

EVOLVING-UNIVERSE-IN-THE-FORM-OF BRIAN SWIMME

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This review actually begins with one of Professor Swimme's prior books, *The Universe Story* (1992), co-authored with Thomas Berry. I read that epochal reorientation of cosmic presentation for one of my classes at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) and then wrote a review similar to this one. In it, I expressed the critical observation that the book attempted to speak from a detached, objective, omnipresent, and all-knowing perspective when all that perspective ever *could be*, really, was Earth-based: *The Universe Story* was inescapably narrated by two Earthlings.

I sent my review to Professor Swimme through intra-CIIS email and he was generous enough to respond. He told me that he empathized with my position, and added, "But what I came to realize is that any storyteller of the universe's development needs also to tell the story of the storyteller's development." This was a tremendous breakthrough! What he was saying was that any universe story ultimately is told from the perspective of the universe at a particular stage of *its* development. This is the lesson of "cosmogenesis:" hence, *Cosmogenesis* (2022) is the story of the universe coming alive in the form of an Earthling named Brian Thomas Swimme.

The pace of the book starts off relatively leisurely as Professor Swimme recounts his early stages of professional development. The opening sentence of Chapter 1 reads: "I begin my story on August 23, 1978, my first day as a professional mathematician at the University of Puget Sound, in Tacoma, Washington."

As a young professional with a young family-in-the-making, the evolving-universe-in-the-form-of Brian Swimme is excited about the opportunities before him, as if Providence had placed him on the ground floor of an enterprise that could grow mighty indeed. Soon enough, however, discouragements begin to seep in as underlying dynamics are revealed, including hidden motivations of participants as well as the veiled purpose of the education "industry" itself. Eventually, the bottom seems to fall out as the evolving-universe-in-the-form-of Brian Swimme realizes that he cannot perform honestly in this charade; he apparently has too much personal integrity—or is it that Providence is calling him elsewhere? A series of serendipitous events finally convinces him to abandon his prior life trajectory—the comfortable one sanctioned by culture and family—and set out on a comparatively tenuous opportunity working with the theological philosopher Matthew Fox in Chicago.

At this stage of the unfolding universe story, it's crucial to interject the role of Denise. An entire chapter toward the end of the book is devoted to describing the

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early romance of Denise and Brian and how they united life-forces to become a super-conjugate couple as an expression of emerging cosmogenesis. I have to confess I too fell in love with Denise, Brian's faithful, intrepid partner who supported his seemingly wild move to Chicago.

Now the pace of the story begins to accelerate. In Chapter 41 (of 66 total), the evolving-universe-in-the-form-of Brian Swimme meets his true teacher, the Passionist Catholic monk Thomas Berry. Considering that as a student at CIIS I considered Professor Swimme to be an intellectual giant in his own right, I was bit surprised at the reverential tone of Swimme's writing on Berry. For the remainder of the book, a characteristically Catholic master-student kind of relationship is gently revealed that may best understood within the immensely personal karmic purposes of each actor. As representative of this quality, here is what Professor Swimme writes about their first face-to-face meeting in Chicago: "He gave off the aura of celebration. As if he were in the middle of a vast cosmic party that I wanted to join with all my heart" (188).

The ever-supportive Denise senses this vital connection. In a particularly heartwarming part of the story, the super-conjugate couple with their newly born second son is trudging through a freezing wind in downtown Chicago, when the following exchange takes place between Brian and Denise:

"You don't need to ask your question," she said. She took my arm and leaned against me as we walked. "Yes. We're going to New York [to the home of Thomas Berry]."

"What? No. No way."

"I've wanted this so long," she said. "Starting back in Oregon."

"What are you saying?" I asked.

"That you'd find your teacher. It was depressing listening to him [Father Berry recounting his honest appraisal of the state of the Earth], but he loves Earth so deeply. It fills him. It's even in the sound of his voice. He's the wisdom figure you've been searching for." (198)

With the accelerating pace of *Cosmogenesis* comes a quickening of the heartbeat of profound insights. For example, the context of Professor Swimme's new relationship with Father Berry is set in this evaluation:

The question of whom we should consult in the work of fashioning a new cosmological story is of highest importance. . . . Humanity's most significant spiritual challenge is an integral understanding of a universe that is developing through time. . . . To give birth to a new cosmological story requires a profound creativity. Everything in Western civilization must be put on the table for discussion and reevaluation. (194-96)

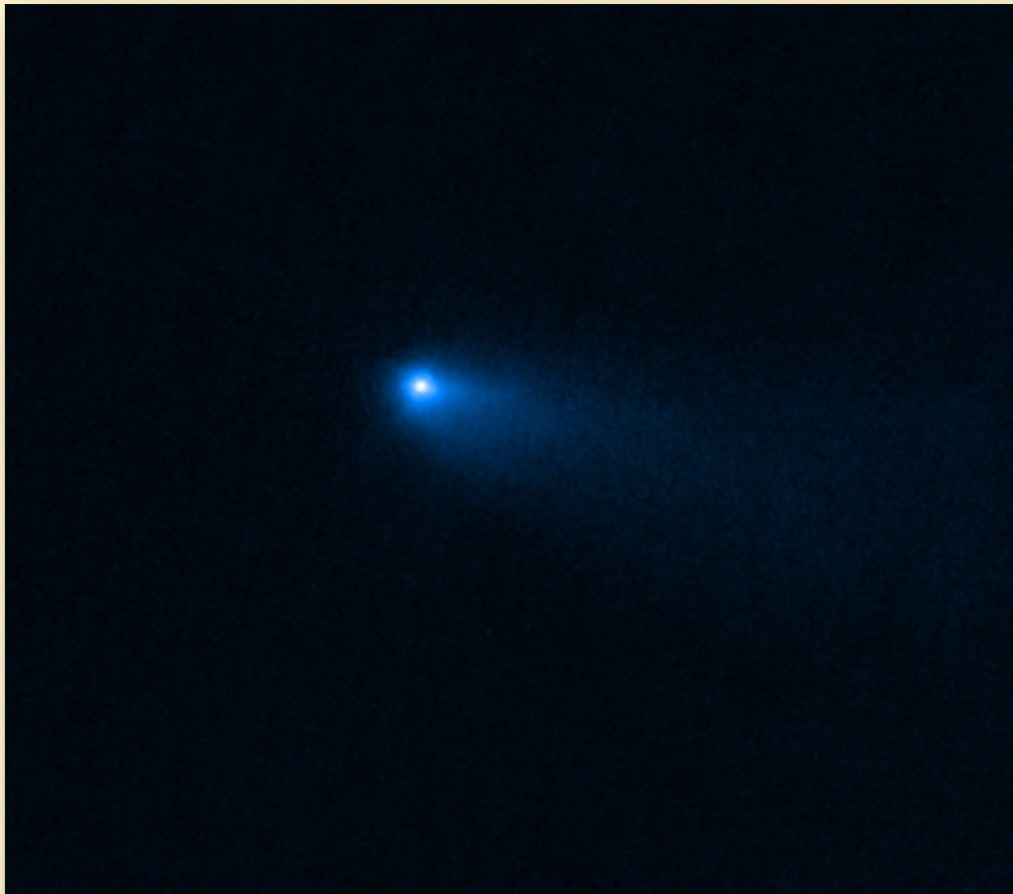
Father Berry was to be Swimme's guide, the one whom he would consult.

Then on page 206, the wise instruction continues:

The universe as a whole is developing, which as you know I regard as the primary revelation of our time, at the scale of a world religion. At risk now is not just Western civilization but the wildness and beauty of Earth itself. Our greatest hope is to meet this challenge by telling an integral, cosmological story, one that will guide us into a future flourishing with life.

Revelations such as these by the sagely figure Thomas Berry continue to grip the evolving-universe-in-the-form-of Brian Swimme at his roots. This formerly composed, up-and-coming professional educator of mathematical physics is recorded in the text as experiencing almost uncontrollable enthusiasm and excitement. Through his interaction with Berry, Swimme behaves as if he is just now discovering his purpose in life (or purpose in the universe, depending on your preferred scale of interpretation). Father Berry informs his new disciple that the reason he struggled to fit in at the University of Puget Sound was because his destiny was not in science but rather “to tell the universe story” (some ten years before he co-authored *The Universe Story* (1992)!). Upon realizing this personal revelation, in characteristic charm, the evolving-universe-in-the-form-of Brian Swimme relates how he raced home to tell Denise that he had just learned who he was and what he was about (208).

I have to admit, in reading *Cosmogenesis*, I felt like I too was being presented with my life’s work. On the opening page of Chapter 42, I scribbled, “Best chapter yet! preamble to my work at CIIS!” It’s not so much the details of the physics involved, the theories and equations of the new cosmological story, but rather the liberating perspective that this story allows. Once we internalize the profound realization that the Universe Story is a still emerging narrative, that we are living as active co-participants in a “time-developmental universe,” we are set free to actively push the boundaries of this emerging universe, to create the next moment and the moment after that in a form we would *choose*, as a reflection of our innermost ideals. We can, in fact, take over the creation (manifestation) because we are nothing less than *the universe becoming aware of itself*, of its awesome powers, its ever-renewing majesty, and its still unmanifest latent potential. We can—fellow Earthlings—surf the leading edge of *Cosmogenesis*



Tell the story!