THEO 100: "Meet a Theologian" Assignment (60 Points)

I. Overview

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore some aspect of Christian theology by "meeting" (getting to know) a Christian theologian of your choice. Instead of considering theology in the abstract, you will explore theology in a specific context by considering the perspective, experience, interests, and insights of one specific Christian thinker. By presenting your research to the class, you’ll make a valuable contribution to the content of our introductory course by helping to illustrate the broad range of thinkers and topics belonging to the Christian theological tradition. As part of the final exam, you’ll reflect in writing on how these presentations have enhanced your learning experience in THEO 100.

This assignment also gives you the opportunity to develop a broadly transferable set of skills in critical reading, critical thinking, academic writing, and information literacy. Successfully completing this assignment requires you to:

- Distinguish reliable from unreliable sources and primary from secondary sources.
- Locate a set of reliable primary and secondary sources relevant to a specific topic, using the full range of tools and resources available through the Loyola libraries.
- Summarize a set of reliable primary and secondary sources, identifying each source’s value and relevance for understanding a specific topic.

II. Assignment

The assignment consists of two distinct elements, described under the headings below: RESEARCH and PRESENTATION.

A. RESEARCH

i. Choose your Theologian

First, choose a theologian of interest to you. Theologians can belong to any historical period (from the Apostolic to the Modern Period) or any affiliation within Christianity (Roman Catholic, Protestant, etc.). In addition, eligible theologians can specialize in any aspect of Christian theology, from doctrines (e.g., Trinity), to methods (e.g., metaphorical theology), to perspectives (e.g., feminist theology), to issues of cultural engagement (e.g., science and theology). The one requirement for eligibility involves bibliography: any Christian thinker with at least one published primary source, whose work has generated at least three secondary sources for students to consider.

Note on choosing a theologian: If you need help or suggestions for choosing a theologian, please speak with me (H. Svebakken) as soon as possible. Also consider topics you're interested in, since I can usually suggest a theologian associated with a topic of interest. Also consider the list of theologians chosen by students in past semesters (on Sakai in the "Meet a Theologian" folder), along with the "Details of Theologians Cited" from McGrath’s text (pp. 223-231).

ii. Research your Theologian

Next, you must undertake quality research on the theologian of your choice, focusing on one (1) primary source and three (3) secondary sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES take top priority, since they contain the actual words, ideas, arguments, etc. of your selected theologian. The selected primary source—whether a text from the Christian New Testament (for biblical authors, such as Paul), an ancient or modern essay or treatise, an ecclesiastical document (e.g., papal encyclical), journal article, sermon, speech, book, etc.—should highlight something distinctive about this theologian’s work within Christian theology broadly, something for which your theologian is known. You should focus on a manageable unit of primary text for this assignment: either a shorter type of primary text (e.g., one sermon) or a shorter unit within a larger primary text (e.g., one chapter of a book). You must include one excerpt of your selected primary text in your presentation to illustrate the distinctive contribution of your theologian.

SECONDARY SOURCES are written not by your theologian but about your theologian, your theologian's work, or your theologian's historical and cultural context. Consider as secondary sources anything that will help you understand your project better, which will in turn help your classmates understand your presentation better. A secondary source might, for example, provide
basic biographical information about your theologian, or clarify some aspect of the historical and cultural setting of your theologian, or help you understand the meaning and significance of your chosen primary text (etc.).

**Note on the use of internet resources:** For academic research at the university level, peer-reviewed print resources represent the "gold standard," because of their reliable quality. For this reason, internet resources should only be used when they provide information **otherwise unavailable** from a print resource (which in rare cases they may). Please do not include internet resources in your bibliography **without prior approval**. Unapproved internet sources will not receive full credit. **Please Note:** Loyola libraries make many high-quality print resources available in an online format (e.g., E-book or PDF journal article). These acceptable "online" sources differ fundamentally from (generally) unacceptable "Internet" sources, which usually do not derive from an academic peer-reviewed print resource. **Tip:** For basic information about your theologian, try the "Britannica Academic" database from Loyola Libraries instead of internet sites (Wikipedia etc.).

**iii. Create an Annotated Bibliography**

The research phase of your project culminates in the creation of an annotated bibliography of your primary and secondary sources. For each of your four sources (one primary source—appearing **first** in your bibliography—followed by three secondary sources) include the following: a correct, complete bibliographical entry followed by a two-part annotation, **first summarizing** and then **commenting** on your source in two distinct paragraphs of 100-200 words each. In other words, the entire annotation for each source (summary and commentary combined) should be **200-400 words, with a word count included**.

**Summary:** Your summary must provide a clear and **objective** statement of the essential point(s) of the source including a brief overview of its content. A good summary does not just simplify and restate each element of the text in sequence. A good summary first requires a clear understanding of the text, which in turn dictates the necessary elements of an effective summary.

**Commentary:** Your commentary should provide a **subjective** statement explaining why this source appears on your annotated bibliography. Consider questions like these: How did this source help you to understand your theologian and your theologian's distinctive contribution, or the historical and cultural context of your theologian? What key insight(s) did it provide? In what other general way(s) did you find the source helpful? What important questions did it raise or answer? What new research ideas or plans did it generate? What did this source contribute that other sources did not?

**B. Presentation**

When you've completed your research, you must prepare a **slide presentation (5-8 minutes)** "introducing" your theologian to the class. Use your slides to guide, organize, summarize, and highlight important parts of your oral presentation, including these four essential elements:

1. **Brief Biography:** Basic facts, plus overview of career and affiliation within Christianity (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, etc.).
2. **Historical and Cultural Context:** Relevant issues shaping this theologian's perspective and distinctive contribution.
3. **Distinctive Contribution:** One specific example (using a brief excerpt from your primary source) illustrating this theologian's **distinctive contribution** to Christian theology. "Distinctive contribution" may involve one particularly influential text, a particular perspective or idea, a particular impact on the Christian theological tradition, etc.
4. **Bibliography:** One slide at the end, listing the sources used to prepare the presentation, matching the entries on the annotated bibliography.

You may also want to include a brief statement at the beginning of your presentation of **why** you chose this theologian. Also, since the reflection essay for the final exam will incorporate material from these presentations, you may wish to include within your presentation some commentary on how your theologian's work contributes in some way to our introductory course in Christian theology and/or provide a bullet point summary of your main points at the end.

**III. Grading**

Grades will be based on (1) a hard copy of the **annotated bibliography** (40 Points), turned in on the day of your in-class presentation, and (2) a **computer file** of the slide presentation (20 Points), submitted to the instructor no later than the day of your in-class presentation. In general, you can expect the grading for your project to be completed one week after your presentation, when you will receive your annotated bibliography back with a grading sheet for the project.