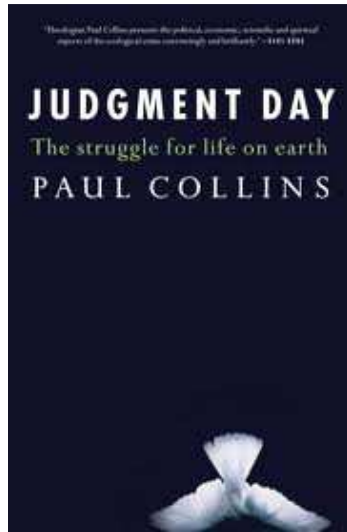


BOOK REVIEW

Collins, Paul. *Judgment Day: The Struggle for Life on Earth*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010.



For Catholic theologian Paul Collins, "climate change" is a shorthand reference to a whole complex of problems arising from humanity's belief, evident across cultures and through time, that the world exists purely for us.

In the opening pages of *Judgment Day* he promises that those of us born after World War II "will be among the most despised and cursed generations in the whole history of humankind". And if that rhetoric isn't strong enough to make his point, Collins goes on to call for the CEOs of fossil energy companies to be tried for high crimes against humanity and nature. They are, he writes, "grossly selfish and fundamentally evil people".

As rhetoric, it is inflammatory in a way not seen in mainstream discourse for many years. However, Collins is not a bomb thrower. His intent is undeniably revolutionary, for he identifies an old, even ancient order that must be overthrown, but the weapons he brings to the struggle are purely intellectual.

Collins impresses, perhaps because his arguments, having exploded from a standing start with accusations of evil and high treason, quickly settle down into a cooler treatise on the morality of human development, and specifically on the moral theology of the ruin we lay on the world in pursuit of that development.

In the final section entitled "Christ ... and some tentative conclusions" Collins shares his belief that "Christian faith without Christ is a meaningless and empty system, that, as Martin Luther said, *crux probat omnia* – the cross of Jesus is the test of everything." Nevertheless, he writes "the sense of presence and transcendence that I find in the natural world of wilderness and sea, among the wild animals, and in the beauty of the stars and the vast history of the cosmos is now far more influential on me than the traditional forms of theological and spiritual discourse."

Clearly, as a Christian, Collins had a difficult task, for he was required from the very first to engage with the responsibility of his own beliefs, and of the institution in which they are manifest, for the terrible sins that have been done in their name. Perhaps because of this rod laid on his back, the book ends up rigorous and impressive.