

## 2016 Graduate Research Symposium Proposal

**Title** - Kissing the Earth: Incarnational Distinctives for a Christian Poetics

**Program of Study** – M.A. in English

**Presentation Type:** Paper Presentation on PowerPoint (residential)

**Mentor(s) and Mentor Email** - Dr. Karen Swallow Prior (kprior@liberty.edu)

**Student name(s) and email(s)** – Joshua Novalis (jnovalis@liberty.edu)

**Category** – Textual

**Abstract:** The Incarnation, the earth-altering moment when God became man, though often seen and accepted in evangelical circles as a factual truth, is rarely seen as an applicable truth. Though many may accept the Incarnation as historical, few understand that it is a doctrine that fundamentally shapes one's perception of and relationship with reality. Additionally, while the Incarnation necessarily informs a Christian understanding of the world, by implication, it also informs a Christian understanding of what constitutes good literature. Therefore, using Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* as a creative framework, this paper seeks to compose a sound Christian poetics by using the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, as a central characteristic of good literature, the flesh made word. Through this framework, a Christian reader can see that good literature first recognizes the inextricable relationship between form and content, marrying the two aspects in a God-man-like union, where both meaningfully shape each other, a principle that can be seen at play in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and "Ash Wednesday." This harmony is made through the author's use of artistic technique, using his medium in as technically excellent a way as possible to depict this unity of form and content, as well as a skilled sense of aestheticism. Good literature also authentically seeks and promotes the spiritual good of its audience, recognizing that all culture shapes its objects, the people that inhabit it, as seen in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." Finally, just as the word became flesh within a harsh and unwelcoming world, good literature also penetrates concrete reality as it is, seeking to display

that reality as faithfully as possible, all while pointing to the hope of a reality that ought to be, a principle at play in Eliot's "Journey of the Magi." In these three "incarnational distinctives," the Christian reader can approach literature and evaluate it in terms of its ultimate source, the God-Man.

**Christian Worldview Integration:** If God is the Creator of all, then it follows that all truth is God's truth, and all beauty is God's beauty. Additionally, since any work of creation reflects the nature of its creator, one must also conclude that the nature of God manifests itself in the philosophical, artistic, and aesthetic principles that govern his creation. Therefore, the best framework any literary critic could use to approach the task of evaluating good literature, be it Christian in origin or otherwise, is the nature of God Himself. Many Christian literary critics have employed this approach, using God's roles as Creator and Redeemer to inform a study of literature. However, the concept of using the Incarnation as a framework into the study of Christian poetics has been the subject of considerably less scholarship, which is unfortunate, as the doctrine is central to an understanding of both Jesus Christ and the nature of artistry. Therefore, this paper should be of interest in the areas of both literary criticism and theology, as it suggests an inextricable connection between the two. Additionally, this incarnational framework's relevance is not limited to Christian artistry alone; the harmony of form and content, the promotion of an audience's spiritual good, and the reconciliation of reality as it is and as it ought to be are principles that are present in all good literature—not simply those written by Christian authors. Therefore, the value of an incarnational literary framework extends to all culture, providing a relevant method of literary evaluation to all purveyors of the written word.

In 250-500 words, describe how your Christian worldview has informed your research design and communication of your results. How is your research impactful within the culture at large?