A.G. Sertillanges, O.P.

The Intellectual Life

Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods

Translated from the French by Mary Ryan

With a new foreword by James V. Schall, S.J.

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Foreword

On the Joys and Travails of Thinking

"A vocation is not fulfilled by vague reading
and a few scattered writings."
— A. D. Sertillanges, Preface to the 1934 Edition.

Many of us in later years wish that, when we were younger, someone would have told us about certain things, often certain books that, as we look back on them, would have greatly helped us in the project of our lives, in particular would have helped us know the truth of things. Some of these books are directed to *what is* true, to reality, to what is, but a certain number are rather directed to the question of "how do I go about knowing?" I have in fact written one myself, *Another Sort of Learning* (Ignatius, 1988). In that book, I mention A. D. Sertillanges' book on "the intellectual life" among those few that will give anyone seriously interested a good start.

But Sertillanges gives more than a good start. He explicitly tells how to start, how to read and write, how to discipline our time, indeed our soul. He also attends to the life of the spirit in which any true intellectual life exists. We have perhaps heard from Aristotle that we are rational animals, that the contemplative life is something to which we should

aspire. Practically no one tells us what this might mean, whether it is something that is available to us on some condition that we do not easily comprehend. But even if we vaguely know that the intellectual life is an exalted one, we have heard rather less about what acquiring this life might entail. No one spells out its terms and conditions. We are also aware that wisdom comes rather later in life than we might at first have suspected. Yet, we suspect that there were ways that could have helped us had we only known them.

The great French Dominican, A. D. Sertillanges (1863–1948), wrote a book in 1921 which he called *La Vie Intellectuelle.* The book was an immediate success, went through many editions, in many languages. Recently, I recommended this book to a young military officer in graduate school at Indiana University, a man destined to teach at West Point. He told me that he ordered it from The Catholic University of America Press but that, at the time, it was out of print. As I had occasion to write to the Marketing Director at CUA Press, I mentioned that this book needed to be kept in print. And much to her credit, she told me that indeed CUA Press was considering another printing.

Too I remarked that the book probably needed a new introduction. I was worried that computer users, a group that now probably includes most of us, might be put off when they read Sertillanges' advice to take notes on file cards! Even though I recognize that, without my help, any computer user will easily translate Sertillanges' advice into com-

puter practicality, I was concerned lest people think this timeless book was out of date because it was written before the computer was a normal tool. In any case, lo, the good Director at CUA Press wondered if I would like to write one. Indeed I would! In a sense, this brief foreword is simply my statement about why this wonderful, useful book should always be kept in print and why it should always be sought out by young undergraduate and graduate students, by elderly folks, and by everyone in-between. Every time I have used this book in a class, often when I teach a St. Thomas course, I have had undergraduate students tell me later that it was a book they remembered because it taught them much about how to continue their intellectual curiosity in a practical, effective manner not merely in college but throughout their lives.

At first sight, as I intimated, this is a quaint book. At second sight it is an utterly demanding book. Sertillanges painstakingly tells us how to take notes, how to begin to write and to publish, how to organize our notes and behind them our thoughts. Thus, I use the word quaint because we no longer use, as Sertillanges did, pens and early typewriters, but sophisticated computers and printing processes that would have amazed him. But keep in mind that Thomas Aquinas, about whom Sertillanges wrote so well and from whose inspiration this book derives, had perhaps only twenty-five years of productive activity in the thirteenth century. He had none of the mechanisms that even Sertillanges had in the 20s of the XXth century. Yet, Aquinas produced an

amount of brilliant and profound matter that is simply astounding.

How did Aquinas ever do it? It is highly doubtful that he would have written more or better if he had the latest computer at his disposal. In fact, in some sense it may have been a hindrance. For St. Thomas developed a great memory and an uncanny capacity to have at his fingertips all the knowledge of the great writers before him, including Scripture. This wisdom took books and reading, of course, even for St. Thomas, but he learned how to do these things. What Sertillanges teaches us is how, in our own way, to imitate the lessons that we can find in the great medieval Dominican about how to lead a proper intellectual life, one suffused with honesty and prayer, with diligent work and, in the end, with the delight of knowing.

In reading Sertillanges' book, we cannot help feeling that he is letting us in on some of the secrets of what went into Aquinas' vast productivity and insight. There are just so many hours in a day, in a week or a month. Sertillanges does not ask us all to give up our daily lives and devote ourselves full time to the intellectual life in the sense that a St. Thomas did. Rather, in his practical way, Sertillanges teaches us how to organize our lives so that we can acquire a solid beginning, hopefully when we are young, and spend the rest of our days building on this solid foundation. In brief, Sertillanges teaches us about habits, about discipline, about, yes, productivity and truth. He thinks that we can lead a true intellectual life if we manage to keep one or two hours a

day for serious pursuit of higher things. He is not rigid or impractical here. Moreover, when stated in terms of hours or time, we tend to miss what Sertillanges is driving at.

Any sort of learning, in the beginning, will have drudgery connected with it. We can simply call it a kind of work. We need to come to a point where we begin to delight in what we are knowing, where we cannot wait to get back to our considerations or writings or thoughts on a given topic. Anything *that* is is fascinating. Chesterton, whose own intellectual life seems as vibrant as anyone's in our time, once remarked that there are no such things as uninteresting subjects, only uninterested people. A large part of this "uninterestedness" is precisely because we have never learned how or why to see what is there.

Sertillanges teaches us to examine our lives. He does not neglect to mention that moral faults, both serious ones and light ones, can in fact hinder us from having the freedom from ourselves that enables us to see what is not ourselves, to see *what is*. "Do you want to have an intellectual life?" Sertillanges asks in his own Introduction to his 1934 edition. "Begin by creating within you a zone of silence." We live in a world surrounded by noise, by a kind of unrest that fills our days and nights. We have so many things to distract us, even if sometimes we think they might educate us. Sertillanges is sure we have the time. But he is also sure that we do not notice that we have time because our lives appear to be busy and full. We find the time first

by becoming interested, by longing to know. Sertillanges demands an examination of conscience both about our sins and about our use of our time.

An intellectual life, a contemplative life is itself filled with activity, but activity that is purposeful, that wants to know, and to know the truth. What we often call "intellectuals" today are probably not exactly what Sertillanges had in mind when he talked about "the intellectual life." Intellectuals as a class, as Paul Johnson wrote in his book *The Intellectuals,* may well be evolving theories and explanations precisely as a product of their own internal moral disorders. We should never forget that an intellectual life can be a dangerous life. The greatest of vices stem not from the flesh but from the spirit, as Augustine said. The brightest of the angels was the fallen angel. These sober considerations explain the reasons why I like this little book of Sertillanges. He does not hesitate to warn us of the intimate relation between our knowing the truth and our not ordering our own souls to the good. The intellectual life can be and often is a perilous life. But this is no reason to deny its glory. And Sertillanges is very careful to direct us to those things that we pursue because they explain what we are, explain the world and God to us.

When we pick up this book, we will be surprised, no doubt, by its detailed practicality. In one sense, this is a handbook, a step by step direction of what to do first, what next. We are tempted to thinking that the intellectual life is some gigantic insight that comes to us one fine morning while we are shaving

or making breakfast. Sertillanges does not deny that some insight can come this way. But the normal course of things will require rather an habitual concern to pursue the truth, to know, to be curious about reality.

This book, moreover, is not primarily for academic professionals, though it will harm not a single one of them. Nor would I call it for everyone—butcher, baker, candlestick maker. But it is for very many and not always just for those who have higher degrees in physics or metaphysics. This is a book that allows us to be free and independent, to know, and to know why we need not be dependent on the media or ideology that often dominate our scene. It is a book that does not exactly "teach" us to know, but it teaches us how to go about knowing and how to continue knowing. The book is designed to keep us inwardly alive precisely by teaching us how to know and grow in knowing, steadily, patiently, yes, critically.

I would put *The Intellectual Life* on the desk of every serious student, and most of the unserious ones. Indeed, Plato said that our very lives are "unserious" in comparison to that of God. Something of that relaxed leisure, of that sense of freedom that comes from knowing and wanting to know is instilled in our souls by this book. Its very possession on our desk or shelves is a constant prod, a visible reminder to us that the intellectual life is not something alien, not something that we have no chance, in our own way, to learn about.

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 this 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.

— James V. Schall, S. J.
Georgetown University, Ash Wednesday, 1998

Translator's Note

The book now translated has had an immense circulation in French; and understandably so, for it has much to give to all intellectual workers. Everyone whose business it is to use his mind (or *her* mind, for *his* can be common gender) in any kind of work—philosophy, theology, art, science, literature; education, which touches on all these things; or even only in exercising the inevitable influence of ideas on surroundings—will find rich suggestion in it. Perhaps it will be the central conception that our every effort to reach reality is an approach to the great primal Truth; perhaps the stimulating assurance that the individual vocation is always unique and necessary, for "God does not repeat Himself," or the encouraging doctrine of work "in joy"; perhaps detailed help towards living by these principles.

The Italian witticism *translator, traitor* is a warning. Indeed the translator should be a good craftsman, like the artist-craftsman praised in Ecclesiasticus, who "laboreth night and day . . . and by his continual diligence varieth the figure: he shall give his mind to the resemblance of the picture, and by his watching shall finish the work." Accordingly *quod potui feci.* No pains have been spared to re-

produce the author's thought exactly, especially when some turn of the French phrase, the abstract precision of the words, some unexpected comparison, made it necessary to depart from his idiom. The rendering has gained much from the careful criticism and suggestions of Rev. Fr. Anselm Moynihan, O.P., S.T.L., which are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

A very few notes have been added to elucidate some technical words or allusions not immediately obvious to other than French readers.

M.R.

September 25th, 1946.

Preface

The little work now republished has been reprinted many times. It dates from 1920. I had not re-read it, and I wondered whether, looking at the book with a fresh eye and fifteen added years' experience, I should recognize my thought. I find it again, whole and entire, except for shades of difference which I shall not fail to bear in mind in the revision that I am now undertaking. The reason is that in reality these pages have no date. They came from what is deepest in me. I had had them in mind for a quarter of a century when they saw the light of day. I wrote them as one expresses one's essential convictions and pours out one's heart.

What makes me trust that they have struck home is assuredly their wide diffusion; but still more the testimony of innumerable letters: some thanking me for the technical help I gave to intellectual workers; others for the ardor that they said had been aroused in young or older hearts; the greater number for what seemed to the reader a revelation precious above all—that of the spiritual climate proper to the awakening of the thinker, to his evolution, his progress, his inspiration, his work.

That is indeed the principal thing. The mind governs everything; it begins, accomplishes, per-

severes, finally achieves. Just as it presides over every increase of knowledge, every creation, it directs the more hidden and more searching effect that the worker produces on himself throughout his career.

I think that I shall not weary the reader if I insist once again on this which is the whole of the vocation of the thinker or speaker, of the writer and the apostle. It really is the preliminary question; it is further the fundamental question and consequently the secret of success.

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. Without that you will do nothing, at least nothing worth while.

The intellectual is not self-begotten; he is the son of the Idea, of the Truth, of the creative Word, the Life-giver immanent in His creation. When the thinker thinks rightly, he follows God step by step; he does not follow his own vain fancy. When he gropes and struggles in the effort of research, he is Jacob wrestling with the angel and "strong against God."

Is it not natural, given these conditions, that the man of vocation should put away and deliberately forget his everyday man; that he should throw off everything of him: his frivolity, his irresponsibility, his shrinking from work, his material ambitions,

his proud or sensual desires, the instability of his will or the disordered impatience of his longings, his over-readiness to please and his antipathies, his acrimonious moods and his acceptance of current standards, the whole complicated entanglement of impediments which block the road to the True and hinder its victorious conquest?

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, says Holy Writ; this filial fear is, at bottom, fear of self. In the intellectual sphere, we might call it attention freed from every inferior preoccupation, and fidelity perpetually alive to the danger of falling away. An intellectual must always be ready to think, that is, to take in a part of the truth conveyed to him by the universe, and prepared for him, at such and such a turning-point, by Providence. The Spirit passes and returns not. Happy the man who holds himself ready not to miss, nay rather to bring about and to utilize, the miraculous encounter!

Every intellectual work begins by a moment of ecstasy; [1] only in the second place does the talent of arrangement, the technique of transitions, connection of ideas, construction, come into play. Now, what is this ecstasy but a flight upwards, away from self, a forgetting to live our own poor life, in order that the object of our delight may live in our thought and in our heart?

Memory itself has a share in this gift. There is an inferior memory, that of the parrot and not of the

[1] Because a man is lifted out of and above himself: Greek *ek-stasis*, out of one's ordinary foothold. (Tr. Note.) See pages 31, 133, 255.

inventor; this memory is an obstruction, closing up the ways of thought in favor of words and fixed formulas. But there is another memory, receptive in every direction, and in a state of perpetual discovery. In its content there is nothing "ready-made"; its gains are seeds of the future; its oracles are promises. Now that kind of memory, too, is ecstatic; it functions in contact with the springs of inspiration; it does not rest complacently in itself; what it contains is still inspiration under the name of remembrance, and the self in which that memory dwells surrenders through it to the inspiring vision of truth quite as much as through research.

What is true of acquisition and pursuit was true of the call at the beginning of our career. After the lingering hesitation of youth, which is so often tormented and perplexed, we had to reach the discovery of ourself, the perception of that secret urge within us, which is directed towards some distant result of which we are not yet clearly conscious. Do you imagine that this is easy? Listening to oneself is a formula that amounts to the same thing as listening to god. It is in the creative Thought that our true being lies, our *self* in its authentic shape. Now this truth of our eternity, which dominates our present and augurs of our future, is revealed to us only in the silence of the soul—that is, in the exclusion of foolish thoughts which lead to a puerile and dissipating indulgence in distraction,[1] in the

[1] *Divertissement.* See note on page 216.

repression of the murmured suggestions that our disordered passions never weary of uttering.

Vocation calls for *response* which, in one effort to surmount self, hears and consents.

It will be the same with the choice of means to success, settling one's way of living, one's society, the organization of one's time, the place to be given to contemplation and to action, to general culture and to one's specialty, to work and to recreation, to necessary concessions and to stern refusals, to the concentration that strengthens the mind and the broader studies that enrich it, to aloofness and to contacts: contacts with men of genius, with one's own group, with nature, or with others in general social life, and so forth. These things also can only be wisely judged of in the moment of ecstasy, when we are close to the eternally true, far from the covetous and passionate self.

And when we have done our part, results and the measure of them will demand the same virtue of acceptance, the same selflessness, the same peace in a Will that is not ours. One achieves what one can, and we need to judge our own capacity so as not on the one hand to underestimate it, or, inversely, not to exceed in the direction of pretentiousness and vain conceit. Whence comes this self-judgment, if not from a steady glance at the impersonally true, and from submission to its verdict, even if it cost us an effort or a secret disappointment?

Great men seem to us men of great boldness; in reality they are more obedient than others. The

sovereign voice speaks to them. It is because they are actuated by an instinct which is a prompting of that sovereign voice that they take, always with courage and sometimes with great humility, the place that posterity will later give them—venturing on acts and risking inventions often out of harmony with their time and place and even incurring much sarcasm from their fellows. They are not afraid because, however isolated they may appear to be, they feel that they are not alone. They have on their side the power that finally settles everything. They have a premonition of their empire to come.

We, who have no doubt to conceive a very different kind of humility, must yet draw upon the same lofty source. Height is the measure of littleness. The man who has not the sense of true greatness is easily exultant or easily depressed, sometimes both together. It is because the ant does not consider the giant beetle that he looks down on the tiny gnat; and it is because the walker does not feel the wind from the heights that he lingers on the mountain slopes. Always conscious of the immensity of the true and of the slenderness of our resources, we shall not undertake anything beyond our power, but we shall go on to the limit of our power. We shall rejoice, then, in what has been given us in our measure.

It is not a question of mere measuring. The real point of the remark lies in this, that weak work or pretentious work is always bad work. A life with too ambitious an aim or one content with too low

a level is a misdirected life. A tree may have indifferent or magnificent branches and flowers; it does not ask for them and cannot command them; its vegetable soul develops under the action of nature in general and of surrounding influences. Our general nature is the eternal Thought; we draw on it with faculties sprung from it, and with the help that it affords us: there must be a correspondence between what we have received from it in the way of gifts—including courage—and what we may expect of it in the way of results.

How much could be said of this fundamental disposition as it affects a career entirely devoted to the life of thought! I have spoken of the opposition and lack of understanding that the great are exposed to; but these things are the lot also of the little; how can they be resisted without single-minded attachment to the truth, and without complete self-forgetfulness? When the world does not like you it takes its revenge on you; if it happens to like you, it takes its revenge still by corrupting you. Your only resource is to work far from the world, as indifferent to its judgments as you are ready to serve it. It is perhaps best if it rejects you and thus obliges you to fall back on yourself, to grow interiorly, to watch yourself, to deepen yourself. These benefits are in the measure in which we rise above self-interest, that is, in which interest centers on the one thing necessary.

Are we perhaps ourselves exposed to the temptation of disparaging, envying, unjustly criticizing others, of disputing with them? We must then re-

member that such inclinations, which disturb and cause dissension, injure eternal truth and are incompatible with devotion to it.

In this connection we must remark that at a certain level such disparagement is more apparent than real, and that it has a certain value in forming current opinion. We are often taken in by the way in which the masters speak of one another. They attack one another unmercifully, but they are fully conscious of one another's value, and they attack often unintentionally.

Yet it remains true that general progress needs peace and co-operation, and that it is greatly hindered by pettiness of mind. In face of others' superiority, there is only one honorable attitude: to be glad of it, and then it becomes our own joy, our own good fortune.

A different sort of good fortune may tempt us: that of external success, though, to tell the truth, that is nowadays very rare in the case of a true intellectual. The public as a whole is vulgar and likes only what is vulgar. Edgar Allan Poe's publishers said that they had to pay him less than others because he wrote better than others. I once knew a painter to whom a picture dealer said, "You need some lessons."

"? . . ."

"Yes, to learn not to paint so well."

The man whose heart is set on perfection does not understand that sort of language; he does not consent at any price, or in any form, to cultivate

what Baudelaire called the zoocracy. But if his heart began to fail him . . .

Even if we snap our fingers at others' appraisals, are we not exposed within ourselves to the foolish judgments of vanity and instinctive puerility? "Never ignore, never refuse to see what may be thought against your own thought," writes Nietzsche. We are not thinking now of incompetent and superficial critics, but of the homage we ourselves owe to vigilance and integrity. How often one would like to evade a difficulty, to be satisfied with an error, unduly to prefer one's own opinion! Severity with oneself, so favorable to rightness of thought, so helpful in safeguarding it against the thousand dangers of research, is heroism. How can one plead guilty and be glad of one's condemnation, without a boundless love for the truth that gives judgment?

That readiness to admit error is offset, it is true, by an uncompromising adherence to our fundamental persuasions, to those intangible intuitions that are at the bottom of our effort and of our very self-criticism. We cannot build on nothing, and the retouches of the workman do not reach down to the first foundations. What we have won by study and considered carefully must be guarded against unjustified second thoughts and scruples. This is demanded by the love of truth of which we have spoken; it is demanded by the same selflessness, which makes us interest ourselves in what is beyond us and yet has taken up its abode in our conscious-

ness. These evaluations are a delicate matter, but they are necessary. On no account must the supreme certainties be shaken, on which all the work of the intelligence reposes.

We must even be on our guard, again in the name of devotion to truth, against that better which has been so rightly called an enemy of good. It sometimes happens that by widening the field of one's research one impairs it; and it sometimes happens that by investigating beyond some advisable limit, the mind loses its clearness and ends by being merely perplexed. The star that one looks at too intensely and too long, can, by that very fact, give a more and more fitful gleam and end by disappearing from the sky.

The conclusion from all this is not that we must not work in depth, nor that we must neglect that broad culture which is a condition of depth in any domain; but that a sure devotion to the true, without personal passion, without loss of balance, is the corrective of excess.

There is another line of defense against hastiness in our judgments and in the development of our work. One is not dazzled, when one loves the truth, by a brilliant idea set in an aureole of commonplaces. That kind of thing does not yield a real result. The most mediocre mind may hit on an idea, like a rough diamond or a pearl. What is difficult is the cutting of the idea, and, above all, its setting into a jewel of truth which will be the real creation.

"Among the hasty readers of books," says Ramon Fernandez amusingly, "I am inclined to

place the author of this book." Yes! But what causes this careless haste which absolves at the outset some less interested and less responsible reader? We shall avoid it by devoting ourselves more earnestly to the true alone.

We shall also avoid plunging into some particular theme that we should like to develop without having first explored its general antecedents and its connection with other subjects. To be long multiple is the condition for being richly one. Unity at the starting point is a mere void. One feels this when one is devoted to high and mysterious truth. Even if one does not use everything that one has learned, the accumulated knowledge gives a hidden resonance to one's words, and this fulness has for its reward the confidence it inspires. It is a great secret to know how to give radiance to an idea by means of its twilight background. It is a further secret to preserve its power of convergence in spite of this radiating quality.

Does failure threaten us or have we already experienced it? This is the time to take refuge in that immutable, unconditional devotion to truth which inspired our effort. "My brain has become my refuge," writes Charles Bonnet. But higher than the brain is the object of its devotion, and that is a very much safer refuge. Even at the cost of suffering, creation is a joy; and, beyond creation, veneration for the idea whence it comes.

Besides, as Foch said, "It is with remainders that battles are won." You have failed in something now, which will prepare you to succeed in something else

—to succeed, in short, as everyone who is worth anything, and who tries, is sure to do.

I want to point out one last effect of the supreme submission to truth of which I have sounded the praise. It puts bounds not only to our personal but to our human pretensions. Reason cannot do everything. Its last step, according to Pascal, is to recognize its limitations. It will only do that if it has submitted to its primal law, which is not its own truth, regarded as its property or its conquest, but the Truth that is impersonal and eternal.

Here there is no limit to honor, by the very fact that presumption is laid aside. Mystery pays. Faith substituted for research carries the mind into vast spheres that it would never of itself have known; and the light of its own domain gains by the fact that distant stars compel it to turn its eyes to the sky. Reason ambitions only a world; faith gives it infinity.

I do not want further to lengthen this discourse. What it contains will necessarily be repeated, since its purpose is to show where the All is to be found.

I have pleaded the claims of that All with an inadequacy of which I am fully conscious and for which I crave pardon. I earnestly wish that my suggestions concerning it, weak as they are, may inspire others to praise it better and to serve it more ardently.

A. G. SERTILLANGES

December, 1934.

Foreword

Among the works of St. Thomas there is a letter to a certain Brother John, in which are enumerated *Sixteen Precepts for Acquiring the Treasure of Knowledge.*[1] This letter, whether it be authentic or not, must be looked at in itself; it is priceless; we should like to imprint its every word in the inmost being of the Christian thinker. We published it together with the *Prayers* of the same teacher, in which his religious thought is condensed and his soul revealed.[2]

We conceived the idea of commenting on the *Sixteen Precepts,* in order to link up with them things of which it is perhaps useful to remind men of study in our day. In practice, that method seemed rather restrictive; we have chosen to adopt a freer procedure; but the substance of this little volume is none the less entirely Thomistic; it will be found to contain what the master suggests, in the *Sixteen Precepts* and elsewhere, concerning the management of the mind.

[1] They are given in Latin and English, with a commentary, in a lecture by Fr. Victor White, O.P., published by Blackfriars, Oxford, December 1944: *St. Thomas Aquinas, De Modo Studendi.*

[2] *Les Prieres de Saint Thomas d'Aquin,* traduites et presentees par A.G. Sertillanges. Librairie de l'Art Gatholique, 1920.

This little work has no pretension to replace *Les Sources;*[3] in part it is inspired by that book. The author, doubtless like many another, has not forgotten the stirring he experienced at twenty, when Père Gratry stimulated in him the ardent desire of knowledge.

Let us often remind this age, which so sorely needs light, of the conditions that enable us to get light and to prepare its diffusion by our work.

We shall not speak here of intellectual production in itself; that would be the subject of another volume. But it is one and the same mind that first seeks to enrich itself, and then goes on to expend itself wisely.

Since we shall have to say later that to give out is in this case one of the means of adding to our store, we cannot doubt the identity of the principles which, in the one process as in the other, make our intellectual activity fruitful.

For that reason we may hope to be useful to all.

CHANDOLIN
August 15th, 1920.

[3] Translated into English under the title of *The Well-Springs,* by Stephen J. Brown, S.J., Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1931.

The Intellectual Life

chapter 1

The Intellectual Vocation

I

When we speak of vocation, we refer to those who intend to make intellectual work their life, whether they are entirely free to give themselves up to study, or whether, though engaged in some calling, they hold happily in reserve, as a supplement of their activity and as a reward, the development and deepening of their mind.

I say the deepening, in order to set aside the idea of a superficial tincture of knowledge. A vocation is not fulfilled by vague reading and a few scattered writings. It requires penetration and continuity and methodical effort, so as to attain a fulness of development which will correspond to the call of the Spirit, and to the resources that it has pleased Him to bestow on us.

This call is not to be taken for granted. To start precipitately on a road which one could not tread with a firm step would be merely to prepare the way for disillusionment. Everyone has the duty to work; and after a first early and toilsome training

no one acts wisely if he lets his mind fall gradually back into its primitive ignorance; but the effortless maintenance of what one has acquired is one thing, and it is quite another to consolidate from the foundations upwards a sum of knowledge recognized as merely provisional, seen to be simply and solely a starting-point.

This second state of mind is that of one who has the vocation. It implies a serious resolution. The life of study is austere and imposes grave obligations. It pays, it pays richly; but it exacts an initial outlay that few are capable of. The athletes of the mind, like those of the playing field, must be prepared for privations, long training, a sometimes superhuman tenacity. We must give ourselves from the heart, if truth is to give itself to us. Truth serves only its slaves.

This way of life must not be entered on without long self-examination. The intellectual vocation is like every other: it is written in our instincts, in our powers, in a sort of inner impulse of which reason must judge. Our dispositions are like the chemical properties which determine, for every body, the combinations into which that body can enter. A vocation is something that cannot be had for the asking. It comes from heaven and from our first nature. The whole point is to be docile to God and to oneself as soon as they have spoken.

Understood in this sense, Disraeli's saying that you may do what you please, provided it really pleases you, contains a great meaning. Our liking, if correlated to our fundamental tendencies and to

our aptitudes, is an excellent judge. If St. Thomas could say that pleasure characterizes functions and may serve to classify men, he must be led to conclude that pleasure can also reveal our vocation. Only we must search down into the depths where liking and the spontaneous impulse are linked up with the gifts of God and His providence.

Besides the immense interest of realizing oneself in one's fulness, the investigation into an intellectual vocation has a more general interest which no one may disregard.

Christianized humanity is made up of various personalities, no one of which can refuse to function without impoverishing the group and without depriving the eternal Christ of a part of His kingdom. Christ reigns by unfolding Himself in men. Every life of one of His members is a characteristic moment of His duration; every individual man and Christian is an instance, incommunicable, unique, and therefore necessary, of the extension of the "spiritual body." If you are designated as a light bearer, do not go and hide under the bushel the gleam or the flame expected from you in the house of the Father of all. Love truth and its fruits of life, for yourself and for others; devote to study and to the profitable use of study the best part of your time and your heart.

All roads but one are bad roads for you, since they diverge from the direction in which your action is expected and required. Do not prove faithless to God, to your brethren and to yourself by rejecting a sacred call.

That presupposes you to come to the intellectual life with unselfish motives, not through ambition or foolish vanity. The jingling bells of publicity tempt only frivolous minds. Ambition offends eternal truth by subordinating truth to itself. Is it not a sacrilege to play with the questions that dominate life and death, with mysterious nature, with God—to achieve some literary or philosophical celebrity at the expense of the true and independently of the true? Such aims, and especially the first mentioned, would not sustain the seeker; his effort would speedily be seen to slacken, his vanity to fall back on some empty satisfaction, with no care for the reality of things.

But it presupposes also that to the acceptance of the end you add the acceptance of the means; otherwise there would be no real obedience to your vocation. Many people would like to possess knowledge! A vague aspiration turns the eyes of the multitude towards horizons that the greater number admire from afar off, as the victim of gout or asthma looks up to the eternal snows. To get something without paying for it is the universal desire; but it is the desire of cowardly hearts and weak brains. The universe does not respond to the first murmured request, and the light of God does not shine under your study lamp unless your soul asks for it with persistent effort.

You are consecrated by your vocation. Will what truth wills; consent for the sake of truth to bestir yourself, to take up your abode within its proper

realm, to organize your life, and, realizing your inexperience, to learn from the experience of others.

"If youth but knew!" The young, above all, need this warning. Science in the broad meaning of the word, *scientia,* is knowledge through causes; but actively, as to its attainment, it is a creation by causes. We must recognize and adopt the causes of knowledge, then provide them, and not defer attention to the foundations of our building until the moment of putting up the roof.

In the first free years after early studies, when the ground of our intelligence has been newly turned-up, and the seed sown, what splendid tillage could be undertaken! That is the time that will never come again, the time that we shall have to live on by and by. What it is, we shall be; for we can hardly put down new roots. The future is always the heir of the past; the penalty for neglecting, at the right time, to prepare it, is to live on the surface of things. Let each one think of that, while thinking may be of some avail.

How many young people, with the pretension to become workers, miserably waste their days, their strength, the vigor of their intelligence, their ideal! Either they do not work—there is time enough!—or they work badly, capriciously, without knowing what they are nor where they want to go nor how to get there. Lectures, reading, choice of companions, the proper proportion of work and rest, of solitude and activity, of general culture and specialization, the spirit of study, the art of picking

out and utilizing data gained, some provisional output which will give an idea of what the future work is to be, the virtues to be acquired and developed, —nothing of all that is thought out and no satisfactory fulfillment will follow.

What a difference, supposing equal resources, between the man who understands and looks ahead, and the man who proceeds at haphazard! "Genius is long patience," but it must be organized and intelligent patience. One does not need extraordinary gifts to carry some work through; average superiority suffices; the rest depends on energy and wise application of energy. It is as with a conscientious workman, careful and steady at his task: he gets somewhere, while an inventive genius is often merely an embittered failure.

What I have just said is true of everyone. But I apply it especially to those who know that they have at their disposal only a part of their life, the least part, in which to give themselves to the labors of the mind. They, more than others, must be men consecrated by their vocation. What they cannot spread out over all their years, they must concentrate in a small space. The special asceticism and the heroic virtue of the intellectual worker must be their daily portion. But if they consent to this double self-offering, I tell them in the name of the God of truth not to lose courage.

If genius is not necessary for production, still less is it necessary to have entire liberty. What is more, liberty presents pitfalls that rigorous obligations may help us to avoid. A stream narrowly hemmed-

in by its banks will flow more impetuously. The discipline of some occupation is an excellent school; it bears fruit in the hours of studious leisure. The very constraint will make you concentrate better, you will learn the value of time, you will take eager refuge in those rare hours during which, the claims of duty satisfied, you can turn to your ideal and enjoy the relaxation of some chosen activity after the labor imposed by the hard necessity of getting a livelihood.

The worker who thus finds in a fresh effort the reward of previous effort, who prizes it as a miser prizes his hoard, is usually passionately devoted to his ideal; he cannot be turned aside from a purpose thus consecrated by sacrifice. If his progress seems slower, he is capable of getting farther. Like the poor drudging tortoise, he does not dawdle, he persists, and in a few years' time he will have outstripped the indolent hare whose agile movements were the envy of his own lumbering gait.

The same is true of the isolated worker, deprived of intellectual resources and stimulating society, buried in some little provincial spot, where he seems condemned to stagnate, exiled far from rich libraries, brilliant lectures, an eagerly responsive public, possessing only himself and obliged to draw solely on that inalienable capital.

He must not lose courage either. Though he have everything against him, let him but keep possession of himself and be content with that. An ardent heart has more chance of achieving something than a crammed head abusing the opportunities of great

cities. Here again strength may spring from difficulty. It is in the steep mountain passes that one bends and strains; level paths allow one to relax, and a state of uncontrolled relaxation quickly becomes fatal.

The most valuable thing of all is will, a deeply-rooted will; to will to be somebody, to achieve something; to be even now in desire that somebody, recognizable by his ideal. Everything else always settles itself. There are books everywhere and only a few are necessary. Society, stimulation, one finds these in spirit in one's solitude: the great are there, present to those who call on them, and the great ages behind impel the ardent thinker forward. As to lectures, those who can have them do not follow them or follow them but ill, if they have not in themselves, at need, the wherewithal to do without such fortunate help. As to the public, if it sometimes stimulates, it often disturbs, scatters the mind; and by going to pick up two pennies in the street, you may lose a fortune. An impassioned solitude is better, for there every seed produces a hundredfold, and every ray of sunlight suffuses the whole landscape with autumnal gold.

St. Thomas of Aquin, as he was coming to settle in Paris and descried the great city in the distance, said to the brother who was with him: "Brother, I would give all that for the commentary of Chrysostom on St. Matthew." When one feels like that, it does not matter where one is nor what resources one has, one is stamped with the seal; one is of the

elect of the Spirit; one has only to persevere, and to trust life, as it is ruled for us by God.

You, young man who understand this language and to whom the heroes of the mind seem mysteriously to beckon, but who fear to lack the necessary means, listen to me. Have you two hours a day? Can you undertake to keep them jealously, to use them ardently, and then, being of those who have authority in the Kingdom of God, can you drink the chalice of which these pages would wish to make you savor the exquisite and bitter taste? If so, have confidence. Nay, rest in quiet certainty.

If you are compelled to earn your living, at least you will earn it without sacrificing, as so many do, the liberty of your soul. If you are alone, you will but be more violently thrown back on your noble purposes. Most great men followed some calling. Many have declared that the two hours I postulate suffice for an intellectual career. Learn to make the best use of that limited time; plunge every day of your life into the spring which quenches and yet ever renews your thirst.

Do you want to have a humble share in perpetuating wisdom among men, in gathering up the inheritance of the ages, in formulating the rules of the mind for the present time, in discovering facts and causes, in turning men's wandering eyes towards first causes and their hearts towards supreme ends, in reviving if necessary some dying flame, in organizing the propaganda of truth and goodness? That is the lot reserved for you. It is

surely worth a little extra sacrifice; it is worth steadily pursuing with jealous passion.

The study and practice of what Père Gratry calls Living Logic, that is, the development of our mind, the human word, by contact direct or indirect with the Spirit and the Divine Word—that serious study and persevering practice will give you entry into the wondrous sanctuary. You will be of those who grow, who enrich themselves, and who make ready to receive magnificent gifts. You too, one day, if God so wills, will have a place in the assembly of noble minds.

II

It is another characteristic of the intellectual vocation that the Christian worker who is consecrated by his call must not be an isolated unit. Whatever be his position, however alone or hidden we suppose him to be materially, he must not yield to the lure of individualism, which is a distorted image of Christian personality.

As life-giving as is solitude, so paralyzing and sterilizing is isolation.

By being only a soul, one ceases to be a man, Victor Hugo would say. Isolation is inhuman; for to work in human fashion is to work with the feeling for man, his needs, his greatness, and the solidarity which binds us closely together in a common life.

A Christian worker should live constantly in the universal, in history. Since he lives with Jesus Christ he cannot separate times, nor men, from

Him. Real life is a life in common, an immense family life with charity for its law; if study is to be an act of life, not an art pursued for art's sake and an appropriation of mere abstractions, it must submit to be governed by this law of oneness of heart. "We pray before the crucifix," says Gratry—we must also work before the crucifix—"but the true cross is not isolated from the earth."

A true Christian will have ever before his eyes the image of this globe, on which the Cross is planted, on which needy men wander and suffer, all over which the redeeming Blood, in numberless streams, flows to meet them. The light that he has confers on him a priesthood; the light that he seeks to acquire supposes an implicit promise that he will share it. Every truth is practical; the most apparently abstract, the loftiest, is also the most practical. Every truth is life, direction, a way leading to the end of man. And therefore Jesus Christ made this unique assertion: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Work always then with the idea of some utilization, as the Gospel speaks. Listen to the murmur of the human race all about you; pick out certain individuals of certain groups whose need you know, find out what may bring them out of their night and ennoble them; what in any measure may save them. The only holy truths are redeeming truths; and was it not in view of our work as of everything else that the Apostle said: "This is the will of God, your sanctification?"

Jesus Christ needs our minds for His work, as on

earth He needed His own human mind. He has gone, but we continue Him; we have that measureless honor. We are His members, therefore have a share in His spirit, are therefore His cooperators. He acts outwardly through us, and inwardly through the inspirations of His Spirit, as in His lifetime He acted outwardly by His voice, inwardly by His grace. Our work being a necessary part of that action, let us work as Jesus meditated—as He drew on the life-springs of the Father to pour them out on the world.

III

And then reflect that if all times are equal before God, if His eternity is a radiant center from which all points on the circumference of time are at an equal distance, it is not the same with the ages and with us, who dwell on the circumference. We are here at a given point on the mighty wheel, not elsewhere. If we are here, it is because God has placed us here. Every moment of duration concerns us, and every age is our neighbor, as well as every man; but the word "neighbor" is a relative word to which the wisdom of Providence attaches a precise meaning for each of us, and to which each of us, in submissive wisdom, must also attach a precise meaning.

Here I am, a man of the 20th century, living in a time of permanent drama, witnessing upheavals such as perhaps the globe never before saw since the mountains rose and the seas were driven into their caverns. What have I to do for this panting,

palpitating century? More than ever before thought is waiting for men, and men for thought. The world is in danger for lack of life-giving maxims. We are in a train rushing ahead at top speed, no signals visible. The planet is going it knows not where, its law has failed it: who will give it back its sun?

All this is not intended to narrow down the field of intellectual research and to confine it to exclusively religious study. That will be evident. I have already said that every truth is practical, that every truth has a saving power. But I am indicating a spirit, and this spirit, both in general and because of what is opportune at the present time excludes mere dilettantism.

It also excludes a certain archaeological tendency, a love of the past which turns away from present suffering, an esteem for the past which seems not to recognize the universal presence of God. Every age is not as good as every other, but all ages are Christian ages, and there is one which for us, and in practice, surpasses them all: our own. In view of it are our inborn resources, our graces of today and tomorrow, and consequently the efforts that we must make in order to correspond with them.

Let us not be like those people who always seem to be pallbearers at the funeral of the past. Let us utilize, by living, the qualities of the dead. Truth is ever new. Like the grass of morning, moist with glistening dew, all the old virtues are waiting to spring up afresh. God does not grow old. We must help our God to renew, not the buried past and the

chronicles of a vanished world, but the eternal face of the earth.

Such is the spirit of the Catholic intellectual, such is his vocation. The sooner he gives precision to this general idea by finding out what kind of study is right for him, the better.

Listen now to the virtues that God asks of him.

chapter 2

The Virtues of a Catholic Intellectual

I

I might say that virtue potentially contains intellectuality, for, since it leads to our end, which is intellectual, virtue is equivalent to the supreme knowledge.

One could draw many things from that, everything indeed; for this primacy of the moral order involves the relative dependence of truth, of beauty, of harmony, of unity, of being itself with regard to morality, which is thus related to the first principle of all things.

But I prefer to follow a humbler path.

The qualities of character have a preponderant role in everything. The intellect is only a tool; the handling of it determines the nature of its effects. Properly to regulate the intelligence, is it not evident that qualities quite different from intelligence

itself are required? Instinctively, every right mind declares that superiority in any branch includes a measure of spiritual superiority. To judge truly, you must be great.

Would there not be something repellent in seeing a great discovery made by an unprincipled rascal? The unspoiled instinct of a simple man would be grievously hurt by it. There is something shocking in a dissociation which dislocates the harmony of the human being. One has no faith in jewel merchants who sell pearls and wear none. To be in close contact with the great spring of all things without acquiring anything of its moral nature seems a paradox. To enjoy the faculty of intelligence, and to make of it an isolated force, a "bump," is, one suspects, a dangerous game; for every isolated force in a balanced whole becomes the victim of its surroundings.

If then character makes shipwreck, one must expect the sense of the great truths to suffer. The mind, being no longer held in check, no longer finding its level, will start down some dangerous incline, and one knows that a small error in the beginning becomes great in the end. The force of logic may send to a more precipitous fall the man whose faculty of discernment finds no safeguard in his soul. That is the cause of so many sensational lapses, and of so many blunders with a spark of genius in them, among masters who have lost the true direction of life.

Life is a unity: it would be very surprising if we could give fullest play to one of its functions while

neglecting the other, or if to live our ideas should not help us to perceive them.

What is the source of this unity of life? Love. "Tell me what you love, I will tell you what you are." Love is the beginning of everything in us; and that starting point which is common to knowledge and practice cannot fail to make the right paths of both in a certain measure interdependent.

Truth visits those who love her, who surrender to her, and this love cannot be without virtue. For this reason, in spite of his possible defects, the man of genius at work is already virtuous; it would suffice for his holiness if he were more completely his true self.

The true springs up in the same soil as the good: their roots communicate. Broken from the common root and therefore less in contact with the soil, one or other suffers; the soul grows anemic or the mind wilts. On the contrary, by feeding the mind on truth one enlightens the conscience, by fostering good one guides knowledge.

By practising the truth that we know, we merit the truth that we do not yet know. We merit it in the sight of God; we merit it also with a merit which brings its own reward; for all truths are linked together, and homage in act being the most decisive of all, when we pay that homage by living the truth of life, we draw near to the supreme light and to all that flows from it.[1] If I embark on the tributary, I reach the river, and then the sea.

[1] The virtue called truth, says St. Thomas, "is a certain truth according to which a man in word and deed shows

Let us look a little more closely into this doctrine which is so important,—so important that simply to recall it would have made the writing of this little work worthwhile.

Is not virtue the health of the soul? And who will say that health does not affect the sight? Ask the oculist. An intelligent practitioner is not satisfied with measuring the curve of the crystalline lens and choosing glasses, he does not merely advise ointments and lotions; he is curious about your general health, your teeth, your regime, your internal organs. Do not be surprised if that specialist in a single organ even questions you about your moral conduct.

The sight of the spirit is no less exacting.

Do you believe that we think with the intelligence only? Are we merely a bundle of faculties among which for this or for that purpose we select the desired instrument? We think "with our whole soul," declared Plato. Presently we shall go much farther, we shall say: with our whole being. Knowledge involves everything in us, from the vital principle to the chemical composition of the least cell. Mental disorders of every sort, states of delirium, hallucinations, asthenia and hypersthenia, inadaptation to reality of whatever kind, prove that it is not the mind alone that thinks, but the man.

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himself as he is." The truth of life "is particularly so called according as a man in his life fulfils what he is ordained to by the divine intelligence." S.T.Ia, qu. 16, art. 4, ad 3. (Tr. Note.)

How will you manage to think rightly with a sick soul, a heart ravaged by vice, pulled this way and that by passion, dragged astray by violent or guilty love? There is, Gratry said, a clear-sighted and a blind state of the soul; a sound and therefore sensible state, and a state of folly. "The exercise of the moral virtues," St. Thomas of Aquin tells you in his turn, "of the virtues by which the passions are held in check, is of great importance for the acquisition of knowledge." [1]

Yes indeed! Think it out. On what, first and foremost, does all the effort of study depend? On attention, which delimits the field for research, concentrates on it, brings all our powers to bear on it; next, on judgment, which gathers up the fruit of investigation. Now, passions and vices relax attention, scatter it, lead it astray; and they injure the judgment in roundabout ways, of which Aristotle and many others after him have scrutinized the meanders.

All contemporary psychologists are in agreement here; the fact is plain to see, admitting of no doubt. The "psychology of the feelings" governs practice, but also, to a large extent, thought. Knowledge depends on the direction given to our passions and on our moral habits. To calm our passions is to awaken in ourselves the sense of the universal; to correct ourselves is to bring out the sense of the true.

Carry your analysis further. What are the enemies of knowledge? Plainly, lack of intelligence; there-

[1] VII Physic., lib. 6.

fore in discussing vices and virtues and their role in the pursuit of knowledge we presuppose persons who are equal in other respects. But, stupidity apart, what enemies do you fear? What about sloth, the grave of the best gifts? What of sensuality, which makes the body weak and lethargic, befogs the imagination, dulls the intelligence, scatters the memory? Of pride, which sometimes dazzles and sometimes darkens, which so drives us in the direction of our own opinion that the universal sense may escape us? Of envy, which obstinately refuses to acknowledge some light other than our own? Of irritation which repels criticism and comes to grief on the rock of error?

Without these obstacles, a man of study will rise to heights greater or less according to his resources and his environment; but he will reach the level of his own gifts, of his own destiny.

We must notice that all the faults just mentioned bring one another more or less in their train; they intersect, they ramify, they are with regard to love of the good or contempt for the good what intersecting streamlets are to the spring. Purity of thought requires purity of soul; that is a general and undeniable truth. The neophyte of knowledge should let it sink deeply into his mind.

Let us rise higher, and speaking of springs, let us not forget the Supreme Spring. The surest metaphysic tells us that at the summit of things, the true and the good are not only connected, but are identical.

We must state for exactness' sake, that the good

thus spoken of is not properly speaking *moral* good; *desirable* good is what is directly referred to; but a little circuit brings us back from the latter to the former.

Moral good is nothing else than desirable good measured by reason and set before the will as an end. Ends are related. They all depend on one ultimate end. It is this ultimate end which links up with the true and is one with it. Connect these propositions, and you will find that moral good, if not identical in every way with the true, still depends on it through the ends aimed at by the will. There is, therefore, between the two, a bond more or less loose or close, but unbreakable.

It is not by the individuality in us that we approach truth; it is in virtue of a participation in the universal. This universal, which is at one and the same time the true and the good, cannot be honored as the true—we cannot enter into intimate union with it, discover its traces, and yield ourselves to its mighty sway—unless we recognize and serve it equally as the good.

Climb up the Great Pyramid by those giant steps that so exactly represent the ascent of the true: if you go up by the northern edge, can you reach the summit without getting nearer and nearer to the southern edge? To keep away from it would be to stay on the low levels; to turn away from it would be to go sideways and downwards. Similarly the genius of the true tends of itself to join the good; if it diverges it is at the expense of its upward impulse towards the summits.

Blessed are the pure of heart, said the Lord, they shall see God. "Preserve purity of conscience," says St. Thomas to his student; "do not fail to imitate the conduct of the saints and of good men." Responsiveness of the soul to the ineffable spring, its filial and loving dispositions, lay it open to receive light after light, and ever-increasing fervor and rectitude. Truth, when loved and realized as a life, shows itself to be a first principle; one's vision is according to what one is; one participates in truth by participating in the Spirit through whom it exists. Great personal intuitions, piercing lights, are in men of equal powers the consequence of moral progress, of detachment from self and from the usual commonplace things, of humility, simplicity, discipline of the senses and the imagination, of an eager impulse towards the great ends.

There is no question now of proving one's skill, of showing off the brilliance of one's powers, as of a jewel; one desires to get into communion with the radiant center of light and life; one approaches this center in its unity, as it is; one adores it, and renounces what is opposed to it in order to be flooded with its glory. Is not all that something like the meaning of the famous words: "Great thoughts come from the heart"? [1]

II

We see then that virtue in general is necessary for knowledge, and that the more moral rectitude

[1] One of Pascal's *Pensées*. In Pascal's language *coeur* means the whole man, with his experience, perceptions, intuitions (Tr. Note).

we bring to study, the more fruitful the study is. Yet there is a virtue proper to the intellectual, and we must dwell on it here, although it will recur often in the course of these pages.

The virtue proper to the man of study is, clearly, studiousness. Do not jump to the conclusion that this is a naïve statement: our masters in doctrine have included many things in that virtue, and have distinguished from it many other things.[1]

St. Thomas placed studiousness under the heading of the controlling virtue of temperance, to indicate that of itself, knowledge is no doubt always to be welcomed, but that our life is so ordered as to require us to temper, that is, to adapt to circumstances and to reconcile with other duties, a thirst for knowing that may easily run to excess.

When I say to excess, I mean in both directions. To the virtue of studiousness, two vices are opposed: negligence on the one hand, vain curiosity on the other. We shall not speak here of the former; if it is not hateful to the reader when he comes to close this little book, it will be because he has grown weary on the way, or because we have managed the journey very badly. It is not the same with curiosity. This fault can creep in under cover of our best instincts, and vitiate them at the very moment that it pretends to satisfy them.

We have already referred to the ambitious ideas which pervert an intellectual vocation. Without going as far as that, ambition may injure studiousness, and hinder the usefulness of its results. An act

[1] St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, 2a, 2ae, qu. 167.

of ambition apropos of knowledge ceases to be an act of the pursuit of knowledge, and he who indulges in it ceases to deserve the name of an intellectual.

Every other faulty purpose would call for the same verdict.

On the other hand, study, even when it is disinterested and right in itself, is not always opportune; if it is not, the person who then pursues knowledge forgets his duty as a man, and what is to be said of the intellectual who is not a man?

Other duties than study are human duties. Knowledge taken in an absolute sense is no doubt our supreme good, but the modicum of it that is granted to us here is often subordinated to other values which, in regard of merit, will be its equivalent.

A country priest who devotes himself to his parishioners, a doctor who turns away from study to give help in urgent cases, a young man of good family who adopts a calling to help his people and in doing so has to turn his back on liberal studies, are not profaning the gift that is in them, they are paying homage to the True which is one and the same Being with the Good. If they acted otherwise they would offend truth no less than virtue, since, indirectly, they would be setting living truth at variance with itself.

One sees many men avid for knowledge who do not hesitate to sacrifice to it their strictest duties. They are not men of study, they are dilettanti.

Or else they abandon the study demanded by their obligations and take up some other that flatters their inclination, and their loss of quality is the same.

Those who aim at what is beyond their powers, and thus run the risk of falling into error, who waste their real capacity in order to acquire some capacity that is illusory, are also men of curiosity in the olden sense. Two of St. Thomas's sixteen precepts for study concern them: *"Altiora te ne quaesieris,* do not seek what is beyond your reach." *"Volo ut per rivulos, non statim, in mare eligas introire;* I want you to decide to go to the sea by the streams, not directly." Precious advice, which serves knowledge as well as virtue by giving balance to the man.

Do not overload the foundation, do not carry the building higher than the base permits, or build at all before the base is secure: otherwise the whole structure is likely to collapse.

What are you? What point have you reached? What intellectual substructure have you to offer? These are the things that must wisely determine your undertaking. "If you want to see things grow big, plant small," say the foresters; and that is, in other words, St. Thomas's advice. The wise man begins at the beginning, and does not take a second step until he has made sure of the first. That is why self-taught men have so many weak points. They cannot, all by themselves, begin at the beginning. When they join a group already well on the

road, they find themselves at a stage where other stages have already been passed, and there is no one to show them the approaches.

On the other hand, what is true of each one as to the stages of his development is true of each one in relation to others. We must not overestimate ourselves, but we must judge of our capacity. To accept ourselves as we are is to obey God and to make sure of good results. Does nature seek to exceed her powers? Everything in nature is exactly measured, without vain effort and without false estimates. Every creature acts according to its quantity and quality, its nature and its power, and then is at peace. Man alone lives in pretentiousness and dissatisfaction.

What wisdom and what virtue there is in judging oneself truly and in remaining oneself! You have a part that only you can play; and your business is to play it to perfection, instead of trying to force fortune. Our lives are not interchangeable. Equally by aiming too high and by falling too low, one misses the path to the goal. Go straight ahead, in your own way, with God for guide.

To this necessary prudence St. Thomas adds the importance of not letting one's curiosity linger over earthly objects at the expense of the supreme object. Later on we shall draw from that a consequence which is important for the organization of our work; [1] but study must first of all leave room for worship, prayer, direct meditation on the things of God. Study is itself a divine office, an indirect

[1] Cf. below: The Field of Work: Comparative Study.

divine office; it seeks out and honors the traces of the Creator, or His images, according as it investigates nature or humanity; but it must make way at the right moment for direct intercourse with Him. If we forget to do this, not only do we neglect a great duty, but the image of God in creation comes between us and Him, and His traces only serve to lead us far from Him to whom they bear witness.

Study carried to such a point that we give up prayer and recollection, that we cease to read Holy Scripture, and the words of the saints and of great souls—study carried to the point of forgetting ourselves entirely, and of concentrating on the objects of study so that we neglect the Divine Dweller within us, is an abuse and a fool's game. To suppose that it will further our progress and enrich our production is to say that the stream will flow better if its spring is dried up.

The order of the mind must correspond to the order of things. In the world of reality, everything rises towards the divine, everything depends on it, because everything springs from it. In the effigy of the real within us, we can note the same dependence, unless we have turned topsy-turvy the true relations of things.

III

These dispositions will be secured, if apart from the exercises of piety which precede our study, we cultivate in work itself the spirit of prayer.

It is again St. Thomas who tells the passionate seeker after knowledge: "*Orationi vacare non*

desinas: never give up praying," and Van Helmont explains this precept when he says these sublime words: "Every study is a study of eternity."

We repeat continually that science (*scientia*) is knowledge by causes. Details are nothing: facts are nothing: the important things are the dependences, the transmissions of influence, the connecting links, the exchanges, which constitute the life of nature. Now, behind all these dependences, is the primal dependence; at the spot to which all connections converge is the supreme Bond; at the highest point of all transmissions, the Spring; beneath the exchanges the Gift; beneath the systole and diastole of the world, the Heart, the boundless Heart of Being. Must not the mind refer back to it unceasingly, and never for a minute lose touch with what is thus the All of all things, and consequently of all knowledge?

Intelligence only plays its part fully when it fulfils a religious function, that is, when it worships the supreme Truth in its minor and scattered appearances.

Each truth is a fragment which does not stand alone but reveals connections on every side. Truth in itself is one, and the Truth is God.

Every truth is a reflection; behind the reflection, and giving it value, is the Light. Every being is a witness; every fact is a divine secret; beyond them is the object of the revelation, the hero witnessed to. Everything true stands out against the Infinite as against its background; is related to it; belongs to it. A particular truth may indeed occupy the

The Intellectual Life

Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods

A. G. Sertillanges, O.P.

Translated by Mary Ryan
With a New Foreword by James V. Schall, S.J.

Sertillanges asks in the preface of the 1934 edition: "Do you want to do intellectual work?" He follows with the prescription: "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 work; acquire that state of soul unburdened by desire and self-will which is the state of grace of the intellectual worker. Without that you will do nothing, at least nothing worth while."

First published in 1920, *The Intellectual Life* has been repeatedly reprinted and continues to inspire and instruct young scholars.

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