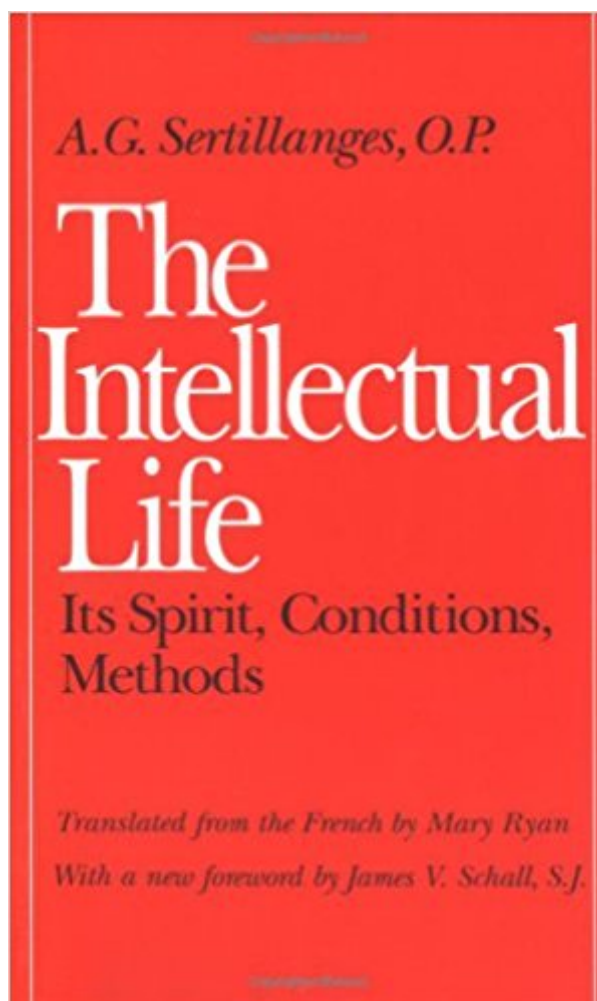




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The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods



Synopsis

"Fr. Sertillanges's teachings are as timeless as any truths which describe the genuine nature of things. . . . This book is highly recommended not only for intellectuals, but also for students and those discerning their vocation in life." *New Oxford Review* "[This] is above all a practical book. It discusses with a wealth of illustration and insight such subjects as the organization of the intellectual worker's time, materials, and his life; the integration of knowledge and the relation of one's specialty to general knowledge; the choice and use of reading; the discipline of memory; the taking of notes, their classification and use; and the preparation and organization of the final production." *The Sign*

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"I would put *The Intellectual Life* on the desk of every serious student, and most of the unserious ones. . . . We should read through this classic book, make its teachings ours after our own manner. Adapting what Sertillanges suggests to our own computer, to our own books, to our own hours of the day or night should be no problem. The book will have an abiding, concrete effect on our lives. If

we follow its outlines, it will make us alive in that inner, curious, delightful way that is connoted by the words in the book's magnificent title--The Intellectual Life. I see no reason for settling for anything less. The great French Dominican still teaches us how to learn, but only if we are free enough to let him teach us."-from the Foreword by James V. Schall, S.J.

It is always shocking to me to stumble across "source material" that I was never exposed to throughout my school years. This book is in that category. I purchased this book after reading about it in Cal Newport's book "Deep Work." I very much liked this book. It's a fascinating set of recommendations for those who want to focus on a particular (intellectual) task, successfully. While Newport's book is very practical, this book almost borders on the inspirational. There were definitely times when I found myself pumped up by the author's great writing style and his advice. Sertillanges was a monk, so there is a liberal dose of Christianity throughout. Take it as you will. To me (a non-Christian), I found his evangelical advice as compelling and revealing as his practical advice.

xviii - "Do you want to do intellectual work? Begin by creating within you a zone of silence, a habit of recollection, a will to renunciation and detachment which puts you entirely at the disposal of the work; acquire that state of soul unburdened by desire and self-will which is the state of grace of the intellectual worker.

- Self-importance means you put yourself before the work. You have to surrender to the work.- Sertillanges says 2 hours per day of uninterrupted, deep study will do.- LOVE is the guide. Literally - do what you love. Surrender to what you love and let it carry you. "Float downstream" in life.- Find your GROUP!!! They can be anywhere - but it should be people who help drive you in your goal, that share a common goal, and have several people who are better than you at it!- The phases of work are - Conceiving, planning, carrying out, and perfecting. Reduce the detours, bottlenecks, and delays!!

Page 132 - "Activity which is too intentional makes our intelligence less sure and less receptive; if we strive too anxiously, we remain shut up inside ourselves, whereas to understand is to become other, and in happy receptivity to let truth pour in upon us." Read only what you want to retain, retain only what will be useful, and manage your brain by not cramming it absurdly.

Being a McLuhan-fan, I was astounded by what seemed like direct quotes from McLuhan (of course, it would have been the other way around) in this book. Sertillanges says that "God is a radiant center from which all points on the circumference of time are at an equal distance.

Did McLuhan see Acoustic space as GOD? Is that why he converted to Catholicism, devout Catholicism? More study will have to be done! At least I have a good plan to do that now... My only qualification of the book is the price. Unfortunately, right now there's no way to

separate comments about the publisher/format and the actual work itself. The work stands on its own. But it is a small paperback book. The price seems too high.

And there are plenty of maxims in this book. I missed not being able to highlight them on my Kindle, but, then again, it's just as well, since I would have highlighted half the book. My favorite may be an unattributed quote "He who stumbles without falling takes a bigger step forward." Sertillanges outlines the nature of and the virtues needed for the intellectual life. He discusses the balance of the physical, mental, and social aspects of the intellectual life. Much of it centers on balancing the depth and breadth of focus: studying and recreation; sitting and walking, reading and looking around; learning and creating, etc. Open to any random page and you are likely to read an inspiring thought in a well-turned phrase. As I read I kept imagining one sentence after another being posted to someone's Facebook status. This is an ennobling manifesto of living a life devoted to thought.

This is one of those books that, had Fr. Sertillanges not written, would need to have been done so by someone else. While all who aspiring to become a Christian intellectual could benefit from this book, it seems especially helpful for the undergraduate and/or seminary student. As the subtitle would suggest, the content of the book ranges from reflections on what it means to be a Christian intellectual, to how this vocation is integrated into a man's life as a whole, and, on the more practical side, how to create an environment for study, as well as the best methods for study itself. As Fr. Schall acknowledges in the introduction, the last portion can be a bit dated, as computers seem to render the cabinets for notecards that Sertillanges recommends obsolete. However, in its totality, the work is still fresh. Perhaps my favorite part of this work is that Sertillanges is conscious of his philosophical presuppositions, and how these impact his opinions on the subject at hand. For instance, he points out that only nurturing our intellectual soul will impoverish us, because "we", in the sense of our true identity, are a composite of form/soul and matter, which includes our animal and social capacities (he recommends exercising and even having others study in silence next to you as some antidotes). As a Catholic priest, and specifically an Aristotelian-Thomist ("the source of knowledge is not books...books are signposts"), he knows where he stands and can be honest about it. Most modern writers of self-help books, for example, are quite oblivious to the reductionist assumptions that usually inform their advice. While someone may be right to a certain extent in saying that the effectiveness of "The Intellectual Life" is limited by its Christian foundation, the same will hold true for the materialist, the existentialist, etc; if he or she says that it would be better presented from a "scientific" or "objective" viewpoint, please run for the hills. Also, despite

translation, the work was surprisingly pleasant to read, with great quotes like, "the communion of saints is the support of the mystical life; the banquet of the sages, perpetuated by our assiduous cult, is the invigoration of our intellectual life". It makes me wonder if Sertillanges had a deep literary background after all! (he recommends to "not poison your head with novels", one of his few pieces of advice that I really would have appreciated a deeper elaboration upon, as I don't see the problem with the novel)

Using the daily routines of Thomas Aquinas, Sertillanges sees to give a list of tips and tools for what those with a pursuit in the humanities (religion, philosophy, intellectualism) and use to achieve a state of balance. It is more than a do this, do this, do this, don't do this. It offers legit examples and though it was written 100 years ago, transcends to the current context.

I read this book while studying in Rome for a semester and it really did change my life. A book to live with for certain. Lots of helpful advice and concrete explanations, while managing not to be dull at all. I would say that Sertillanges is able to easily describe and explain good things you know and are aware of, but yourself can never find the right words to explain to others. As someone who now works in higher ed, I think this probably should be required reading for all college aged people.

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