Increasingly, it seems, more shelf space is given in bookshops to popular science than to religion, and certainly to Christianity in particular. As Franciscans rooted in an incarnational theology, we would applaud this active interest in seeking to understand the origins of our universe and human life in particular. I would hope however, alongside all people of faith, we would actively resist voices that seek to remove God completely from the picture. To this end, Michael Meacher MP has written a timely and profoundly important book.

Michael Meacher notes in his introduction that he writes from the point of view of a sceptical enquirer, seeking to explore some of the fundamental questions that surround our human existence, our origins and our ultimate destination as a species. He approaches these questions through exploring a wealth of scientific discovery and theory, alongside examining the development of human philosophical and spiritual enquiry. He challenges the view held by some popular scientists that the universe is a collision of what he calls "pitiless, directionless chance", by suggesting that the evidence shows instead something altogether more purposeful.

At a time of ecological crises, Michael Meacher draws much needed attention to the place of humankind in the awe inspiring cosmological scale. It is a startling thought that out of billions of years of the universe's life, humanity has occupied just 40,000 years, and yet the cosmological environment is intricately suited to our existence. This book challenges the constant desire of humankind to exercise the politics of greed, conquest and self-interest, and urges us to engage our philosophical and spiritual insights as a way of perceiving more clearly the deeply interconnected relationship we have with the cosmos.

As Christians, and Franciscans in particular, this is a tremendously useful book for informing our dialogue with all those we meet who seek to understand the environmental and cosmological context of humankind. The closing chapter particularly would provide very good background reading for moving such people further in the direction of meeting the person of Jesus. To make such an introduction is not Michael Meacher's specific task, but in these pages he has certainly provided beneficial tools for those of us whose task it is.

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