Editor’s introduction

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First, on behalf of our whole team, let me apologize for the long delay in producing this new issue of our journal. There have been changes among the members in charge of different sections and submissions were not examined until the beginning of 2023. I do hope the variety and richness of the topics explored by the six articles here will reassure you as to the necessity of continuing our project to publish original studies on new religions and on the new developments of more traditional ones in order to understand the spiritual transformations of our world.

The first article, “Astronism and the Astronic religious tradition,” by Michael York and Cometan presents a totally new space or astronomical religious movement (founded in Britain in 2013) through an analysis of how it is simply the latest expression of the Astronic tradition with Upper Paleolithic roots. The authors focus on the salvific doctrine of transcension to show how the quest to understand our place in the universe is individually rewarding and highly relevant for our age.

With “Jesus the Sect Leader in Comparative Perspective” Mikael Rothstein offers an article that some may find subversive but that is perfectly in tune with our concerns. Since we often explain to skeptics how “sects” simply follow a common pattern of development and that Christianity started as one with Jesus as charismatic leader, the demonstration through comparisons with contemporary groups given by Rothstein is most stimulating.

In “The Global Revival of Legendism: Korean Online Games,” William Sims Bainbridge demonstrates the links between the cultural form of Legendism and traditional Korean folk religions through an in-depth analysis of several virtual games. He shows how their designers build on
the links between magic and religion, avatars and deities, to strengthen the success of South Korean cultural forms on the world stage.

“Active Compassion: Reimagining Zen (Chan) and Martial Arts” shows how, from his stance as a Jujutsu instructor and practising Buddhist, Som Pourfarzaneh perceives the incompatibility yet complementarity between Zen and martial arts, whether Japanese or other. He explains how through their re-envisioning “active compassion”, both techniques can benefit their practitioners and their entourage.

Petter Johnstad “How to Disappear Completely: Entheogen-induced Experiences of Self-dissolution” studies the impact of the use of specific psychedelic drugs on respondents, focusing on their feeling of dissolution of the self: disruption of self-related illusions, experiences of bodilessness, immersion in another reality, transformation of identity, separateness from or fusion with humanity or a transcendent force through telepathic unity.

In “The War is Not Over: Scientology, Resilience, and the Resurgence of State-Sponsored Anti-Cultism,” Donald Westbrook shows how the issues faced in France by the Church of Scientology are a good test case of the anti-cult war waged by the government body, MIVILUDES, in particular since the authority in charge of the organisation, Sonia Backès, is a former Scientologist who falsely claims she had to defect and has now turned into a vocal opponent to make sure she can keep her job.