

Judgment Day The Struggle for Life on Earth, Paul Collins, Orbis books, New York, 2011, pp.xii + 292.

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The apocalyptic tone of the title is compounded on the frontispiece by a quotation from the Book of Revelation: 'God's anger has come, and the day for judging.... and destroying those who destroy the earth.' Paul Collins has a noticeable track record in challenging traditional views. He resigned from being a Catholic priest after 33 years over a dispute with the Vatican regarding his book on *Papal Power*.

He writes '... the climate change process has become a symbol for the clash between modern culture, with its individualism, consumerism and capitalist economics, and the natural process of the planet. In the end the two are not compatible...' (p8). 'This book grew out of my conviction that environmentalism is the most significant human, moral and theological problem confronting the contemporary world, and that if we don't face up to the issues embedded in the ecological crisis we will have no future as sane, ethical and spiritual beings' (p13). Collins argues that we shall deserve to be cursed by future generations (our grandchildren) if we do not tackle both global warming and over-population. Chapters 2 and 3 are stuffed with data on these two urgent concerns. It's a moral problem and countries from different parts of the world have diametrically opposed views. 'It's no wonder politicians in democratic countries avoid such questions like the plague (p103).' Popularly held religious views developed over centuries have contributed greatly to anthropocentrism, the greatest sin. Now almost all of us who live in developed countries are environmental thugs.

In the longest chapter, on *the Bible*, he discusses the history of interpretation of verses about man having dominion over the earth, showing tremendous skill in handling large themes and weighing them in the light of the four Cardinal Virtues. With global warming and the BP oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in mind we need many prophetic Ezekiels in our own era. This is a book, he writes, about hope. We need to save the world by rediscovering the sacred in nature. A brief mention of a poem by St John of the Cross indicates that mystical religion may come in useful: it's a pity that Collins didn't draw upon, e.g., Thomas Traherne, William Wordsworth, William Blake and R S Thomas to reinforce his presentiment.

Dr Collins cries out for a poetizing of individual and national vision and for fresh theological thinking relevant to today's issues. Without awareness, the first world has allowed economic wealth to reign as sole arbiter for a nation's welfare. To continue tied to the arguments of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas and their formulations will only reinforce the disastrously unhealthy status quo. The author has a great chapter on 'geologians' such as Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, Sean McDonagh, Hartshorne, Cobb, Birch and others, indicating that humankind is autistic and blindly committing biocide and geocide. We live in a symbolic and sacramental universe wherein biblical literalism is to be avoided like the apocalyptic plague which American literalists promote with atrophied imagination. We need to reinvent how we present Christianity. Fr Adrian Smith worked doggedly at this before his recent death.

Jurgen Moltmann and Heidegger (who fondly quotes Meister Eckhart) are invoked. Panentheism is applauded. I am less convinced about his false dichotomy between body and soul. Robert Crookall would strongly indicate a different understanding. Collins' thesis, which is presented with such rigour and detail that it is hard to disagree with his passionate urgency, would be helped by Geoffrey Lampe's Bampton lectures *God as Spirit* and Alan Watts' *Behold the Spirit: a Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion*. Does humankind need to heed this cry? Absolutely, but light bedtime reading it is not.