



On the Occasion of the Commemoration of St. Paisios (Velichkovsky)
(15 November) and the Beginning of the Nativity Fast

Great is the Benefit from the Reading of Patristic Texts*

The Devil Abhors Spiritual Books

THE VISION of Elder Sophronios as it appears below was taken from the very edifying life of St. Paisios (Velichkovsky) (translated by Father Seraphim [Rose] [Forestville, CA: Saint Paisius Abbey Press, 1994], pp. 259-262).

St. Paisios, who was born in 1722 in Poltava, Russia [Romanian Ukraine], and reposed in 1794 at the Monastery of Neamț in Moldavia [Romania], was distinguished for his great zeal for Patristic texts, taking unsparing pains for their discovery, copying, and translation.

In our days, glory to God, innumerable spiritual books are available, the reading of which brings the soul to compunction and rouses it from the torpor of negligence and self-love.

The narrative which follows helps us to understand that the lack of spiritual desire for the study of godly works is due to Satanic action, which provokes us to various “excuses in sins,” so that we do not apply ourselves “to the fountain” of Patristic writings.

May the life of St. Paisios, which we enthusiastically recommend, decisively help us in this important matter for the salvation of our souls.



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The Vision of Elder Sophronios

THE FOLLOWING awesome vision clearly reveals the great benefit and salvation which comes from the study of edifying books, and hence the enmity which the demons have towards them, in that these books destroy their snares and devices. The vision was revealed some hundred years ago to a pious abbot of the Monastery of Niamets, which had been founded by the saintly Paisius Velichkovsky.

Some years after the repose of the righteous Paisius, the austerity of the monastery's life began to grow lax, on one hand because of the great wealth it had acquired, and on the other because of the great freedom that was allowed to people of the world who came to visit the monastery.

Some came with their whole families to stay in the monastery for two or three months during the summer, spending their time in various worldly entertainments.

The monks became negligent in their rule and began rather to care for their vineyards and gardens in the monastery's holdings.

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ONE OF the disciples of the saintly Paisius, Sophronius by name, being the abbot at the time, led an austere and spiritual life.

One night, thinking that it had already dawned, Sophronius went out by the monastery's gate and looked towards the outer gate, at the place where the holy spring lies today.

There he saw a man, black in appearance and fearful in form. He wore the garb of a military officer and cried loudly, as officers do when they are giving commands to their troops. His eyes were blood red and shone like flames of fire. His mouth was like that of an ape and his teeth protruded from his mouth. At his waist he had entwined around him a large serpent, whose head hung down with its tongue hanging out like a sword. On his shoulders there rested "galoons" shaped like the heads of asps and on his head he wore a hat, from which venomous snakes extended their bodies and wrapped themselves like hair around his neck.

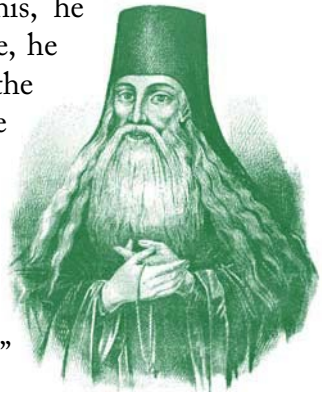
When the abbot Sophronius saw this, he became petrified from fear. After a while, he came to himself somewhat and asked the officer of darkness what he sought on the monastery's premises at such an hour.

"Can it be that you do not know that I am the Chief Commander here in your Monastery?" answered the black one.

"We have no army here, and our country is enjoying a period of profound peace," replied the abbot.

"Then be it known to you," answered the black one, "that I am sent from the unseen hosts of darkness and we are here to wage war against the monastic order. When you make your promises at your tonsure, you declare an unseen war on us and you inflict many wounds on us with your spiritual weaponry. Many times we retreat in shame, since the flame of your prayers burns us. Now, however, we no longer fear you, especially ever since Paisius, your abbot, died. He terrified us and we suffered [*sic*] much at his hands. Ever since he came here from the Holy Mountain with sixty other monks, I was sent with sixty thousand of our own troops to stop him. As long as he was in charge, we had no rest. In spite of all the temptations, devices and snares that we tried against him and his monks, we availed nothing. At the same time, the tongue of man cannot tell what terrible afflictions, hardships and trials we suffered during that man's sojourn here. He was an experienced soldier and his strategies always caught us off our guard.

"However, after he died things let up a bit and we were able to remove ten thousand of our troops from this front, and so fifty thousand of us were left. When the monks began becoming negligent in their rule and began having more concern for their fields and houses and vineyards, we relieve another ten thousand of our troops of their duties here and the remaining forty thousand stood by to continue the offense. Then, a few years later, some of the monks decided to change Paisius' rule, and the monks became divided and some left. In the meantime, laymen were allowed to rent rooms in the monastery, and when they brought their women in also, we



Saint Paisios

had a victory celebration and reduced our troops by another ten thousand. Later, when the schools for young boys were opened, the battle came well nigh to an end, and we were able to reduce our troops by another ten thousand, leaving only twenty thousand of us here to take care of the monks.”

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WHEN THE Abbot Sophronius heard these things, he groaned within himself and asked the black one: “What further need have you to remain in the monastery, seeing how, as you yourself confess, the monks have given up their fight? What further work is there left for you here?”

Then, being constrained by the might of God, the ugly one revealed his secret.

“It is true that there is no longer anyone to fight against us as of old, since your love has grown cold and you have become engrossed with worldly and earthly affairs. But there is still one thing left in this monastery that disturbs us and causes us anxiety. It is those filthy rags, I mean the books—perdition take them!—that you have in your library. We live in fear and trembling lest any of the younger monks ever take them into his hands and begin reading them. Once they begin reading those accursed rags, they learn of your ancient piety and your ancient enmity against us, and the little upstarts begin raging against us. They learn that the Christians of old, both lay and monastic, used to pray unceasingly, fast, examine and confess their thoughts, keep vigil and live as though they were foreigners and strangers in this world. Then, simple-minded as they are, they actu-

ally being putting that foolishness into practice. Furthermore, they even take all of the Scriptures seriously. They rave and rail against us like wild beasts; let me tell you, one of those hot-headed fools is enough to chase us all out of here. They become as unrelenting and uncompromising with us as your executed Leader (the Saviour). We have come to have such peace and concord with you. But those so-



called spiritual books of yours are a constant source of enmity and discord. Why can't we have peace? Why don't you read my books? Are they not spiritual also? For I too am a spirit, am I not? And I too inspire men to write books. But all that is needed is for one of those wretched rags which you call parchments to fall into the hands of some simple fool and a whole conflagration begins anew and we are forced to flee and take up arms against you once more."



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THE POOR ABBOT, unable any longer to keep silence, asked him, "What is your greatest weapon against the monastics in these our times?"

And he answered:

"Our whole concern at present is to keep monks and nuns away from spiritual occupations, especially prayer and the reading of those smoky books. Why don't you spend more time taking care of your gardens and vineyards, of your fishing and schools for the young, of your hospitality for all those good people who come here during the summer for the fresh air and pure water? The monastics who busy themselves in such pursuits are caught in our nets like flies in a spider's web. Until all those books have been either destroyed or corroded with time, we will have no peace. They are like darts in our side."

No sooner had he finished these words, than the semantron was struck for the service of Matins. Straightaway, the officer of the demonic hosts vanished like smoke.

The abbot arose with great pain of soul because of these revelations and came in the church.

When the monks had gathered, he told them with tears everything he had seen and heard during that terrible apparition.

Then he commanded that all these things be recorded for the edification of those that would come after.

*Source: Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 247 (March-April 1992), pp. 58-60.