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Library Research Prize Application: Description of Research Methods

When I initially began the research for my thesis, the sheer number of resources and library materials overwhelmed me. Although I had developed a general topic to research in Trinitarian theology, I quickly realized that I would need to narrow my topic, keep focused in my research, and efficiently identify relevant sources for my project. My research mentor and thesis director, as well as the services available through the Weinberg Memorial Library, helped to keep my project on track and to make efficient use of the myriad of available resources.

My research began in the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss-born theologian of the Roman Catholic Church, whose work I studied in an honors tutorial during my junior year. Having read the fifth volume of his *Theological Dramatic Theory* during my tutorial, I sought out the remainder of his works in the library as background material for my thesis research. Immediately I realized that an in-depth study of his entire corpus of work would prove impossible for an undergraduate thesis, and so I quickly limited my topic to an examination of personhood in the light of his Trinitarian theology. The library provided the resources to read and to research his writings in this area – writings which span several multi-volume collections, books, and journal articles. I relied upon the library collections for this research, since the volume of von Balthasar's collected works far surpasses my means to acquire them personally.

Through the initial research process I inadvertently came across similar works I had studied by Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), one of von Balthasar's contemporaries and major dialogue partners. The continual references to Ratzinger throughout von Balthasar's work helped me to further narrow my topic to a study of the "event" of personhood in the thought of von Balthasar and Ratzinger, thus enabling me to engage in more precise, guided, and detailed research. I am indebted to the library for the works of von Balthasar and a substantial portion of Ratzinger's

writings in English translation, access to which only a University library such as the Weinberg Memorial Library could provide.

Having spent the majority of the fall semester reading through the works of Ratzinger and von Balthasar, I also sought out commentaries, analyses, and relevant journal articles through the print reserves and electronic databases the library offers. The process also led me to the online publications of the major documents of Vatican II and the magisterial documents of the Catholic Church. As my list of sources and available material grew exponentially, I learned how to effectively search for the works of the thinkers in question, relevant Church documents, and the documents, articles, commentaries, and secondary sources that pertained most to my research project. As the number of available resources seemed to grow, I likewise learned to keep my project focused, narrowing on my topic and finely honing my research strategy.

Over intersession I reviewed a list of all the sources and thinkers I had collected and began to formally outline my thesis project. The initial research throughout the fall helped me to develop more precisely my central arguments and thesis claims and, with a running list of every book, collection, article, and source I had reviewed as background material, I could construct a provisional outline of the project. This outline changed over the remainder of the project, though it provided the framework from which to begin writing and served as the foundation for the thesis project. Keeping a record of all the background research, along with brief annotations denoting their potential relevance to my project, allowed me to make this outline with relative ease and efficiency.

With the conclusion of the writing and revisions of my project, I can identity and appreciate the numerous skills and research strategies I have developed through this process. I learned how to keep focused on my research and to narrow my topic, how to effectively sift through the great volume of library resources, and how to incorporate the many materials and resources available for my project.