

10 BOOKS TO FORM THE CHRISTIAN MIND





Dear Friend,

Before introducing these ten books, let me say a few things by way of clarification. This is not a 'best of' list – as the formation of the Christian mind is too grand and mysterious to reduce to a simple top ten.

Also, I am taking for granted that the Bible – sacred Scripture – is *the* essential book (or more accurately, collection of books) for the Christian mind. Thus, this list is ten books apart from the Bible.

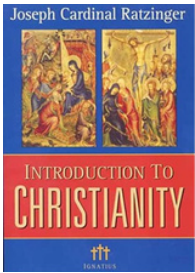
This list is personal and somewhat eclectic. I've tried to be as broad as possible and include classic as well as relatively modern works, academic and more accessible works, and explicitly theological works as well as other genres.

And there are many, many books that could very easily be on this list – the hardest part was to reduce this to ten!

Yours sincerely,

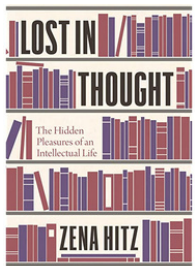
Dr Paul Morrissey

President
Champion College



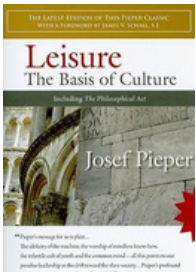
INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY JOSEPH RATZINGER

Ratzinger, later to be Pope Benedict XVI, is one of the great Christian intellectuals of the twentieth century. This work, written in 1968, is based on a course that Ratzinger gave on the Apostles' Creed. Ratzinger engages with modern philosophical thought and method while remaining faithful to the orthodox creed. A particularly important contribution is his argument that the dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is a false one: the Jesus of history is the Christ of the Creeds and worship. In another of his Christological works, *Behold the Pierced One*, Ratzinger writes that "Christology is born of prayer or not at all." This introduction to Christianity is very much the fruit of prayer and a great mind.



LOST IN THOUGHT: THE HIDDEN PLEASURES OF AN INTELLECTUAL LIFE ZENA HITZ

This is the most recent work here (published in 2020), a very timely book providing a necessary defence of the intellectual life at a critical time. While not a Christian book per se (though Hitz herself is Christian and the autobiographical prologue is a very moving account of her journey of faith), this book is a beautiful reflection on how the life of the mind is deeply connected to leisure and contemplation. Learning for its own sake is a deeply Christian ideal that needs to be fostered in schools and universities.



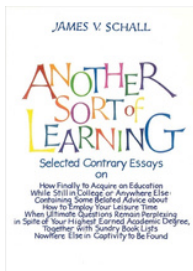
LEISURE: THE BASIS OF CULTURE

JOSEF PIEPER

This book is the perfect antidote to our hyperactive age. As you are probably aware, one of the seven deadly sins is sloth, or acedia, which is boredom or “laziness” to do the good. We often stereotype sloth as the person sitting on the couch, channel surfing and eating fast food; but perhaps the surest indication that sloth is rampant today is the inability of people to sit still, to contemplate, to read deeply, to appreciate silence, to wonder at nature, to think deeply, to philosophise, to create, to pray, and to worship. Perhaps the surest indication that we suffer from sloth is our addiction to the small computers we carry around with us. Pieper, the twentieth-century Thomist philosopher, argues that we need to rediscover leisure if a Christian culture is to be rebuilt. I agree with him.



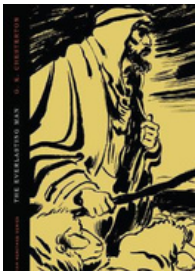
Leisure, it must be remembered, is not a Sunday afternoon idyll, but the preserve of freedom, of education and culture, and of that undiminished humanity which views the world as a whole. ~Josef Pieper



ANOTHER SORT OF LEARNING

JAMES V. SCHALL

The late, great Jesuit political philosopher wrote this book as a guide to a classical liberal education. I can do no better than quote the (very long!) subtitle: “Selected contrary essays on how to acquire an education while still in college or anywhere else: containing some belated advice about how to employ your leisure time when ultimate questions remain perplexing in spite of your highest earned academic degree, together with sundry lists nowhere else in captivity to be found.” If you enjoy lists like this present one, you will absolutely love this book by Schall. A delightful book which gives you a desire to read a lot more books!

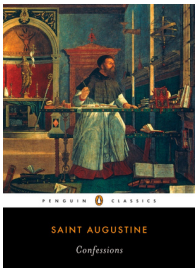


THE EVERLASTING MAN

G.K. CHESTERTON

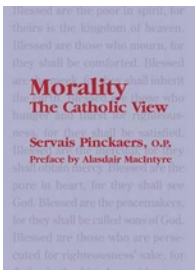
Orthodoxy is Chesterton’s most famous Christian work, but *The Everlasting Man* is the first book I read when younger that really drew me to the intellectual richness of Christian faith. The book is divided into two parts: the first addresses the question of the human person; the second, Jesus Christ. In his introduction, Chesterton writes: “I do desire to help the reader to see Christendom from the outside in the sense of seeing it as a whole, against the background of other historic things; just as I desire him to see humanity as a whole against the background of natural things.” As per Chesterton’s other works, do not come looking for rigorous academic discourse, but certainly come for the sense of wonder, the strange, the argument, and the joy.

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee. ~ Augustine of Hippo



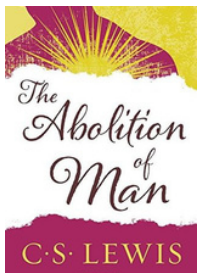
CONFESSIONS AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Said to be the first autobiography in the modern sense, Augustine's classic account of his conversion remains a breathtaking and very intimate portrait of a man seeking his heart's true desire. The remarkable thing about the book is how Augustine combines the personal account of his search for the truth with an account of the truth he finds. It is poetic and academic, beautiful and true.



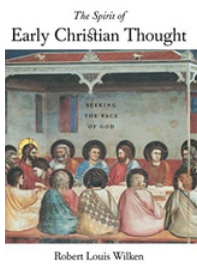
MORALITY: THE CATHOLIC VIEW SERVAIS-THÉODORE PINCKAERS

This little book is a summary of Pinckaers' magnum opus, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*. Pinckaers' work synthesises brilliantly the key dimensions of Christian morality, a morality that, contrary to stereotype, is not moralism. His work highlights the importance of happiness, the virtues, and an authentic understanding of human freedom. He also provides a wonderful intellectual history of Christian ethics. The best short introductory work on the moral life that I know of.



THE ABOLITION OF MAN C.S. LEWIS

This great apologist, novelist and man of letters was asked to deliver a series of lectures on education, and this book is the very profound result. Lewis rails against the tendency in modern education to neglect universal truth, morality and judgement. The superb first chapter, “Men Without Chests”, finishes with this memorable quote: “In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”



THE SPIRIT OF EARLY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT – SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN

This is a wonderful collation of the key insights of the early Church fathers. Wilken’s work is very accessible, highlighting the intrinsic link between sacred Scripture and how the early Christians lived, thought and worshipped. Often, Church history can be a little dry, but Wilken brings these great early Church figures alive by providing historical context and highlighting their key works, which more often than not addressed key pastoral and human problems of these early centuries of Christian life.



FIDES ET RATIO: ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

JOHN PAUL II

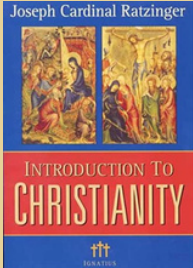
Written at the end of the second millennium, St John Paul II's great encyclical draws out the harmony between philosophical and theological wisdom (reason and faith). So many of our contemporary problems have their root in the separation of faith and reason. An important motif of *Fides et Ratio* is the poverty of modern philosophy insofar as it neglects universal questions of meaning – what we might call wisdom. However, we can extend this to contemporary education in general, which neglects overarching wisdom in favour of specialisation and fragmentation. The magnificent opening of this letter is worth quoting in full:



Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves. ~ John Paul II

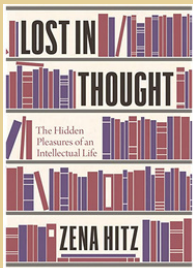
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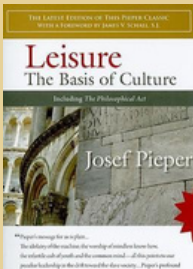
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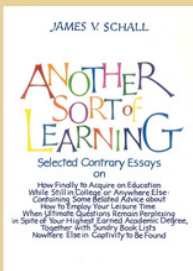
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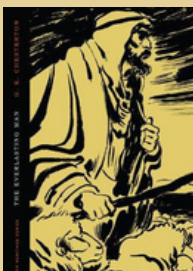
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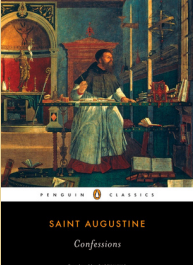


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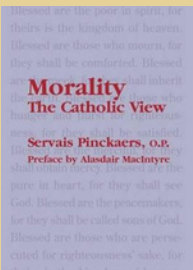
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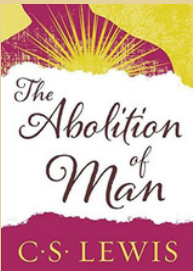
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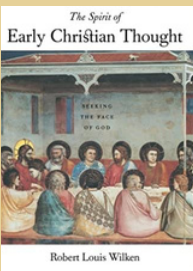
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