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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.

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.¹ 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.² Tsiolkovsky's scientific endeavours were profoundly influenced by the more radical beliefs of Fyodorov which took on a religious character.³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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).⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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 that human civilisation should 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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 analytic religions.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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 spark a transformation one's perspective.³⁵

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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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).³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹ 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*.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴

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’.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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).⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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.⁵² 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 analiptic 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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*.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

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.⁶²

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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴

The theology of Astronism is formed of three elements: monotheism, pantheism and what Astronists call ‘depadotheism’.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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 the salvation of humanity and theosis.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

Due to its status as the earliest of the analytic 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

analipctic religions studied in this article. Whether in art or film, the space programmes of superpowers, or subsequent philosophical movements such as transhumanism, the analipctic 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.⁶⁹

The future of the analipctic 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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ Astronism in particular now struggles for recognition in a similar fashion to most other new religious movements (Lefebvre and Monnot 2020, 236–239).⁷² 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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