

# FEATURE

## Book probes links between science, spirituality

*At Home in the Cosmos*, by David Toolan, SJ; Orbis Books; 257 pages; \$25

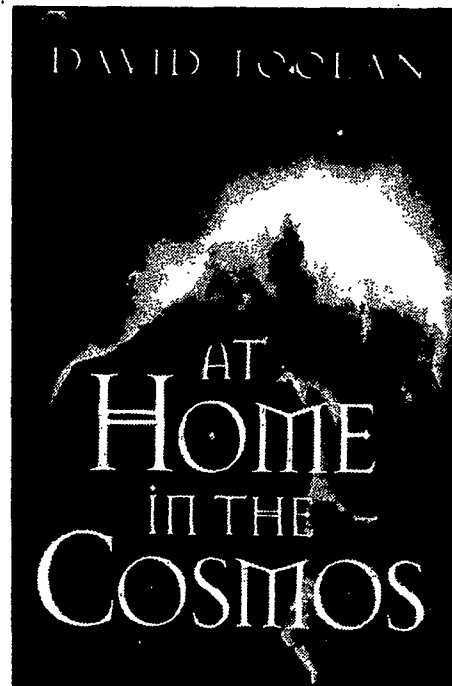
Reviewed by Gerald Schwartz  
Guest contributor

Every day there seem to be new facts added to the volumes we know about physics, astronomy and the world around us. How does what we think of as matter, whether it's a subatomic quark, a star like our sun, or the source of our own energy, affect our spiritual practice? What differences do the facts of our physical universe make in the way we believe, pray and work?

These are the questions met head on in *At Home in the Cosmos* by Jesuit Father David S. Toolan, theologian and associate editor of the Jesuit weekly magazine, *America*.

*At Home in the Cosmos* is a book that convincingly explains our place in the grand scheme of things, in the cosmic story that is now being told by the natural sciences. Father Toolan reviews how contemporary science is discovering a world that is "irreversibly temporal, dynamic, interconnected, self-organizing, indeterminate, and boundlessly open to transformation."

He writes of how, quite literally, we are descendants of the very stars, for "without star factories to convert helium out of hydrogen, there would be no oxygen, carbon, or iron: and without these there would be



no amino acids or proteins for life."

Fifteen billion years of evolution, a proliferation of forms out of chaos, are inscribed in our bone marrow, in our nerves and tissue. Father Toolan reasons that "each of us is a distillation, a condensed centrifuge of cosmic energy."

Elaborating, he gives us a "sacramental understanding of the cosmos" in a

overview of our current grasp of physics and astronomy — of dark matter, black holes and thermodynamics — which is both conversant and absorbing. It is, however, merely a prelude to Father Toolan's real purpose, which is to explore the implications for the believer.

So, how do we pray and act in such a setting? This post-Einsteinian universe is unimaginably vast and ancient. It is blessed with what Toolan calls "a steadfast stability." Still, more notably, he describes it as also graced "with process, self-organization, interconnection, communication, fluctuation, and openness."

Given all that, it has to make a difference to our experience of God, our prayer life, our work and our action. Speaking of faith, *At Home in the Cosmos* assures us that news from the Hubble space telescope or from experiments and tests performed with a nuclear accelerator will not in itself suffice to answer our highest questions.

We are summoned to follow the news we get from the Scriptures — as, for example, the Book of Wisdom: The world and everything in it is holy because "the imperishable spirit" of God lives in all things. Taking this cue, along with a depth probe of our own soul's experience, we can come to a final analysis reaching further than science and all its apparatus into the secret design of things. It's here that Toolan, echoing a morning prayer attributed to

Saint Patrick, gives form to the notion that a post-Einsteinian cosmos reconnects us with "the strength of heaven, light of the sun, radiance of moon, splendor of fire, speed of lightning, swiftness of wind." This insight is perhaps the book's most powerful contribution, since it contrasts to the iron cage of physics, allowing us to perhaps see ourselves as no longer intruders in the cosmos, but belonging.

Further, as Scripture testifies, Jesus has to be taken as "prototype of our species, and better yet in cosmic terms, as archetype of what the quarks and molecules, from the beginning were predestined to become — one resurrected body in and through the path he opened up." When this liturgy works in us, the book tells us, we glimpse light in the darkness, "Christ's transforming vision of earth and cosmos." And as Toolan adds, it is a work that cannot be performed solo; "It requires a congregation, do-good institutions, nations, a global network."

At once spirited and sensible, *At Home in the Cosmos* goes far to renew in us the voice of Christ, that "star carbon and earth stuff" finding purpose, and, in the resurrection, its glory. That's the vision of our faith, "without which," Toolan closes, "the universe is doomed to futility."

Schwartz, of West Irondequoit, writes reviews and poetry for literary journals.

## Summer video releases contribute scant quality selections

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available in VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating. All reviews indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

### 'Down to Earth'

Stale remake has aspiring comedian (Chris Rock) die prematurely, followed by inept angel (Eugene Levy) placing him in the body of an elderly millionaire who's just been bumped off by his wife and her lover. The romantic comedy is a poor rewrite that uses the race issue for cheap laughs. Some sexual references and fleeting profanity with recurring crass language. The USC-

CB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (Paramount)

### 'Head Over Heels'

Frivolous romantic comedy in which art restorer (Monica Potter), living with four supermodels in New York City, falls for the seemingly perfect guy (Freddie Prinze Jr.), until she thinks she sees him commit murder. Film has a few entertaining moments despite conventional comedy-of-errors plot. Fleeting violence, a few sexual encounters, some crude humor and brief crass language. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (Universal)

### 'Recess: School's Out'

Innocuous animated movie about six el-

ementary school youngsters who foil the plans of a bitter former principal (voice of James Woods) to wipe out summer vacation. Based on the cartoon TV show, film feels like an extended series episode with flat animation and a flimsy narrative. The USCCB classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences. (Buena Vista)

### 'Saving Silverman'

Mindless comedy about two twentysomething friends (Jack Black and Steve Zahn) who concoct a plan to save their best friend (Jason Biggs) from marrying the wrong woman (Amanda Peet) by kidnapping her and reuniting him with his long-lost love. Familiar story is told in monotonous fashion with lagging pace and an occasional chuckle. Comically intended violence, a few sexual situations and references, fleeting profanity and some crude expressions. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13

— parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13. (Columbia Tristar Home Video)

### 'Snatch'

Savage crime caper in which two low-level boxing promoters and their bare-knuckle gypsy fighter (Brad Pitt) unintentionally become embroiled in the theft of an 86-carat diamond by a gambling addict (Benicio Del Toro). Writer-director Guy Ritchie pulls together seemingly unrelated plot lines with kinetic editing and colorful characters, but the escalating brutality and benign attitude towards wrongdoing are repulsive. Much gratuitous violence, brief nudity, constant rough language. The USCCB classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted. (Sony Pictures Entertainment)

Pare is director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting.

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