was discovered and interpreted by American archaeologist Alexander Marshack to be a bone fragment roughly depicting the phases of the Moon.<sup>58</sup> The meticulousness of the carver of the Moon phases again suggests a degree of dedication that could have amounted to or resulted from worshipping the Moon in fascination with its changing phases.

The second manifestation of astronomical religion from the Upper Palaeolithic is astromancy which is distinguished from its successor

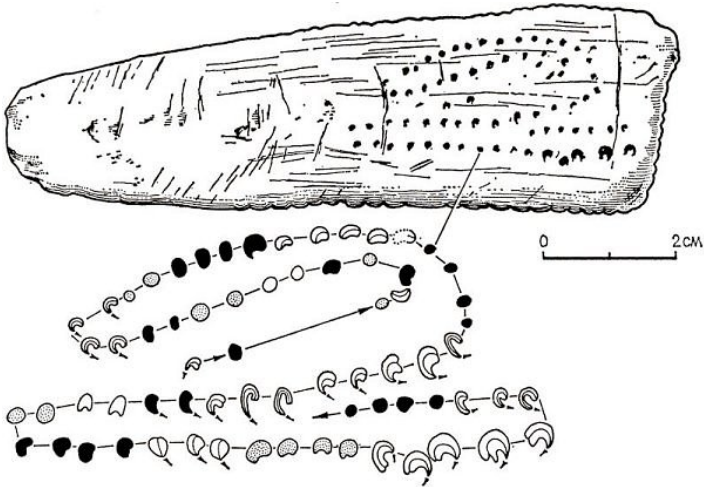


Figure 4: Aurignacian Lunar Calendar; Abri Blanchard, France; 30,000 BCE.

astrology as the practice of divining by the stars but devoid of the cultural infusions and advanced astronomical knowledge evident in later, more sophisticated astrological systems. In essence, astromancy is more primitive and simplistic than astrology. Astromancy is devoid of any elaborate zodiacal or horoscopic systems that not only rely on knowing a person's date of birth but also on the development of constellations. In the Palaeolithic, these constellations would have been in their infancy if the evidence of astromorphism in Palaeolithic rock art is to be believed.<sup>59</sup> These zodiacal and horoscopic elements of astral



divination likely emerged far later during the cradle of astrology among the Chaldeans some 2,500 years ago.

Key to astromancy is divination but underlying it is an association between the stars and the affairs of humankind. This belief attributes to the stars the power of holding either partial or total influence not only on the enjoyment but also the survival of life. In the Aurignacian Lunar Calendar in Figure 4, there is perhaps an even greater indication in the specimen of selenomancy than astromancy.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the carver meticulously marks the phases of the Moon perhaps in anticipation of

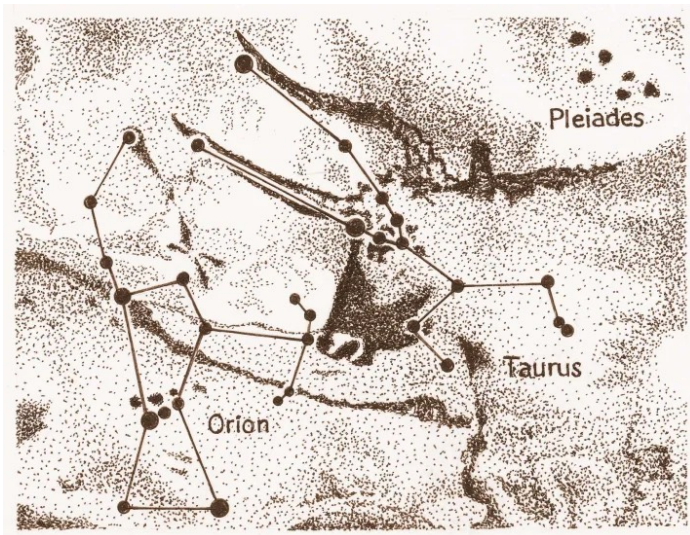


Figure 5: Great Star Bull; Lascaux, France; 15,000 BCE.

childbirth based on the belief that the Moon holds some influence over successful fertility.

From this analysis, the close relation between astromancy and astrolatry in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic is revealed, namely, how the simple association between celestial control over human affairs would justify worshipping the celestial body in the hope of receiving favourable treatment.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore very possible that the astromantic belief that celestial bodies hold some degree of influence over human affairs possibly preceded celestial deification and subsequent acts of worship. These primitive interactions between astromancy and astrolatry constitute the main form of astronomical religion from the



Figure 6: Pleiades Aurochs; La-Tête-du-Lion, France; 19,730 BCE.

Palaeolithic onwards, thus supporting the Astronic theory of the origin of religion.

### **Astromorphism and astronality**

The Upper Palaeolithic specimens analysed in this research are in essence pieces of art, whether in the form of cave paintings<sup>62</sup> or engraved amulets and like in any modern artwork, they include recurring themes that come to form motifs that may indicate the beliefs or ideas the Palaeolithic artist held when they created them.<sup>63</sup> The first motif to explore and key to supporting Astronicism is astromorphism. Astromorphisation is the attribution of terrestrial objects like people, animals or inanimate objects to celestial phenomena for instance the zodiac associates various animals, objects and ideas with constellations.

Figure 5 of the Great Star Bull specimen is a Palaeolithic example of astromorphism. Discovered in the Lascaux Caves in France in the Hall of Bulls<sup>64</sup>, this painting which is dated to 15,000 BCE, depicts a bull overlaid with a pattern of stars forming the constellation Taurus. Beside the bull is a depiction of the constellation Orion as a representation of the hunter while the Pleiades cluster is depicted above the scene.<sup>65</sup> The belief possibly underlying this astromorphic motif is that the terrestrial and extraterrestrial are in some way connected; what happens on the grounds is reflected in the night sky or what stars and



Figure 7: Malita Bone Plate; Irkutskaya Oblast, Russia; 12,800 BCE.



Figure 8: Lascaux Comet Strike; Lascaux, France; 15,200 BCE.



Figure 9: Orion Stone Age Star Chart; Ach Valley, Germany; 30,500 BCE.

celestial phenomena appear in the night sky indicate what will take place on the terrestrial plane. This is not too far removed from the belief at the basis of the practice of astromancy that the stars and celestial bodies hold some degree of influence over human affairs.

The work of Dr Michael Rappenglück has typically emphasised where dots overlaying a terrestrial object form a constellation recognisable today and some criticise him for this. However, the focus of astromorphism is that stars are associated with terrestrial objects at all. For the presence of astromorphism to be confirmed, the



Figure 10: Palaeolithic Milky Way; El Castillo, Spain; 38,000 BCE.

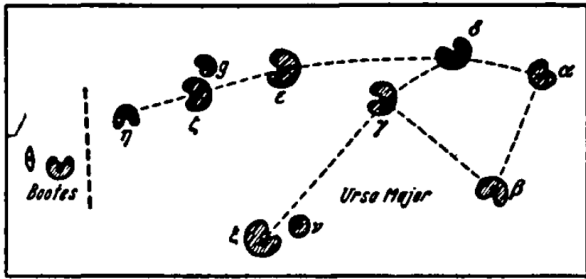
constellation need not be recognisable to today's standards as instead there need only be a connection drawn between terrestrial and extraterrestrial phenomena. Another example of astromorphism is Figure 6, the Pleiades Aurochs specimen dated to 19,730 BCE and found at La-Tête-du-Lion in Ardèche, France.<sup>66</sup> This specimen of Upper Palaeolithic rock art is astromorphic because there is an association made between the animal as the terrestrial object and the Pleiades cluster depicted above, a theme also demonstrated in Figure 1. Figure 7, the Malita Bone Plate, is an example of spiral cup mark engravings depicted in stelliform style while Figure 8, the Lascaux Comet Strike, has been interpreted by some as an attempt to depict a devastating cometary strike.<sup>67</sup>

Figure 9, the Orion Stone Age Star Chart, is a further example of astromorphism. Etched into an ivory tablet from a mammoth tusk dated to at least 30,500 BCE is the figure of a man that possibly corresponds with the constellation Orion and on both its side and reverse a series of carved notches resembling stars.<sup>68</sup> Rappenglück's interpretation is that this piece of carved ivory is a prehistoric star chart and possibly a pregnancy calendar designed to estimate the birth of a child. If correct, this is an example of astromorphism because the Palaeolithic carver has attributed the human figure to the constellation Orion and demonstrates an astromantic belief that by observing the stars, one can predict terrestrial matters. Returning to the category of specimen of Palaeolithic rock art, Figure 10 titled the Palaeolithic Milky Way, a piece of cave art made of red ochre, may be an example of the depiction of stars from 40,000 years ago. Concerns over rock paintings are that they rely heavily on a contemporary interpretation to constitute any significance as they cannot speak for themselves; while these astronomical interpretations are not illogical neither are they definite.<sup>69</sup>

The second major motif is that the sizeable collection of Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic specimens indicates the creators must have experienced some kind of emotion to commit to making these kinds of creative expressions.<sup>70</sup> In other words, it would be logical to assume that the Palaeolithic artists, upon making their observations of the night

sky, felt an emotional attachment to the celestial bodies they saw. This article refers to this emotion as astronality and by looking into modern psychology, one may find William E. Kelly's psychological construct noctcaelador as a contemporary equivalent.<sup>71</sup> Astronality may have been the underlying cause of the emergence and proliferation of human religious activity based on observation of celestial phenomena.

The astronality possibly felt among the Aurignacians and other Palaeolithic people groups was expressed through the stelliform arrangement of cup marks and engravings. Moreover, there is an evident connection between the terrestrial world and the extraterrestrial with the astromorphic depiction of constellations overlaying terrestrial objects, animals and human figures. In this sense, astromorphism



**Fig. a. Representation of stars in Ursa Major and Bootes on an amulet from the stone-age. The different size of Mizar and Alcor is noteworthy. The form of the Big Dipper suggests a rather high age for the amulet.**

Figure 11: Great Star Amulet; Northern Europe; 38,000 BCE; annotation by Makemson.



becomes a product of astronality since the range of specimens of a stelliform style from the Upper Palaeolithic necessitates some underlying emotion as the impetus.

Moreover, these stelliform and astromorphic cave paintings, engravings and carvings reflect a Palaeolithic cosmovision, a particular sense of how the Aurignacians for instance perceived the night sky and its relation to the terrestrial world. The various specimens are attempts

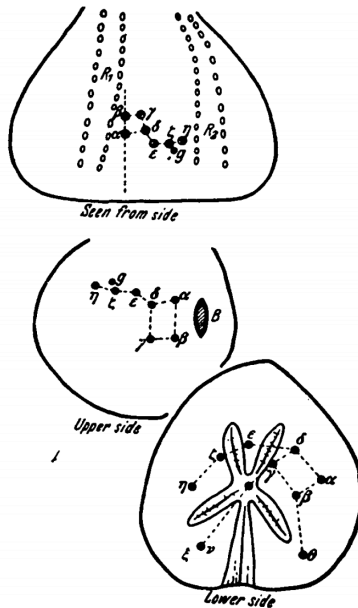


Fig. b. Representation of the Big Dipper on a fossil and silicified sea-urchin (Echinus) from the stone-age (Baudouin).

Figure 12: Echinus Big Dipper; Europe; Upper Palaeolithic.

at understanding and expressing this cosmovision just like artists today reflect their emotions and perceptions of the world through their creations. When looking at the specimens, one must consider why they were created: deification, placation or as an attempt to understand the world and the place of human beings in it based on the physical hierarchy of species.

At the basis of each specimen likely exists a common attempt to understand, to survive as well as to express the emotion felt when gazing upon the magnificent objects in the sky. Indeed, over time these artists and their perceptions of the day and night skies developed and their artistry became more sophisticated. These astroglyphs (i.e., prehistoric and ancient depictions of astronomical objects, symbols or events) became more elaborate as religious and astrological systems developed and coherent cultural traditions formed. This came to produce the countless astroglyphs of the ancient world but the tradition of astroglyphs began much earlier, reaching back into prehistory as demonstrated by the body of specimens presented in this article.

Some may raise concerns over how one could accurately decipher the periods in which the various specimens were created. The answer is astronomical dating. In her 1954 work *Astronomy in Primitive Religion*, American astronomer Maud Makemson used astronomical dating to establish the age of a fossilised and silicified sea-urchin used as an

amulet with the Big Dipper asterism engraved onto it (see Figures 11 and 12).<sup>72</sup> With how the Big Dipper was depicted on the amulet, Makemson could say the amulet was between 30,000 to 40,000 years old. Makemson used astronomical dating as a reliable method for confirming the high age of specimens.<sup>73</sup> However, what makes this amulet indicate a degree of religious devotion to the asterism is the way the stars were meticulously engraved meaning that the deeper or wider the circle, the brighter the star.<sup>74</sup> It must be considered what this Palaeolithic engraver was trying to achieve by engraving the asterism they saw and what underlying emotion might have motivated their actions.

### **Secular utility of astronomy**

In this final section of the article, the third branch of Astronicism will be explored, namely, how early humans in the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic used astronomy for secular purposes and how this transferred to religious belief and practice. These secular uses of astronomy are proposed in Astronic theory to have played a key role in the origin and development of religion. They were not merely conducted for leisure but were essential to survival despite having later been replaced by advancing technologies. There were seven main

prehistoric secular uses for astronomy: hunting, timekeeping, navigation, storytelling, divination, harvesting and construction.<sup>75</sup>

Before exploring each of these, it is essential to understand how they may have been transmitted to religious belief and practice. The role of astronomical observation in these activities would have necessitated some level of association between the celestial bodies and divinity, most likely the deification of the celestial bodies themselves.<sup>76</sup> This ‘utilitarian astronomical religion’ involves the dual use of celestial bodies for secular and religious purposes as well as pre-animistic celestial deification for means of survival.<sup>77</sup>

It is appropriate to begin with the central practice of Palaeolithic tribal culture: the hunt. Being key to survival, the success of the hunt would have had significance attributed to it including where, when and how it should take place. The first secular use of astronomy is indicated by the artistic expressions that emerged in the Upper Palaeolithic which suggest that by depicting astronomical objects, the hunter-gatherers felt the celestial bodies held some influence over the success of the hunt.<sup>78</sup> The stars may have been worshipped and placated among certain tribes on the basis that they were viewed either as gods or as having some control over the hunt.

As the second utility of astronomy, the sequential appearances of the Sun and Moon were aptly used for timekeeping purposes.<sup>79</sup> The

movement of celestial bodies hence became central to timing primitive activities which meant that closely observing these celestial movements was essential. From the perspective of Palaeolithic peoples, these objects above were not only moving autonomously but may have been viewed as overseeing matters taking place on the ground from their elevated positions.<sup>80</sup> Likely as a product of the reliance on the movements of celestial bodies for timekeeping came the later use of the positions of the stars to determine the seasons as humans moved away from hunter-gatherer societies and into the age of agriculture. Having to use celestial observations for these agricultural purposes would have cemented the role of astronomy in the survival of tribes. This special role of celestial bodies in apparently controlling when crops are to be harvested suggests why various forms of astral worship remained central practices throughout the Neolithic period and into early recorded history.

Just as the celestial bodies were used for purposes of timekeeping as early as the Palaeolithic period, they were also key to the development of navigation. *Homo sapiens* have long wandered the Earth, using celestial bodies as guides in the night sky to do so since they act as useful reference points for travellers.<sup>81</sup> Not only were the stars used for travelling across vast stretches of land, but also later by the Polynesians and other seafaring peoples as an essential tool for navigating the

seas.<sup>82</sup> It is not surprising that astrolatry became widespread across different people groups since there was an association of the stars as guides while their navigational use may have prompted their placation and worship to survive the long and perilous journeys.<sup>83</sup>

The fourth example of astronomical utility is the use of celestial phenomena in storytelling from the Upper Palaeolithic onwards. Forms of storytelling involving celestial bodies can be found as omens of astronomical events such as lunar or solar eclipses which might have been associated with bad fortune as seen in the storytelling traditions of the Aboriginal Australians.<sup>84</sup> However, the most prominent example of the role of astronomy in Palaeolithic storytelling is the family of myths now referred to as the Cosmic Hunt. The general outline of the myth is that a hunter or group of hunters chase after some type of animal, the animal dies and its spirit is described as ascending to the stars to form a constellation in the sky.<sup>85</sup> There is a wide variance of the Cosmic Hunt myth across five key variables: how many hunters there are, how they kill the animal, what animal is killed, what constellation the dead animal ascends to form and what stars are associated with the hunters.

This variance is due to the dispersion of the Cosmic Hunt myth across cultures and continents throughout its long history. The assertion that the Cosmic Hunt is Palaeolithic in origin is based on the notion that because varieties of the myth can be found in North and South

America, the storytellers must have made their way into the Americas via the Bering land bridge for the myth to have dispersed there (see Figure 13 for a map showing this dispersion).<sup>86</sup> However, due to rising sea levels as Earth was emerging out of the last ice age, the bridge was covered by the Bering Sea around 9,000 BCE.<sup>87</sup> Scholars have tended to place the origin of the prototype of the Cosmic Hunt at 12,000 BCE, but its relevance to this debate can be determined by its three core themes: how the story involves the transformation of terrestrial objects into constellations (transtellation), the myth's association of death with

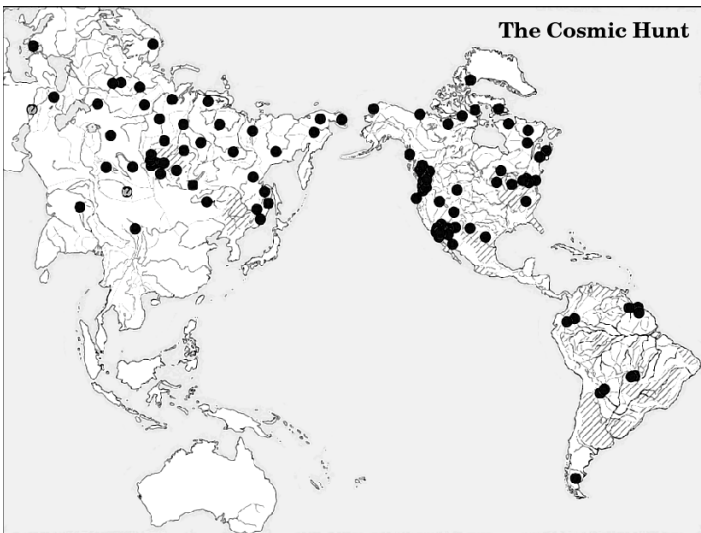


Figure 13: Area distribution of the Cosmic Hunt myths in the Old and New Worlds. For shaded areas data is not available or unprocessed.

ascending to the stars (astranthropy), and its attribution of animals, humans and inanimate objects to constellations (astromorphism).<sup>88</sup>

What perhaps emerged as a result of the tradition of storytelling by way of the stars stretching back into Palaeolithic times is the practice of astronomical symbolism which saw growth with the rise of astrology.<sup>89</sup> Symbolism of this kind includes solar symbols mostly centring on the representation of the solar disk and solar rays, the lunar symbol of the crescent Moon, astral symbols and planetary symbols.<sup>90</sup> Finally, the later use of astronomy in the construction of buildings and monuments from the Neolithic period is evident in how these structures are aligned astronomically like Stonehenge for instance.<sup>91</sup> This use of astronomy indicates a degree of belief in deified celestial bodies holding influence over terrestrial life and so deserve to have buildings and monuments erected in their direction.<sup>92</sup>

This section has considered the different ways that astronomy was used in secular ways from the Palaeolithic period onwards with influence on the origin and development of religion but still in need of addressing is why celestial bodies were chosen as objects of religious fervour. Just as the terrestrial natural environment has played a crucial role in human religious activity so has the extraterrestrial natural environment because the night sky is visible to all people. There is a universal quality about the night sky as all people can see it no matter



their location on the planet, their wealth or social status or the culture or religion into which they were born. This quality constitutes a major factor in why the night sky and celestial bodies might have become subjects of religious devotion.

The Cosmic Hunt myth is an example of how beliefs and motifs concerning celestial bodies have been tailored to different regions and cultures over millennia. The constellations described in the myth for instance differ depending on where the myth had been transmitted to and what stars were visible in the night sky at that location. The physically higher position of the Sun, Moon and stars has always meant that these celestial bodies have occupied a superior position to human beings which is likely to have played a role in their deification. Moreover, Palaeolithic and Neolithic times would have seen no light pollution which, in combination with humans living among the natural world rather than removed from it in our synthetic civilisations, might also have played a part in igniting a religious fervour for celestial bodies.

### **Conclusion: an anthropology of astronomy**

To propose that astrolatry played a major role in the origin of religion is to make a broader anthropological statement about how the practical uses of astronomy translated into religious activity and thereby

influenced the course of human civilisation. At its core, this article has presented the Astronic theory for the origin of religion based on a range of archaeological specimens from the Upper Palaeolithic. This origin theory joins several others but contributes a unique view: that the deification and subsequent placation, animation and divination activities of the Aurignacians onwards were not confined to terrestrial nature but included the extraterrestrial environment and its celestial occupants.

While other origin theories have tended to focus on the source of religion as the deification of terrestrial phenomena or belief in an afterlife indicated by apparent burial ceremonies<sup>93</sup>, the Astronic theory views the origin of religion as based on human observations of the night-time and daytime skies. These celestial observations and the natural awe they produced warranted their deification which developed into primitive astrolatric practices. Used to justify this astronomical origin of religion is the presence of astromorphism in some of the rock art and amulet specimens from the Upper Palaeolithic as was the translation of the secular utilities of astronomy into religious behaviour.

Theories regarding the origin of religion have always been used to establish a broader message and Astronicism is no different. Beyond its association of the origin of religion with primitive observations of the night sky, Astronicism identifies a lineage of astronomical religion

stretching from Palaeolithic star worship and celestial divination to the astrological and astrotheological systems of antiquity through to the analiptic religions of today such as Astronism.<sup>94</sup> From prehistory to modernity, the night sky and its phenomena have always played a role in either inspiring human spirituality or acting as the objects of human religious belief.<sup>95</sup> The Astronic theory of the origin of religion embodies the beginning of the relationship between astronomy and religion which continues in new forms today.

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# **Geocentric and Cosmocentric Spiritualities from a Contemporary Western Pagan Perspective**

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This article explores the divergent views between and the possible consequences of various cosmocentric understandings including that of Astronism and the geocentric/biocentric concerns of contemporary pagan spirituality. These contrasting religious positions are discussed using the sociological measuring tool of the ideal-type. In actuality, no religion conforms fully to its ideal conception. Instead, the device is employed as an analytic. *Vis-à-vis* humanity itself, however, the question turns to whether we attempt ultimately to escape our earthly confines or rectify and restore our terrestrial conditions.

Keywords: cosmocentrism, geocentrism, ideal-type, pagan spirituality, Western paganism

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## **Variety in doctrines of salvation**

The notion of salvation is peculiarly Abrahamic and specifically Christian. Broadly, salvation refers to the act of saving or protecting from harm, injury, risk, loss and destruction. Still, theologically it is concerned with redemption, namely, the deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. This constitutes the beliefs and doctrines of soteriology. In the Christian sense, it is the achievement of a final release from suffering, evil, finitude and death. From the viewpoint of Christianity, because of Adam as the first man and his disobedience to God's mandate, humanity lives in a fallen state and depraved world. Accordingly, so that the human collective could be redeemed from its sinful affair, God himself incarnated as a human being and underwent sacrifice and death for universal atonement. This last is still dependent on the individual's acceptance of Jesus Christ as God and saviour. But where salvation for the Christian usually means bodily resurrection on Earth, for Islam salvation is the eventual entrance into Paradise. This last is contingent upon the individual's belief in Allah as the one and only God along with the acceptance of Muhammed's teachings and obedience to Shari'ah law. Salvation in Judaism is similarly concerned with the conformity of the individual to God's commandments as revealed in the Torah. Though their practices and scriptures are different, Islam is closer to Judaism in rejecting the Trinitarian concept

developed by Christianity. The Abrahamic God has disowned the son that emerged with Christianity between Hebrew and Muslim religions and once again proclaimed a monotheistic oneness.

By contrast, with the Dharmic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, the material world is an illusion (*māyā*), or at least without intrinsic value. In these traditions, salvation is self-attained rather than achieved through the transcendent grace of God. It refers to release (*mukti*), or liberation (*moksha*), from the continuing cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*), in the illusion or worthlessness of physical existence. The various paths of yoga or the adherence to the 'Eightfold Path' lead one, respectively, to *samadhi* (union with the Absolute or Brahman), or *nirvana* ('extinguishment').

Different from both the Abrahamic and Dharmic spiritualities, what has become reclaimed as 'paganism' is the acceptance and affirmation of the material world, not as something to escape but rather to enjoy and cherish. If and when paganism endorses a belief in reincarnation, it is usually argued that this is what allows an individual to once again re-enjoy terrestrial existence. For most contemporary Western pagans (CWPs), 'God' is not something completely other and transcendent to this world but instead immanent in physical reality. The divine becomes understood as various aspects of the world or cosmos (polytheism), or as identical with the cosmic all (pantheism). Robert Corrington



expresses this in the following way: “There is nothing whatsoever outside of nature. The sacred is in and of nature and cannot outstrip nature.” The great concern of paganism at present is the environment and the restoration of the natural ecological balance of the planet.<sup>1</sup>

Much of this same conservationist concern is shared with those who have no belief or decisive conviction in the supernatural, namely, the secularists whether they be atheists or agnostics. As with the pagans, secularistic salvation entails not the attainment of a heavenly afterlife or the obliteration of personal existence but rather the well-being of the planet and material existence. In paganism or secularism or both, salvation (from Greek *sōtēria* via Latin *salvare/salvation*) is the restoration or raising of the natural world to a more complete or better realm or state of being.

## **Philosophical commonalities and differences**

What paganism and Astronism share in common is the non-rejection of corporeal existence. Both are principally this-worldly rather than focused solely on the afterlife although more recent Astronist discourse has affirmed the doctrine of transcosmisation which is the belief that transcension will lead to species escaping cosmic limited reality. Their difference in respect to salvation is to see it as linear for the one and cyclic for the other. In a word, paganism is geocentric while Astronism

is cosmocentric. Astronist soteriology contrasts with Buddhism for example by embracing the material through the application of technologies of space exploration as a technique for eventually circumventing the physical world and escaping limited reality. Despite the more recent emergence of this transcosmisation doctrine, Astronism's vision of reality still focuses on the importance of the cosmos. Again, like telluric or pantheistic forms of paganism, Astronism can include the intracosmic "belief that the answers to our existence are to be found within The Cosmos rather than beyond it."<sup>2</sup> While the emphasis for some pagans is indeed anthropocentric, the growing re-evaluation for increasing numbers is for the Earth herself as the centre; not in the former Eudoxian or Ptolemaic astronomical sense but instead in the biocentric emphasis of valuing the telluric first and foremost above all. Not all pagans are tellurian, but some are instead gnostic and wish to translate to a 'higher' non-physical or ethereal existence. Many of these last entertain similar to Astronists a panentheistic belief in that while God is part of this world, he/it is also simultaneously something other or transcendent to it. Pagans, however, and especially telluric pagans, tend to see panentheism ('all in God') as a derivative of the Christian theological wish both to have their cake and eat it too—God being transcendent but also immanent.

Perhaps, unlike Astronists, pagans do not think in evaluative terms such as 'Higher Levels'. Knowledge is understood as augmentative rather than necessarily 'elevated'. For CWPs, this vertical metaphor is a legacy of the West's Judaeo-Christian heritage. Instead, knowledge is assessed more along an axis of the simple-to-complex and in the pragmatic terms of accessibility, applicability, expansion and practicality. Paganism does not shun the ethereal, mysterious and ineffable and can employ shamanistic, ritual and other non-ordinary methods in the pursuit of such, but it virtually always endeavours to balance the supernatural or preternatural quest with the utilitarian and down-to-earth. The commonsensical is always vitally important and stressed alongside the esoteric.

Information about earthly and other worlds is not philosophy as such but empirically gained knowledge that can be applied to improving life on Earth, the growth of technology and exploration of non-terrestrial outer space. Philosophies (literally, the 'loves of wisdom') provide guiding principles for human behaviour. They can range from Platonic, Neo-platonic and Cartesian dualism to Nietzschean and Spinozan mind-body unity, but they all address the questions of existence, meaning, value, reason, language and consciousness. The branches of philosophy are epistemology, metaphysics, logic, axiology and governmental politics. Basically,

philosophy is the attempt to understand human nature. Science is the determination and application of empirical data. The two are not the same. The first allows us to reach into outer space; the second is concerned with the logical construction of ideas. Both might provide happiness, but their approaches are different.

If “‘Law and order’ is what the Cosmos is based on ... [and] if any part of the cosmic body, organ or cell begins to fail and starts producing defective energy,”<sup>3</sup> any attempt to eliminate this disruptive energy for the benefit of the organism must occur within the understanding that nature herself both on Earth and throughout the universe—as best we can understand—is a natural process whether we humans like it or not and whether it is a volcanic eruption, a hurricane, a meteoritic collision or a supernova. It is really humanity alone who is responsible for the production of disruptive energy in such forms as capitalistic exploitation, colonial imperialism, the institution of slavery and engagement in destructive conflict. Cosmic law or the laws of nature are not options as are human rules and regulations but simply the way nature functions and works. The ‘law and order’ statutes are not the *lex naturalis* governing natural phenomena that humans have gained through observation but are human-made creations designed and legislated for the co-functionality of humanity and interpersonal conduct. It is here where philosophy and religious codes play a role, but

it is also here where the proliferation or variety of philosophies and religions can collide. Paganism and Astronism along with secularism and—to a degree—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism have a greater potentiality morally to coincide. The Abrahamic religions appear, by contrast, to be more divisive and factional and capable of crusades, Islamic state puritanism and Israeli-engineered genocides. This is not to deny that compatible and even admirable ethical achievement can also emerge from Abrahamic spirituality (e.g., Quakerism, New Age Christianity, Islamic Sufism, and the like), but when an alleged spiritual endorsement operates in promoting holy lands and the allowance of supposedly righteous exclusion of others and the equally supposedly unsaved, the danger of disruptive energy operates the most fully and uncontrollably.

### **The four worldviews**

Differently from Astronism, a Prezi educational presentation considers there to be four different worldviews: the cosmocentric, theocentric, anthropocentric and secular.<sup>4</sup> The last is “a worldview that does not accept the supernatural as influencing current people's lives.” It is economically centred and dedicated to the progress of society. The examples given are the Church of Euthanasia and the Satanic Temple. The secular is opposed to religion, believes in the values of the present

with no concern for eternity, no belief in a divine creator, and regards nothing as sacred. Instead, values are held to be relative; there is no right or wrong. Nature itself is only matter and exists here for human needs alone.

For the theocentric worldview that is God-centred, the same presentation considers that God is “the timeless, changeless source and sustainer of the universe and the source of all knowledge, discloses otherwise indiscernible foundational truths through Scripture, and that these otherwise hidden disclosures rightly frame and give direction to human questions to make sense of anything, including communication.”<sup>5</sup> The examples given are Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Clearly, this is the Abrahamic worldview. Life is thought to come from a loving, powerful and wise God, and the purpose of life is to know God. Values in society are integral for the helping of others, and all actions should be pleasing to God. By contrast, the anthropocentric worldview is instead human-centred by assigning intrinsic value to humanity alone and considering humans as the most important thing on at least the planet Earth if not the universe as well. The Prezi site gives no concrete examples for the anthropocentric but claims that for this outlook charity is an obligation; human rights, lives and communities are critical; the common good is fostered by the ‘best’ human values; and knowledge is respected, and along with free will, is

the key to improving the world. Rather strangely, the site also considers ‘community worship’ as important for the anthropocentric perspective.

It should be clear, by this point, that Prezi is discussing the sociological concept of the ‘ideal-type’. Sociology employs these types for measurement purposes in determining how much any specific religion or spiritual orientation conforms to or comes close to the ‘ideal’ and then seeks to explain why it is different than the ideal itself. In actuality, most religious persuasions are blends of the various ideal constructs. When it comes to the cosmocentric, this is explained by the Prezi educational site as the “belief that the natural state of our universe should remain as it is, without human attempts to terraform planets for human habitation.” This is not the Astronistic view but instead overlaps to an extent with both the theocentric and anthropocentric outlooks. In this alternative version of the cosmocentric, it is argued that nature is alive and is spirited, all life is dependent on the environment and nature, everything consists of an interconnected web, and the individual is not a priority. This description amounts to the biocentric and geocentric understandings of paganism, and the examples given for the cosmocentric are aboriginal spirituality and Wicca but also both Hinduism and Buddhism.

Another Prezi website, here by Hannah J., considers only three main worldviews, namely the cosmocentric, theocentric and

anthropocentric.<sup>6</sup> Again the theocentric is centred on God who is in control of people's lives, and the anthropocentric is centred instead on humans who are considered to be the most important species with the Earth to be used as humanity needs. While humans are dependent on nature, nature herself/itself exists for humankind's benefit. In contrast to both of these views, the cosmocentric is supposedly centred on both fate and astrology. It is predominantly focused on Mother Nature than on people themselves. Humanity is not held to be "the most important species." We are more dependent on the Earth than the Earth is on us.

The non-anthropocentric view expressed by Hannah J. resonates with much contemporary Western paganism if not world paganism more broadly (e.g., Bron Taylor's Dark Green Religion<sup>7</sup>; Mark Green's Atheopaganism<sup>8</sup>), as well as with some of Astronism. As Astronism's founder Cometan expresses, thinking cosmocentrically is actually "unnatural' for humans as a worldview to take ... because it demands that humans accept the insignificance of themselves, the species to which they belong, and the planet on which they have resided for all history."<sup>9</sup> This, however, coincides completely with the biocentrism and geocentrism of CWP. Where the pagan perspectives differ from that of Cometan would be the absence of a grading order between the outlooks. Instead, Cometan presents a 'Hierarchy of Worldviews' from highest to lowest: 1. Cosmocentrism (Astronistic), 2. Biocentrism



(Vegan), 3. Anthropocentrism (Collectivistic), 4. Ethnocentrism (Nationalistic), and 5. Egocentrism (Individualistic). In fact, “the singular defining belief of Astronism and the worldview of the entire Astronic tradition [is that] The Cosmos is considered to be the only empirically real entity to provide existential purpose to humanity.” As such, “cosmocentricity involves placing The Cosmos at the centre of individual and societal spiritual, intellectual, economic and practical life.”<sup>10</sup> Here, cosmocentrism is contrasted with theocentrism, anthropocentrism, technocentrism and geocentrism among others.

### **Claims of a prehistoric legacy**

Another similarity between the pagan and Astronist traditions is that both claim their origins in prehistoric times. Contemporary Western paganism draws from the heritage of the Greco-Romans, the ancient Egyptians, the Mesopotamians and Canaanites, the Celts and Germanics, the Proto-Indo-Europeans as well as the Afro-Latin, indigenous and Stone Age cultures. According to the BBC, “Contemporary Paganism is the restoration of indigenous religion, especially that of ancient Europe.”<sup>11</sup> Further:

The first Pagan tradition to be restored was that of the Druids in Britain. In the mid-seventeenth century stone circles and other monuments built four and a half thousand years previously

began to interest scholars. Some thought that the original Druids (prehistoric tribal people of Europe) had built them. In 1717, one of these scholars, the Irish theologian John Toland, became the first Chosen Chief of the Ancient Druid Order, which became known as the British Circle of the Universal Bond. By the nineteenth century a new outlook was evident as people searched for the fundamental principles of religion by looking at the faiths of different places and times. ...Pagan philosophies, which venerated nature and were polytheistic began to be seen as sophisticated contributions to contemporary spirituality. Across Europe people were rediscovering their indigenous cultures. In northern Europe there was a growing interest in Saxon and Norse traditions. In England, William Morris translated the Icelandic sagas and Cecil Sharp collected village dances and songs. In Germany Schlegel and Schelling in particular were attracted to the nature religion which they saw behind traditional folk customs, and at the beginning of the twentieth century Guido von Liszt pioneered the study of the runes. In north-east Europe, particularly Lithuania, nationalist movements spread and indigenous languages were reclaimed, traditional tales recorded and the old festivals celebrated. Folk

music was part of this reassertion of local identity, preserving traditions which otherwise would have been forgotten.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, while not the first astronomical religion, Astronism “is the modern manifestation of a long series of astronomical religions tracing their origins back to the Upper Palaeolithic period of the Stone Age some 40,000 years ago.<sup>13</sup> Astronism is viewed as a naturalistic religion or philosophy by some given its focus on outer space rather than solely on the supernatural. But again like CWP, there are also supernatural understandings of Astronist beliefs as well. In Astronism, these concern transhumanism, transcensionism and transtellationism. Coined by the English biologist and philosopher Julian Huxley in 1957, transhumanism refers basically to the possibility and permission for humanity to employ technology to modify, enhance and expand cognition and bodily function beyond current biological constraints.<sup>14</sup> This could include the extension or development of preternatural capabilities, though it is doubtful that this is what Huxley had in mind. For Astronism, however, the transhumanic refers to eschatology and not only the purpose of death but the study of the soul. While the naturalistic branch of Astronist eschatology, overlapping with the secular worldview, denies the existence of the soul, an afterlife and the supernatural, transtellationism is its opposite and operates in consideration that the soul, post-mortem existence and the supernatural

are at least possibilities if not realities. The transcensionist, by contrast, is naturalistic but also agnostic or indifferent to the ideas of soul, afterlife or involvement with God or the God-concept.<sup>15</sup> For Cometan, the endeavour of transcension is completed by what he calls ‘siderinity’, namely, the capacity for human beings to escape limitedness.<sup>16</sup>

However, in establishing the legitimacy of the Astronic tradition, Cometan claims that it “sits alongside the Abrahamic, Dharmic, and Taoic traditions to form the oldest kind of religious tradition.”<sup>17</sup> According to Igor Gojnik and Zorana Sokol-Gojnik, the Taoic signifies all East Asian religions including Confucianism, Chinese folk religion/Shenism, Shinto, Taoism, presumably Korean shamanism and some others. Each of these focuses in one way or another essentially on the Cosmic Dao as ‘the Way of the cosmos’.<sup>18</sup> While the Abrahamic, Dharmic and Taoic institutionalised spiritualities are later religious developments, this assertion still ignores paganism.

### **Controversy over what is ‘pagan’**

The founder of Astronism has considered the term ‘pagan’ to be pejorative as an outdated and/or unfair label. Thanks to the historic and imperialistic ascension of Christianity in the West, this is true to some extent. But in keeping with today’s more acute discernment and critical

assessment of colonialism and governmental expansion over foreign cultures, ‘pagan’ is once again becoming an accepted, positive and valid designation. The American Humanist Association (AHA) understands the designation to derive from the Latin *pāgānus*, but it also considers that this referred to those who lived in the country as opposed to the cities where Christianity initially began to grow. While this last may be true, it is a later development. Originally, as Pierre Chuvin has determined, *pāgani* were simply ‘people of the place’, i.e., those who preserved the native customs of their locality—whether in the town or countryside. A *pāgānus* (in contrast to an *alienus* ‘a person from elsewhere’ and ultimately a Christian who was out of touch with indigenous expressions of polytheism), was simply a resident of a *pāgus*—something like an urban ward in the city or a village, district, canon or province in the country.<sup>19</sup> The term *pāgānus* did come eventually to signify a ‘peasant’ more or less in the sense of ‘country bumpkin’, but the Greek equivalent of the designation, namely, *Hellene*, suggests someone more urban and cultured.

The AHA explains further that ‘pagan’ came to signify anyone who engaged in religious acts, practices or ceremonies that were not Christian. Jews and Muslims employ the term in a similar sense.<sup>20</sup> ‘Paganism’ itself has come to be defined either as a religion other than Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, or as no religion

at all. Despite these increasingly obsolete attributions, however, it is now recognised that the common pagan belief is that divine presence is part of nature, and this, in turn, elicits a reverence for the natural order in life.

The Renaissance of the fifteenth century reintroduced the ancient Greek concepts of Paganism. Pagan symbols and traditions entered European art, music, literature, and ethics. The Reformation of the sixteenth century, however, put a temporary halt to Pagan thinking. Greek and Roman classics, with their focus on Paganism, were accepted again during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Paganism experienced another rise in the nineteenth and twentieth century when modern forms of Buddhism and Hinduism were growing in popularity. Following the interest in ancient civilizations that became popular in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, including the popularity of Druid revivals, scholars in the early twentieth century explored the ancient spirituality of the British Isles and Europe. The more current “Pagan Renaissance” grew out of a variety of sources that coalesced between the 1930s and 1950s. Paganism represents a wide variety of traditions that emphasise reverence for nature and a revival of ancient polytheistic and animistic religious practices. Some modern

forms of Paganism have their roots in the nineteenth century, e.g., the British Order of Druids, but most contemporary Pagan groups trace their immediate roots to the 1960s and have an emphasis on a special interest in nature.<sup>21</sup>

My argument in this article is that paganism is a ‘root religion’ and, using a play on words, what might be termed ‘spiritual radicalism’. The world’s other religions are essentially offshoots if not counter-developments of this root religion. Virtually, if and when we wish to understand any specific religion, it is imperative to understand paganism as the root from which the tree of all religions grows.

Inasmuch as paganism is the root of religion, it confronts the earliest, the most immediate, and the least processed apprehensions of the sacred. This is the experiential on which paganism in both its indigenous and contemporary forms wish to concentrate. But while the very notion of the sacred raises theological and philosophical questions, it also presupposes the ethical. In fact, for pagans, the ethical heart of the sacral is what can best be termed *honor*, *trust*, and *friendship*. While all religions may share these goals, the concepts themselves date back to the earliest stages of human encounter, to the time when everyone was pagan. Whatever else these may be, honor, trust and friendship are pagan virtues, and they allow us to recognize

that by virtue of its focus on the sacred, paganism is, by default, an ethical religiosity. The many varied routes of individual paganisms allow adherents different accesses to the experience of the sacred, and as the original custodians of ethical consciousness, paganism today as both a theological option and a religious practice is a spirituality prepared to engage with not only Mother Earth but also all her children, regardless of the differing and even opposing spiritual predilections that they may have. In the long run, pagans would wish to engage with the whole of cosmic nature and all forms of sentience, but the sacred planet and its ‘earthlings’ who comprise the human community are now the task at hand.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, and in contrast to Astronism, the primary concern and focal point is geocentric rather than upon the greater cosmos. This is in keeping with the emphasis on the immediate locality which is where most pagans begin both effort and reflection. We are here now on this blessed Earth, and perhaps before we go elsewhere, we had best first clean up our mess at home. Otherwise, there is a strong interconnection between Astronism and paganism. Both are ethical orientations, both encourage and allow individuality and diversity, and both admire the cosmos and regard it as sacred. A key difference, however, is that paganism does not consider the cosmos or suffering to be intrinsically



evil, whereas in Astronism as long as humans remain in the cosmos they will always be subjected to suffering and evil. Because of this, transcosmisation is regarded to be the end goal of the Astronist doctrine of transcension, that is, “the belief that the expansion of human civilisation into outer space to colonise other planets will bring about such advancements in human technology, physical ability and insight on metaphysical subjects that space exploration will lead humanity to salvation.”<sup>23</sup> Transcension is further explained as:

The salvific process involves human beings physically and metaphysically elevating themselves to the astronomical world. Transcension is therefore not merely space exploration or space expansion but so much more. It is a sacred endeavour that describes a physical ascension to outer space as well as both an intellectual and spiritual ascension to the stars. This latter metaphysical part is crucial because just as our physical bodies will ascend, so must our minds. Humanity’s completion of transcension will result in our coming into union with The Divine at transcosmisation and will thereby constitute our escape from all limitedness and will secure our eternal bliss.<sup>24</sup>

As an analipsocentric religion, Astronism basically “sees transcension as the principal means of salvation for humankind...by means of elevation and potentialisation.”<sup>25</sup> Through transcension and elevation to

the astronomical world, humanity allegedly will become free from the limitations of anthropocentric thought that is founded upon the concept of human centrality.<sup>26</sup>

Personally, I tend to see Astronism as a kind of paganism. Like paganism, it retains various secular elements—belief in or endorsement of the supernatural is optional. However, there do seem to be more Abrahamic or Christian constructs in Astronist formulations than there are in paganism such as linear salvation, concept of the soul, pantheism, an intended purpose for humanity. Whatever the case, both Astronism and paganism embrace the cosmos (Greek *kosmos* ‘world, order, universe’)—the one more comprehensively; the other more locally. But of the four basic ideal-types of religion, I would argue that the one most applicable to Astronism is that of pagan (vis-à-vis Abrahamic, Dharmic or secular).<sup>27</sup> Granted that my inclusion of Astronism within the Big Tent of paganism or of Astronism belonging under the pagan umbrella is a debatable issue, religion short of fundamentalism or sectarian dogmatism is always an open arena for dialogue, discussion and exchange—let alone the agreement to disagree.

## **Other space religions**

There are, indeed, several other kinds of space religions besides Astronism. Scientology, Raëlism and Heaven's Gate consider that human beings came to the Earth from some extraterrestrial civilisation. Heaven's Gate held that extraterrestrials had visited humanity in the past and placed humans on Earth and would return to collect a select few. L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology is 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 the true self or the 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 take up a new body and live a new life though there is no way of knowing when or where."<sup>28</sup> In general, however, rebirth is reincarnation on Earth itself. There is with Scientology no desire to escape the world or incarnation as there is with Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>29</sup> In this respect, returning to life on this planet is similar to the belief of many if not most contemporary Western pagans.

Claude Vorilhon's Raëlian movement is also like paganism in its belief in living in the here and now with happiness and laughter. Like Scientologists, however, life on Earth has extraterrestrial origins

through the visiting race of Elohim that Vorilhon/Raël claims were historically mistaken and worshipped as gods. Through genetic engineering, these Elohim created humanity. With this movement, the Raélians believe neither in evolution nor in an afterlife but instead are seeking immortality through the process of scientific cloning. In actuality, Raëlism is a form of atheism, but it accepts the Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammed, Joseph Smith and other prophets as chosen and educated by the Elohim.<sup>30</sup>

Both Scientologists and Raélians see the future as life on planet Earth, though it is still maintained that life on other planets throughout the cosmos also exists. To this degree, they contrast with both Heaven's Gate and The Order of the Solar Temple who hold that life to come will be through transportation to other planets. The founder of Heaven's Gate, Marshall Applewhite, 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."<sup>31</sup> The Solar Temple was a UFO Knights Templar-influenced group that engaged in both suicide and murder to gain access to the utopic Proxima planet orbiting Sirius. For Solar Templers,

[rather] than seeking to survive the ecological apocalypse [of planet Earth], they would, instead, abandon the world to its fate

and effect a transit “with all lucidity and in full consciousness” to their home in the stars.<sup>32</sup> The transit became the ultimate ritual of [Solar Temple members’] initiation which marked the passage from the profane world to the spatially pure world of another planet.<sup>33</sup>

For Heaven’s Gate,

[the] group committed suicide so that they could ascend to “The Evolutionary Level Above Human.”<sup>34</sup>

Speaking more personally, my partner’s parents were co-founders of a spiritual commune in the US state of New Mexico near the Columbus-Mexican border: The City of the Sun—a New Age intentional community that was influenced primarily by Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism and Transcendentalism. They would phone on occasion to inform us that they were currently witnessing a fleet of flying saucers in the sky. They would marvel over the phenomenon but being elderly would then after a while simply retire to bed. But my own experience when visiting New Mexico has been that, when asked, most people confirmed that they had seen UFOs in the sky. My parents-in-law subsequently became involved as committed followers of the Human Individual Metamorphosis organisation created by Bo and Peep, “the Two” (Bonnie Nettles and Marshall Applewhite), and we were told that along with others they would be physically ascending to

a spaceship—their shoes being all that was to be left behind in the desert. Consequently, they divided their assets between their three children in the wake of this expectation. Fortunately, however, they became disenchanted and left the group before it became Heaven's Gate and gained notoriety through its members' 1997 mass suicide in San Diego.

With some exception for Scientology, both Raëlism and Astronism reveal little indebtedness to the transcendental ideology of Theosophy. Heaven's Gate, The Order of the Solar Temple and Astronism all seek a trans-geocentric extension of life elsewhere in the universe, but Astronists see this conveyance still as physical rather than as an ethereal sublimation that forsakes everything 'human' including the human body. And this idea of humanity colonising outer space, some forms of contemporary paganism also share. 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, 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>35</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>36</sup>

In contrast to this cosmocentric impetus that focuses outwardly into interstellar space, the geocentric directs its attention from the metagalactic to the Earth herself/itself. A prominent discipline that considers the Earth as the astronomical centre is the divinatory method of astrology. Accordingly, “astrology is a method of predicting mundane events based upon the assumption that the celestial bodies—particularly the planets and the stars considered in their arbitrary combinations or configurations (called constellations)—in some way either determine or indicate changes in the sublunar world.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, “astrology is the name given to a series of diverse practices based on the idea that the stars, planets, and other celestial phenomena possess significance and meaning for events on Earth.”<sup>38</sup> Its basic assumption is that an interconnection exists between the physical, spiritual and psychological. Hannah J. contends that the cosmocentric centres on astrology and fate, but for contemporary practical astrology, it is rather a discerning of the stars as they centre upon the Earth, and this, following Alan Leo’s aphorism that “the stars incline, they do not compel,”<sup>39</sup> the patterns and configurations between the Earth and the

heavens are at best suggestive but not determinative or indicative of fate or predestination.

In the natal chart or horoscope of the individual, our solar system's planets along with the luminaries (the sun and moon) are mapped to the person's birth moment and place on Earth as if it were the centre of the cosmos. This geocentric reflection is used to interpret various aspects and events in the individual's life. It is also employed as a timing device to assist in selecting such things as a fortuitous moment to launch a new project. These configurations amount at best in being non-causal signals. The main problem with astrology, however, and despite its unceasing popularity, is that in the West it is tropical and based on the seasonal cycle of the northern hemisphere, whereas in India it is sidereal in that the Earth's axial precession is considered and corrected for the progressive changing alignments between the astrological signs and the constellations from which they have been named. Consequently, these two systems of astrology are slightly out of sync with each other. The discrepancy between the two is at present approximately twenty-four degrees. What this results in is that a person's zodiacal sign in one system may be that of the adjacent sign in the other.

In the West, astrology had come to interact with the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic schools of Greek philosophy. It became a



mainstream feature of Greco-Roman society and functioned as a means for deciphering the synchronisations between terrestrial events and celestial phenomena. CWP has inherited some of this legacy, though astrology does not appear to be an integral aspect of contemporary pagan thought with its concentration on the well-being of the planet. But in contrast to this geocentric and biocentric pagan concern, Astronism claims the following:

[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>40</sup>

Salvation is linear for the panentheistic astronomical religion of Astronism, and this is something that distinguishes it from paganism's cyclical regeneration. Whereas the pagan is primarily telluric and focused on Earth, the Astronist contemplates the cosmos "for its spirituality, faith, destiny, hope, future and existential purpose."<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, geocentric paganism and cosmocentric Astronism are two different viewpoints—each being individually valid for those who hold them. The main problem for contemporary Western pagans has to do with the "limits of 'infinite space' [and] the growing pile of garbage around us."<sup>42</sup> In her *Astropia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race*, Mary-Jane Rubenstein articulates a basic pagan

anxiety and acknowledges that the Space Race *myth* itself is founded on the American belief in an unlimited extraterrestrial frontier—an ‘astrofrontierism’ that is grounded on an earthly frontierism which itself has been grounded in biblical land claims. Sadly, despite the 1967 United Nations ratification of the Outer Space Treaty which mandates that outer space is “for the benefit of all peoples” and must only be used “for peaceful purposes,”<sup>43</sup> the United States, China and Russia have all refused to ratify the treaty. “‘Space’ is [now] the most recent arena of massive deregulation and privatization under the reigning economic strategy known as neoliberalism.”<sup>44</sup> To the disappointment of contemporary pagans concerning future explorations of the extraterrestrial, “the only thing likely to trickle down from space is more pollution.”<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps only the very few might still believe in a geocentric universe. Most people of today are aware that we live in a heliocentric solar system. However, as alluring as the cosmocentric call may be for some, for others the importance of maintaining biocentric balance and of the responsibility incumbent upon humanity is represented by a clear, sane and mature geocentric emphasis.

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# **Recognition and Registration Issues and Their Impacts on the Religious Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

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Although the international legal framework protects the rights of all persons to adopt or manifest any religion or belief of choice without discrimination, indigenous spirituality is generally dismissed, marginalised or denied respect and recognition in many states. The dismissal and denial of recognition of indigenous spirituality has led to severe discrimination against many indigenous communities and human rights violations, including the dispossession and loss of sacred sites, the obstruction of spiritual practices and the violation of the right to religious freedom. This article examines state policies and practices on the recognition and registration of indigenous religious groups and the implications for their exercise of religious freedom. It argues that while states' recognition of indigenous spirituality has grown in recent decades, indigenous

beliefs remain among the most marginalised, disrespected, discriminated and unrecognised. Consequently, many indigenous groups cannot fully exercise their religious freedom.

Keywords: indigenous rights, indigenous spirituality, registration of religious groups, recognition of religion or belief, religious freedom.

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## **Introduction**

While state recognition or registration of religious organisations is not legally required for the exercise of freedom of religion or belief<sup>1</sup>, a lack of it can significantly impact people's ability to exercise that right and other fundamental freedoms.<sup>2</sup> Registered and recognised religious communities receive several privileges and benefits, including access to state funds, national inclusion, protection of sacred sites and tax exemptions and deductions<sup>3</sup>, that are not often available to unregistered or unrecognised groups.<sup>4</sup>

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in many international human rights instruments<sup>5</sup> such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>6</sup>, and applies to the followers of all religions, including indigenous spirituality.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, the religious beliefs and practices of indigenous peoples are often disrespected<sup>8</sup> and not given adequate recognition compared to other religions by



authorities in many states, including by courts.<sup>9</sup> In Western democracies such as Canada<sup>10</sup> and the United States<sup>11</sup>, indigenous peoples' exercise of their spirituality has been subjected to historical and ongoing political, cultural and racial discriminatory policies and practices, leading to the limitation, dismissal and denial of their rights.<sup>12</sup> According to the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, the spirituality of indigenous peoples is denied recognition and restricted in eighteen states and territories where arbitrary administrative requirements are imposed.<sup>13</sup>

The dismissal or absence of recognition for indigenous peoples' spirituality and practices has facilitated indifference, marginalisation, discrimination and human rights violations, including the destruction of sacred sites belonging to indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup> In many states, government policies, practices and laws have caused the dispossession and loss of many indigenous lands, including sacred sites, knowledge, language and other practices that are essential to indigenous religious traditions.<sup>15</sup>

This article explores the implications of religious registration and recognition practices on indigenous peoples' right to practice their beliefs or spirituality.<sup>16</sup> It focuses on government laws, policies and actions and other practices, and how they favour or disfavour

indigenous spirituality and the impacts on indigenous peoples' rights. The article argues that while states' recognition of indigenous spirituality has grown in recent decades, it remains amongst the most marginalised, discriminated against, least respected and unrecognised religion or belief tradition in many states.

Besides being misunderstood, indigenous religious traditions have been impacted by religious chauvinism, prejudice and racially motivated policies that privilege Christianity, Islam and other imperialistic traditions and their cultures.<sup>17</sup> The article concludes that states' discriminatory policies and laws denying recognition limit the religious freedom of indigenous peoples. This includes the dispossession and damage of traditional lands and sacred sites and the loss of the right to self-determination.<sup>18</sup>

The article largely draws on a wide range of publicly available sources of information, including the U.S. Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report*, reports by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, court rulings and academic literature. Finally, the article draws some concluding remarks and makes recommendations on how to enhance the visibility and recognition of indigenous religious practices to ensure the protection of indigenous peoples' freedom to exercise their right to practice,

manifest, teach and maintain their spirituality and beliefs or mitigate violations of that right.

## **International legal framework**

Freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) is protected in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR, and several other international human rights instruments<sup>19</sup> and national constitutions. This right is further elaborated on in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981. The right includes the freedom of all persons, including indigenous peoples, to have or adopt their religion or belief of choice, whether theistic, non-theistic or atheistic<sup>20</sup>, and extend to individuals or groups even if they do not adhere to ‘institutionalised’ belief systems. Freedom of religion also guarantees the right of every person to freely manifest their religion or belief in the form of worship, observance, practice, teaching and dissemination without interference or the fear of punishment.<sup>21</sup>

Articles 18 and 27<sup>22</sup> grant indigenous peoples the right to define and determine their spirituality and identity. In his interim report of 2022, Shaheed articulated that indigenous peoples’ FoRB is also connected with their right to self-determination.<sup>23</sup> This means that indigenous peoples are guaranteed the freedom to define and determine their own

spiritual identity. Although there is no universally accepted definition of “indigenous peoples” under international law, one of the most fundamental and generally accepted criteria is “community self-identification.” Many indigenous people consider themselves ‘distinct’ from others by their shared identity, culture, language and their possession of a “historical continuity with pre-colonial societies on their land.”<sup>24</sup>

The term ‘spirituality’ instead of ‘religion’ is used by many indigenous communities to describe their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>25</sup> This is because there is no equivalent word in English for the term ‘religion’ to describe indigenous spirituality, which is considered to be much broader.<sup>26</sup> The term ‘spirituality’ is also preferred because spirituality is central to indigenous peoples’ identity in ways that are distinctive from other religions, including Christianity and Islam.<sup>27</sup> Unlike in most European cultures, many indigenous cultures do not conceptually draw a clear distinction between what is “sacred and secular”, or culture, language and identity, or between “spirituality and the land on or through which it is expressed.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the term ‘spirituality’ represents the holistic nature of indigenous beliefs in how they transcend spiritual ceremonies and encompasses a wide range of activities, including hunting, fishing, herding and gathering plants, medicines and goods “[with] a spiritual dimension.”<sup>29</sup>

Many indigenous communities view their spirituality as a ‘way of life’, and transcendental worship intrinsically linked to local culture and worldview that forms an integral part of their emotions, habits, daily experiences and practices or virtues, ways of thinking, health and a particular way of living together and communicating.<sup>30</sup>

To indigenous peoples, land is not merely material and nature is not just natural.<sup>31</sup> Rather, both have spiritual dimensions and are part of a sacred substance that is “the source, sustenance and end of all cosmic life on which everything depends.”<sup>32</sup> Indigenous spirituality is thus interrelated to the land, and all that is within it, including plants, the animal world, supernatural beings, forces and rituals, as they “are all interrelated.”<sup>33</sup> Researchers have reported for example that “religion” for the Inuit people in Alaska is connected to “their traditional ways of relating to their land and the life that is present in seas and other waterways.” An Inuit way of life includes the transmission of their traditions and customs across generations to ensure their communal well-being and survival.<sup>34</sup>

Recent growth in international human rights standards and mechanisms has led to a significant expansion in the conception of indigenous peoples’ right to FoRB.<sup>35</sup> For example, the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; hereafter “the Declaration”) is an internationally-recognised framework that sets

the minimum standards for the protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples.<sup>36</sup> The Declaration was developed in consultation with indigenous peoples to articulate their rights, including their spiritual practices. It provides an important clarification on the standards of the specific rights of indigenous people provided in Article 18 of the UDHR and Articles 18 and 27 of the legally binding instrument ICCPR and how they are applied to indigenous peoples.<sup>37</sup> Several provisions directly relate to rights associated with practising indigenous spirituality, including but not limited to Articles 8, 10, 11, 12 (2), 13 and 18. For instance, Article 12 (1) states the following:

Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

Article 25 of the Declaration extends beyond the conventional concept of religious rights of individuals to manifest and practise their religion or belief outlined in Article 18 of the ICCPR.<sup>38</sup> Article 12 of the Declaration guarantees indigenous peoples' access to and maintenance of religious and cultural sites, ceremonial objects and repatriation while

Article 25 provides for recognition of their spiritual connection with traditional lands.

Many international actors, including states, regional and domestic courts, scholars and rights-holders rely on the Declaration to interpret ICCPR provisions concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.<sup>39</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Committee has observed that the protections of minority rights provided under Article 27 of the ICCPR include indigenous peoples' relationship with "the use of land resources...[such as] traditional activities as fishing or hunting."<sup>40</sup> Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)<sup>41</sup> also protects the right of everyone to participate in cultural life, which has been interpreted to include 'religion or belief systems.'<sup>42</sup> The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also affirms that 'culture' in Article 15 requires states to respect the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with their ancestral lands and other natural resources.<sup>43</sup>

### **State policies and practices**

Despite the religious protections provided for all persons in Article 18 of the ICCPR and the expansion in the concept of indigenous peoples' right to FoRB in recent decades, indigenous beliefs or spirituality is not

respected or recognised in many states.<sup>44</sup> In this context, recognition and registration issues encompass various state efforts, including laws, practices and policies of states that privilege certain religious groups or their members, ban, restrict or discriminate against others or limit their ability to practise their religion or beliefs, including the freedom to preach, publish or convert to another religion.<sup>45</sup>

Legal commentators, rights-holders and key stakeholders argue that the existing international legal framework for protecting freedom of religion or belief fails to provide adequate or appropriate protection for a wide range of practices and beliefs that constitute indigenous spirituality.<sup>46</sup> Several states have failed to protect believers of indigenous spirituality equally, often dismissing legal claims invoking their right to FoRB as a justification to deny protection of indigenous practices as well as access to and use of traditional lands.<sup>47</sup>

Many human rights experts observed that indigenous spirituality was poorly understood and largely dismissed in the conceptualisation of FoRB within the international legal framework.<sup>48</sup> For instance, the conceptualisations of Articles 18 of the UDHR and the ICCPR were shaped mainly by debates between Islamic and Protestant Christian groups, albeit its expansion having also been influenced by the rights of atheists in states of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, indigenous peoples' religion and traditions have too often



been articulated through the lens of non-indigenous people, including theologians, lawyers and politicians.<sup>50</sup> This is because the term ‘religion’ is a Western concept that fails to capture the full understanding of beliefs, spiritualities and worldviews, leading to a narrower interpretation of indigenous peoples’ right to FoRB.

As a consequence, the legal protections provided for religious freedom in the international legal framework usually privilege Abrahamic religions, in particular Christianity and Islam. These religions are generally recognised as “voluntary, individual, textual and believed”, and centred on a clear distinction between religion and culture.<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, indigenous peoples’ religions are defined as primarily “public, obligatory, collective, oral, local”, and a matter of practice rather than conventional belief.<sup>52</sup> Indigenous spirituality is often oriented to indigenous peoples’ communities, local culture, identity, relationship with the ‘Creator’, traditional lands and “all their relations”<sup>53</sup>, including waters and other natural resources in ways that are completely distinct from universal religions.<sup>54</sup>

According to Shaheed, indigenous spirituality is broader than the universal religions.<sup>55</sup> It encompasses diverse spiritual beliefs and localised practices that are “integral to [the] indigeneity” of the indigenous group in question, and their “distinctive” spiritual relationship with “traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used”

lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources. In their submission to the Special Rapporteur, the Indigenous Values Initiative and American Indian Law Alliance opined that indigenous spirituality is so intrinsically intertwined with the indigenous peoples' way of life, worldview or culture that it "cannot be divided into frameworks and categories."

State policies and practices that govern the recognition and registration of religious groups and their activities are rooted in racism, colonisation, forced assimilation and the dispossession of indigenous people of ancestral or sacred sites. For many centuries, indigenous peoples, their spirituality, culture and other traditions have been subjected to historical and ongoing political, cultural and racial discriminatory policies and practices to deny their worldviews adequate protection. The cultural hierarchies and their supporting theories are justified on the basis of racially motivated theories, science and legal arrangements.<sup>56</sup> Since the colonial era, most indigenous peoples and their cultures have been considered less worthy and inferior to colonial people and their cultures.

Religions such as Christianity and Islam have been used to justify the annihilation of many indigenous peoples, their worldviews and cultures and to perpetrate gross rights violations against them.<sup>57</sup> This was the case in Latin America where Catholicism was instrumental in

the annihilation of indigenous cultures for centuries.<sup>58</sup> While such racially based cultural hierarchies have long been denounced and rejected by science, they have considerable influence on current legal regimes, policies and state practices with significant implications on the lives and practices of indigenous people in the present day. Studies show that substantial aspects of the laws that were created during the colonial era remain in current law books and continue to influence the opinions of authorities who apply the law. The Doctrine of Discovery for instance has long been used in many states as a justification to dismiss, destroy or deny recognition to indigenous spirituality.<sup>59</sup>

Despite being a secular state<sup>60</sup>, Canada's laws and institutions, including in the fields of education, healthcare and social services are greatly influenced by past Christian institutional structures, teachings and traditions.<sup>61</sup> According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, secular Canada is structured in favour of Protestant Christian groups, including Anglicans and Presbyterians as well as Roman Catholics to some extent.<sup>62</sup> The establishment of weekends (rest days), public holidays and other Christian traditions such as Easter and Christmas also favour dominant Christian groups, allowing them to attend their religious services. Canadian religious practices are deeply rooted in religious chauvinism combined with racism, sexism, classism and gender-based prejudice. These practices are rooted in Protestant

Christian faiths which some sociologists have argued are Canada's "shadow establishment."<sup>63</sup> The dismissal and delegitimisation of indigenous spirituality, ways of life and policies to 'civilise' and convert Canada's indigenous peoples have been justified on the assumption that one must be Christian to be a 'proper' Canadian citizen.<sup>64</sup>

Current U.S. laws are rooted in the legal doctrine of Christian discovery and the fifteenth-century Christian theological presumptions that justified the dispossession of indigenous peoples by transferring absolute titles to Christian sovereigns by virtue of "discovery."<sup>65</sup> Issues of religious freedom arising in the context of forced assimilation often centred on equal access of both Catholic and Protestant institutions to government resources to the neglect of indigenous groups. The law has been used as a justification for the dispossession and forced cultural assimilation of indigenous people based on a presumed lack of cognisable religion.

During a virtual meeting with Shaheed in 2022, Professor Michael D. McNally remarked that the concept of 'religious freedom' has been weaponised against indigenous peoples and their traditions.<sup>66</sup> McNally also noted that indigenous peoples have disproportionately experienced histories of violations of their FoRB through the dispossession of their territories, including sacred places, and have experienced historic and

ongoing schemes of forced assimilation at the behest of states, and often in collaboration with religious institutions.<sup>67</sup>

Although the factors that contribute to the discrimination of indigenous people on the basis of their religion or belief are diverse and complex, legal experts have observed that insufficient legal imagination plays a significant role.<sup>68</sup> What counts as ‘religion’ for legal protections under the freedom of religion law privileges traditions that centre on individual belief such as Christianity than those with beliefs set off from other aspects of culture. In places such as the U.S., religious freedom laws have not only failed to provide adequate protection but in some cases have permitted further violations of indigenous peoples’ right to exercise their religious freedom.<sup>69</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court for instance rejected the claims of indigenous groups like the Yurok, Karuk, Tolowa and Hoopa Indians that constructing a federal road through their sacred sites in a national forest would violate the Free Exercise Clause.<sup>70</sup>

While states’ recognition of indigenous spirituality has grown in recent decades, indigenous people are amongst the most discriminated groups based on their religion or belief. In many states, indigenous groups are subjected to severe and systematic discrimination and marginalisation with significant implications on their ability to exercise their innermost religious or belief convictions.<sup>71</sup> A series of research

and engagements conducted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission with indigenous peoples in recent years showed that they are faced with systemic barriers, prejudice and discrimination when exercising their spirituality.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, prejudice and discrimination against indigenous people on account of religion were found to be on the rise.<sup>73</sup> Scholars have also observed that the U.S. Supreme Court has “never extended the protections of the First Amendment” to the country’s indigenous peoples.<sup>74</sup>

States have failed to respect indigenous legal systems, culture and other traditions.<sup>75</sup> For example, a lack of recognition of the Winnemem Wintu tribe by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs has resulted in interrupted access to their lands for the performance of certain ceremonies or participation in decisions relating to spiritually based fishing activities. Similarly, Indonesia’s lack of recognition for indigenous spirituality is reflected in how adherents of Aliran Kepercayaan spirituality are forced to identify as Hindus before they are given access to national identification cards.

State policies have also long been assimilative and prohibitive towards indigenous populations. Many indigenous peoples have been subjected to ‘legalised’ assimilation and discrimination<sup>76</sup>, past and ongoing state restrictions on ceremonial practices and spiritual leaders often to forcibly or coercively convert them to the majority religion.<sup>77</sup>

During the colonial period, indigenous peoples' lands were taken and their sacraments were often outlawed.<sup>78</sup> In several states, indigenous people have been subjected to dispossession and forced cultural assimilation on the basis of a lack of state recognition.<sup>79</sup> Assimilative policies and state support for colonial cultures led to the forcible removal of indigenous children from their families and communities to distant places to attend faith-based schools.<sup>80</sup>

Shaheed observed that the historical and ongoing experiences of discrimination, violence and hostility against indigenous peoples threaten their "spiritual, cultural and physical survival."<sup>81</sup> In 2022, the U.S. government found that assimilative policies are associated with intergenerational loss of indigenous spirituality. Similarly, representatives of Canada's indigenous people reported to Shaheed their "enduring trauma from...imposed loss of ancestral identity and spirituality."<sup>82</sup>

Many indigenous peoples are systematically excluded from civic and political spaces on account of their indigeneity. Some states even prohibit those who do not belong to their official religion from holding public office, contrary to their right to non-discrimination. Indigenous peoples have been denied or stripped of their citizenship, in turn affecting their socioeconomic participation.<sup>83</sup> For example, the Citizenship Law of 1982 of Myanmar does not recognise the

ethnoreligious Rohingya community as citizens, rendering them stateless and denying them several civil and political rights, including the right to participate in elections.<sup>84</sup>

Besides restrictions on indigenous spiritual ceremonies, symbols and leaders, the right of indigenous people to exercise their FoRB has also been implicated by past and current state policies involving forced displacement, the exploitation of indigenous territories without their free, prior and informed consent, environmental damage and destruction, as well as the impacts of climate change. The veneration of natural areas as sacred sites is one of the most common aspects of indigenous cosmology.<sup>85</sup> Indigenous sacred sites transcend cultural and geographic boundaries; they constitute essential aspects of the spiritual, psychological and social foundations of many indigenous communities.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the destruction of such sites could present an “existential harm”, or significant threat to the freedom of indigenous people to practise their religion.<sup>87</sup> The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, for instance, has observed that the forcible removal or dispossession of indigenous people from their ancestral lands<sup>88</sup> is “not merely a matter of possession and production but [also has] a material and spiritual element” that they must fully enjoy to preserve culture.<sup>89</sup>



## **Themes of indigenous spirituality and further state practices**

In spite of the protections provided in Articles 18 and 27 of the ICCPR guaranteeing the rights of all persons, including minorities to exercise their religious rights “either individually or in community with others and in public or private”, scholars argue that they may not fully protect indigenous peoples’ collective right to exercise their spirituality.<sup>90</sup> Indigenous spirituality includes diverse beliefs and traditions. Many indigenous peoples describe their relationship with nature as balanced or cyclical, embracing places, viewing natural phenomena including land, sea, flora and fauna as sacred, and emphasising respect for God, nature, humans and animals. Many indigenous communities practise animism, holism, shamanism, solstice celebrations, sacred environmentalism and ancestral worship, and maintain ceremonial or burial sites and consider hunting and using other resources sustainably as part of their spiritual customs.<sup>91</sup> In Canada for example, many indigenous spiritual ceremonies include burning traditional medicine such as sweetgrass, sage, tobacco and cedar.<sup>92</sup>

Discriminatory state policies privileging dominant cultures have often led to a steady disappearance of indigenous languages with severe implications on indigenous spirituality and the transmission of knowledge.<sup>93</sup> Inadequate state support, coupled with prohibitions in

state policies, have also led to a steady loss of indigenous languages which are integral to traditional ceremonies and knowledge transmission.<sup>94</sup> Thousands of indigenous children have been systematically removed from their families and communities to distant religiously-based schools, leading to disconnections with their cultures and languages.<sup>95</sup> Religious chauvinism, racially based assumptions and prejudice against indigenous culture and ways of life resulted in the creation of the day and residential school systems by the Canadian government and Christian churches which led to the removal of indigenous children from their communities.<sup>96</sup>

Whereas the places of worship and rituals of other religions are understood and recognised by government institutions including courts, indigenous peoples' spirituality, including the sacredness of natural sites are often neither understood nor recognised by state authorities.<sup>97</sup> Legal experts have argued that although the protection of religious sites and shrines is guaranteed in paragraph nine of the Human Rights Council's Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, evidence shows that indigenous religious sites have often not been equally protected in several states.<sup>98</sup>

Many indigenous people face severe discrimination with respect to the protection of their sacred sites such as lands, waters and

communities of non-human life that are often considered relatives, access to which is essential in the exercise of their right to practice and manifest their belief or spirituality.<sup>99</sup> As such, access to and the integrity of such places are essential to the exercise of religious freedom by indigenous peoples.<sup>100</sup>

In the case of *Ktunaxa Nation v British Columbia* (2017), seven out of nine judges in the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the development of a ski resort in the mountains considered sacred by the Ktunaxa Nation did not violate the Ktunaxa's Charter right to freedom of religion.<sup>101</sup> The Supreme Court clarified further that the freedom of religion guaranteed in section 2(a) of Canada's Charter of Rights does not extend to the protection of "the object of beliefs", but rather protects "the freedom to worship."<sup>102</sup> The Court also stated that the State's duty is to protect the freedom of everyone "to hold such beliefs and to manifest them in worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination...not protect the spiritual focal point of worship."<sup>103</sup>

Two dissenting judges stated that the Court's "restrictive approach takes away the spiritual significance of beliefs or practices and amounts to an interference with "an individual's ability to act in accordance with his or her religious beliefs or practices."<sup>104</sup> While the dissenting opinion appears to be more sympathetic to indigenous spirituality, the majority decision of the Court affirmed Canada's discriminatory law.<sup>105</sup> Before

the Court's ruling, a Ktunaxa Nation Council Chair, Kathryn Teneese, had doubted "whether [the community's] freedom of religion right [was] the same as other Canadians" because the "the previous courts have told [them] that [their] spiritual practices and beliefs [...] matter less than a ski hill."<sup>106</sup> Some U.S. courts have also ruled that the commercial use of traditional lands would not "coerce" indigenous peoples to act contrary to their religious beliefs<sup>107</sup>, and the state could use federal lands "even if [it] makes worship [...] impossible."<sup>108</sup>

The most relevant core United Nations instrument concerning the protection of the sacred sites of indigenous peoples is UNDRIP.<sup>109</sup> Canada has formally endorsed and expressed its commitment to implement this declaration.<sup>110</sup> The Declaration explicitly affirms indigenous peoples' religious rights to their traditional land.<sup>111</sup> It empowers indigenous peoples' to protect their sacred sites from outside interference that would seriously undermine the religious value of the area in question.<sup>112</sup> This is further articulated in Article 25 which explicitly guarantees indigenous peoples' right to protect sacred sites for future generations.<sup>113</sup>

Legal experts have observed that the protection of religious sites and shrines guaranteed in paragraph nine of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief appears to apply to manufactured structures<sup>114</sup>,

and also covers ‘traditional lands which are essential indigenous spirituality.’<sup>115</sup> The above provision acknowledges the rights of both use and stewardship.<sup>116</sup> Highlighting the strong interconnectedness between indigenous peoples’ culture and their FoRB, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has observed that maintaining and strengthening indigenous peoples’ “spiritual relationship” with their ancestral lands is “indispensable to their cultural life.”<sup>117</sup> This argument is affirmed in many human rights complaints during which indigenous peoples often cite cultural rights in their complaints to the Human Rights Committee concerning their spiritual practices.<sup>118</sup>

Indigenous ceremonial practices and spiritual leaders have been subjected to historical and ongoing state restrictions designed for assimilation and forced conversion, leading to violations of their FoRB.<sup>119</sup> Until the early twentieth century, for example, Japan barred many Ainu practices, including their bear-spirit-sending ceremony called *iyomante*.<sup>120</sup> Canada and the United States also outlawed sun dances, potlaches and other indigenous traditional practices that were considered “anti-Christian”, despite being an integral part of indigenous worship and the transmission of knowledge between generations.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, religious organisations have also stigmatised and banned indigenous spiritual practices perceived to be “morally damaging” or “corrupt.”<sup>122</sup> For example, experts on Greenlandic indigenous culture

and history have noted that the state-sponsored Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark imposed restrictions to prevent indigenous drum dances from taking place.<sup>123</sup>

Indigenous people have also been dispossessed or denied access to their traditional lands as a result of environmental destruction or damage stemming from construction, extractive industries, agro-based farming, logging, cash crop plantations, hazardous waste dumping and tourism.<sup>124</sup> A mining company in Australia for example destroyed an ancient rock structure in Juukan Gorge that was of considerable spiritual importance to the indigenous people.<sup>125</sup> Elsewhere in Cambodia, India and the Philippines, indigenous peoples have been forcibly evicted from their lands by extractive companies, in some cases supported by national police and the military.<sup>126</sup> Tanzanian authorities, for example, were accused of deploying live ammunition and tear gas against Maasai people to forcibly evict them from their land to pave the way for the development of game reserves.<sup>127</sup>

The failure of states to protect indigenous people and the occupation, access or use of indigenous lands without free, prior and informed consent significantly undermines their enjoyment of their spirituality.<sup>128</sup> In several indigenous societies, the freedom to manifest and participate in spiritual and religious ceremonies is dependent on their access to, use and control of traditional lands and the natural

environment.<sup>129</sup> The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, for instance, has observed that "any impediment to or interference with accessing the natural environment, including land... [would have] considerable repercussions on the enjoyment of freedom of worship."<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, the relocation of burial sites has prohibited indigenous people from practising traditional burial ceremonies.<sup>131</sup> In South America, for example, the sacred sites of indigenous people have been displaced by increasing urbanisation and the development of city infrastructure and extractive industries, including mining and logging which are often in remote locations.<sup>132</sup> These activities have led to the relocation of indigenous people from their traditional lands, severe environmental damage, social tensions and the killing of many indigenous peoples and their leaders while defending their traditional lands and the environment.<sup>133</sup>

The denial of indigenous peoples to access and use their lands also deprives them of the right to enjoy spiritual practices and to transmit knowledge to future generations while engendering spiritual and psychological distress by creating a sense of alienation.<sup>134</sup> Experts argue that the removal of such objects from indigenous communities could have spiritual and physical harm on indigenous peoples, including "spirit-caused illnesses" with the potential to persist into

future generations.<sup>135</sup> Over one million indigenous ancestral remains and cultural items still reside in repositories worldwide.<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile, many states, museums, other cultural institutions and private collectors have refused to repatriate ceremonial objects and remains to indigenous peoples.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, efforts by indigenous peoples to recover these items are hindered by temporal, financial and legal hurdles, including national laws that limit deaccession or dismiss repatriation claims.<sup>138</sup>

Under UNDRIP, states are obliged to “consult and cooperate in good faith” with indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions to obtain their “free, prior and informed consent” before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.<sup>139</sup> Article 32 of the Declaration also provides that states must obtain the free and informed consent of indigenous peoples before they can undertake any projects that affect indigenous peoples’ rights to land, territory and resources, such as the exploitation of minerals, water or other natural resources.<sup>140</sup>

Under Article 11(2) of UNDRIP, indigenous peoples must be provided with an effective mechanism for redress, including restitution for religious and spiritual property taken from the affected group without their free, prior and informed consent.<sup>141</sup> Articles 28 and 32(2) of UNDRIP also state that indigenous peoples are entitled to effective redress and restitution for the dispossession of their traditional lands, or



otherwise “confiscated, taken, occupied or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent” to mitigate inter alia any cultural and spiritual impacts.<sup>142</sup> This implies that the dispossession of indigenous sacred places, objects and ancestors can give rise to substantive protections, including restitution.<sup>143</sup>

Article 25 of the Declaration empowers indigenous peoples “to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship” with their traditional territories, waters and coastal seas, including those occupied or dispossessed.<sup>144</sup> For indigenous peoples, land rights are not merely secular issues, but involve fundamental religious or spiritual elements that can also trigger states’ international obligations to guarantee FoRB in connection with the deprivation or dispossession of indigenous peoples of their ownership or control of their traditional lands.<sup>145</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This article examined the implications of state recognition and registration policies and practices on the right of indigenous people to exercise their freedom of religion or belief. It highlighted that despite the protections provided in several international instruments, indigenous people across the globe face acute discrimination in ways

that limit or deny them their right to exercise their FoRB. State policies and practices are characterised by a lack of recognition of indigenous religious practices, low visibility, indifference and discrimination. Consequently, indigenous people have been subjected to a limitation or a denial of their ability to exercise their right to manifest, maintain and transmit their spirituality, have access to and enjoy protection of their religious and cultural sites, as well as use and control ceremonial objects and other elements. Since spirituality is a vital aspect of most indigenous communities and their subsistence, a failure to protect the right to FoRB of indigenous peoples has significant implications on the continuity of their survival, an adequate standard of living, right to culture and self-determination.

To ensure the full enjoyment of indigenous peoples' right to exercise their FoRB, national laws and policies on registration processes should extend to the protection of indigenous peoples' access, control and use of traditional lands, including preventing their destruction, occupation or a disruption of access to sacred sites. Under Article 19 of UNDRIP, states must "consult and cooperate" with the representative of relevant indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before passing laws that will reasonably foreseeably affect them. This would enhance their ability to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions,

customs and ceremonies. In turn, states should reframe their understanding of FoRB towards a collective model that ensures the full protection of the collective rights of indigenous peoples to exercise their religious rights.

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**Book Review: *Cosmodeism: A Worldview for the  
Space-Age: How an Evolutionary Cosmos is  
Creating God* by Tsvi Bisk**

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*Cosmodeism: A Worldview for the Space-Age: How an Evolutionary Cosmos is Creating God* by Tsvi Bisk. Westphalia Press, 2025. 368pp.

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Bisk begins his latest work *Cosmodeism: A Worldview for the Space-Age: How an Evolutionary Cosmos is Creating God* with the cosmodeist aphorism that “in the end an evolutionary cosmos will have created God.” This intentionally contrasts with the statement made at the outset of the Bible that “in the beginning, God created the heaven

and the Earth.” This polarity stands as the main differentiation between an Abrahamic conception of the divine (i.e., as a god immanent, omniscient and providential), and a cosmodeist one, namely, that God does not yet exist but will do in the future as a result of the natural evolution of the cosmos. Bisk posits that human beings may benefit from this cosmic evolutionary process by becoming subjects of it and thereby ascending to god status. This transformation of the cosmos which human beings have the opportunity to benefit from is called the Cosmotheistic Hypothesis which was originally developed by Israeli political theorist and philosopher Mordecai Nessayahu. The reason for Bisk’s present work is his attempt to fully transition Nessayahu’s Cosmotheistic Hypothesis into Cosmodeism. Bisk posits that Cosmodeism is a more comprehensive belief system suitable for an audience of the twenty-first century as it addresses more directly many of the crises that humanity currently faces.

Bisk frames Cosmodeism using a three-step method in this work: (1) by laying out the “existential predicaments” and “post-modern crises” of current civilisation; (2) by rebuffing notions of de-development and general pessimism with propositions imbued with cosmic optimism; and (3) by using remnants of Nessayahu’s most intelligible writings combined with religious and secular examples to leverage both a legacy and an explicit need for the Cosmodeistic



Hypothesis. Bisk succeeds in proving a need for the application of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis with his rational and evidenced-based challenge to the contemporary notion that there is a limit to human growth. Bisk firmly rejects the suggestion that human efforts should be concentrated on humbly preserving what we have rather than executing a grand plan to unearth new resources that could put the natural environment at risk. Bisk seems averse to organised religion in this work but does posit his writings as a form of speculative natural theology due to the significant theological implications of his Cosmodeistic Hypothesis which Bisk also suggests can synthesise the Axial Age and the Enlightenment Age.

Bisk portrays the process of evolution as infinite and one that will continue until it results in the creation of a consciousness that resembles God regardless of humanity's engagement with the process. In the Cosmodeist framework, God does not yet exist but will be created through the process of evolution. Hence, the inherent purpose of the cosmos is to create God which Bisk suggests is a resolution to the problem of the apparent meaningless of individual human life because we have the opportunity as individuals and as a collective species to benefit from this process of cosmic evolution. As an Astronist, I see Nessyahu and now Bisk's proposition on evolution as highly similar—if not identical—to the salvific process of transcension

and to Cosmist Nikolai Fyodorov's conception of the Common Task. Bisk's work tells the story of the development of Cosmodeism through both his personal reflections on the meaning of life and the cosmos as well as through the writings of his former colleague and friend Nesyahu. This is a work of sentiment on behalf of Bisk reflecting on his life and that of his friend, but it is also a work of development in the sense that Bisk clarifies Cosmodeism by expanding on the philosophical groundwork that Nesyahu commenced in the 1950s.

Bisk faces the most fundamental existential questions in this work, these having emerged as a result of both advancements in science and the emergence of scientism. Fundamentally, Cosmodeism challenges nihilism which Bisk argues has become pervasive because of how scientific discoveries have left human beings feeling discomforted. Our former self-confidence as a species rested on the assurances religion gave to us that we have meaningful lives but this contentedness has been rattled by our realisation that we no longer live in what Bisk describes as a "cozy universe" in which human beings are important. Cosmodeism triumphs over nihilism by unequivocally asserting a meaning to life in the universe which is assured through cosmic evolution. Thus, built into the very fabric of the cosmos is a meaning that all sapient beings can apply to themselves for solace and assurance.

Included in Bisk's work are two books, the first titled *Our Age of Discontent* which explains the existential predicaments of the modern era. Many questions have been answered by science but these discoveries have raised many more, in turn causing an existential and moral dilemma for humankind. Bisk then goes on to lay out several crises humanity is facing from the scientific to the philosophical and religious to the psychological and material. In these chapters, Bisk presents the theoretical groundwork necessary for justifying humanity's ascent to *Homo divinitas* which Bisk explores fully in book two of this work. The hallmark of a religion or philosophy or hypothesis that is what I call 'analiptic' (i.e., affirms some form of transcension), is cosmic optimism which Bisk clearly conveys in this work. For example, in chapter ten, Bisk calls out the "sanctimonious self-indulgence" of those who advocate for the end of growth. He clashes in this work with those who propound any form of cosmic pessimism or apocalypticism which in layman's terms asserts a philosophy of "we're doomed."

Bisk's presentation of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis is generally far more optimistic about the human future as long as humanity continues to adhere to the traditional American "can do" attitude. However, this condition placed on humanity's cosmic future casts some doubt over the assurances of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis, particularly the specific

fate of humanity under cosmic evolution. This highlights a difference between Astronism's transcension and the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis. In Astronism, transcension is workable for human beings and Astronism is pantheistic, humans can also depend to a degree on divine intervention to guide humanity back to God. Cosmodeism—as a form of deism—does not possess this same faculty as the execution of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis conveys cosmic evolution as a natural process that is less malleable and somewhat preset or otherwise fixed. Curious also is the connection Bisk makes between the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis and environmentalism in chapter ten in which he explicitly identifies himself as a humanistic environmentalist (i.e., one who cares for a clean environment because it is good for human beings). This is similar to the view held by Astronists who believe that the purpose of natural resources is so that they can be used by sapient species for the sake of progressing transcension. Bisk's humanistic environmentalist view—which emphasises the “infinite resource of the human mind”—corresponds with a cornucopian approach and is a direct result of Bisk's adherence to the broader philosophy of cosmic optimism.

Bisk's 'no nonsense' outline of what needs to take place practically when it comes to environmental issues is refreshing, especially in the field of space religion because Astronist publications tend to be more theoretical and religious and thereby more idealistic and sometimes

even utopian. Bisk's discussion of what practical steps need to be taken can indeed be applied to the context of Cosmism's Common Task and Astronism's transcension as these corresponding concepts share the same fundamental optimism as Bisk and Nessayahu's Cosmodeistic Hypothesis. The key subject in Bisk's plan is growth and he focuses on identifying avenues for human beings to unlock limitless growth. Cosmodeism tends to focus on the potential for material growth among species while Astronism—despite acknowledging the essential role of material growth—tends instead to focus on intellectual and spiritual growth as a means of progressing transcension.

However, it must be remembered that Bisk treats Cosmodeism not as a religion but merely as a hypothesis. For example, he spends much of part four of this work discussing Nessayahu's theories as mere conjectures, including in his writings many cosmological, economic and theological dimensions of his friend's work. In particular, in the conclusion to part four, Bisk provides a useful explanation of Nessayahu's cosmology of a finite cosmos evolving out of an infinite universe, in turn the cosmology of Cosmodeism distinguishes between cosmos and universe which is similar to the Astronist cosmology. Combining this with how the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis advocates a form of transcension, Cosmodeism is brought theoretically closer to Astronism. It was particularly enjoyable to read at the beginning of

chapter four about the approach Bisk had taken to “paraphrase, condense and expand on” the writings of his former colleague and friend which again highlights the sentiment in his work and gives the sense that there is a personal history here as to why Bisk has conducted such an extensive exposition on Cosmodeism.

While I fully appreciate Bisk’s need to rewrite or reframe Nesyahu’s writings to make them more readable for a contemporary audience, it would have been even more fascinating and indeed useful—particularly for historians—to have included more extensive direct quotations from Nesyahu’s original work, especially since Nesyahu’s original writings are not publicly available in English. On a related note, I think there is certainly a gap in the literature for a complete exegesis of Nesyahu’s original works, especially his 1953 work *Cosmic Science and the Scientific Society*. I think Bisk is the only person who could conduct such an exegesis with sufficient accuracy to Nesyahu’s original thoughts, especially with how Bisk describes Nesyahu’s writings in this work as highly technical and exhausting for the average reader. This type of research would make suitable content for the *Journal of Astronist Studies* and so I welcome Bisk to make some contributions to a future volume. I hope that this type of research will naturally develop once the discourse on space religion and space philosophy attracts more attention from academics. Also important to

note is Bisk's contribution of renaming Nesyahu's Cosmotheism to Cosmodeism based on his opinion that the 'theism' element of the original term placed too much emphasis on a supernatural god beyond natural laws while Bisk postulates that the term 'Cosmodeism' places its focus on natural theology and is superior due to its closer alignment with logic and science.

Bisk's work will be useful to any scholar of the field of Astronist studies and space religions as well as the broader study of new religious movements. It is essential reading for anyone merely curious about Cosmodeism given that Nesyahu's writings are still untranslated from Hebrew, thus making them inaccessible to a Western audience. In particular, both Astronists and Cosmists will be interested in this work, not only because it can serve as a companion to Cosmodeism but because it can help us to understand to a greater depth the concepts that relate Cosmodeism to similar movements like Astronism. Bisk's work makes a crucial addition to the discourse on space religions and sheds light on the complexities of Cosmodeist thought, including how this tradition has developed from Nesyahu to Bisk. The post-Scientific Revolution anxiety is also well-captured in Bisk's writings which leverages an explicit need for a planned execution of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis.

Bisk gives us various intimations to the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis across religious traditions—Jewish, Christian, Muslim and ‘Asian’ including Dharmic and Taoic—which makes a significant contribution to the field in a never-before-seen comparison of space religion (what I would call the Astronic religious tradition) to other religious traditions. The secular intimations of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis also provide some excellent source material for comparison, perhaps even alluding to an evolution of human thought culminating in Cosmodeism which would add to Cosmodeism’s allure as a belief system. I noticed, however, the absence of a discussion of Cosmism in the book which I think would have given more historical context to Cosmodeism. This was a missed opportunity for comparison in my opinion between space religions. In particular, I would be interested if Bisk explained to what degree he views Fyodorov’s Common Task to correspond with Nesyahu’s Cosmodeistic Hypothesis. This type of ‘inter-Astronist’ comparison (i.e., comparison between space religions) would be useful for those interested in the interplay of beliefs of religions espousing some form of transcension, especially if this led to a critical examination of whether my assumption that transcension is the common thread linking Cosmism, Cosmodeism and Astronism is accurate from a Cosmodeist’s perspective.



Overall, Bisk's work is an essential contribution to the field of Astronist studies not only because it provides an extensive discussion of Cosmodeism, but also because it clarifies the writings of Nesyahu himself from someone close to him while he was alive. Due to this, we can be assured that Bisk's presentation of Nesyahu's hypothesis is accurate to how he intended his writings to be interpreted. It is important, however, that Bisk provides his own additions and developments in the form of Cosmodeism to Nesyahu's original hypothesis in this work which are equally valid and valuable. The question this work also raises, however, is the following: what is the future of Cosmodeism? This question goes unanswered by Bisk as part of his broader silence over the organisation of Cosmodeism. In many ways, this work by Bisk lends the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis as a gift to the world to be developed by contemporary and future philosophers. This raises an opportunity for theoretical expansion but also highlights several omissions of this work: the unanswered question of what specifically makes someone a Cosmodeist, the ideal structure of organised Cosmodeism and a glossary of Cosmodeist terms which would have been useful. In light of these omissions, I suspect Bisk's priority is not to organise Cosmodeism. But if not then, I must ask him: what is the actual purpose of Cosmodeism?

As an Astronist reading this book, my main criticism of Bisk is his perceived aversion to organising Cosmodeism either as a religion or a philosophy. For humanity to execute the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis, a grand plan will no doubt be required which Bisk begins to develop in this work through his discussion of the practical steps humanity ought to take to tackle environmental issues and human growth. However, far less attention is placed on developing Cosmodeism's eschatology and soteriology which need some expansion to make Cosmodeism a well-rounded belief system. Moreover, I have lingering questions about the specific role of humanity in the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis: what ought human beings to do to ensure they do not miss out on ascending to *Homo divinitas*?; is there a specific window of time we have to execute the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis?; what if we miss this deadline?; does Cosmodeism encourage setting up institutions to guide humanity's execution of the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis?

Lastly, I was disappointed to find less emphasis in Bisk's writings on space exploration and outer space as the essential setting where the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis ought to be executed. Moreover, how Bisk conveys the process of how cosmic evolution will lead to human beings becoming Gods turns increasingly vague as his writings address topics further and further from Earth. For example, the goal of Astronism is transcosmisation—the act of human beings becoming evolved enough

to physically leave the limited cosmos and enter the infinite universe—but the absence of such a specific far-future end goal in Cosmodeism may leave readers at an abrupt terminus. Having said this, Bisk’s work is certainly welcomed and ought to be looked upon as a creed of Cosmodeism and as an essential addition to the library of anyone remotely interested in the interplay between evolution and theology.

## **Notes on Contributors**

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