

‘The Earth’s Future: Narrative, Gospel, Mission.

A Theological Projection through the Canon of the Christian Scriptures.’

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ABSTRACT

Christian mission is shaped by many things not least of which are perceptions of the created order and eschatology. The nature of the transition from earth to new earth has profound consequences in that it determines understanding of how the creation fits within the purposes of God. Some argue for annihilation or massive dissolution of the created order at the Parousia thereby devaluing all perceived to be doomed. This earth-centred theological question of transition, and its implications for holistic mission, has not been adequately researched in its own right. A comprehensive examination of the whole Canon is required: one which brings together all the relevant texts into a coherent theology of the earth that clarifies the degree to which the earthiness of the earth is integral to the new creation. This original research develops such a theology in a narrative framework that projects forward to the presence of this earth in the new creation. Throughout the Biblical narrative, the research identifies a triangular relationship from creation to new creation in which God, humankind and non-human creation are all inextricably linked, and in which the earth’s future is consistently presented as integral to the ultimate purposes of God. The earth was subjected to corruption due to the sin of humankind but as humankind finds liberation in Christ so will the creation find freedom from all consequences of the sin of humankind. The research establishes a trajectory throughout the narrative that consistently projects forward towards a full restoration of these relationships and that therefore the new heaven and new earth will be the result of a resurrection-like transformation and reconciliation of the present created order. The Biblical texts normally utilized to justify annihilation or dissolution are examined carefully and found to be wanting for such claims. The *missio Dei* includes the renewal of the whole earth as the Kingdom of God reaches fulfilment in the Parousia even as the Gospel calls persons and nations to faith. Consequently, the mission of God’s people needs to be likewise holistic and conducted in such ways as to reveal and anticipate the future hope of the uniting of heaven and earth in the already begun new creation.