

Human Tape-recorders (Saint Paisios the Athonite)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Because of so much reading, people today have ended up as tape-recorders and their cassettes are full of superfluous things. But according to Abba Isaac, teaching without action is a 'repository of shame'.

You see, lots of people who are interested in sports read sports magazines or newspapers and just sit there like lemons, but they admire the athletes. 'He's amazing', they say. 'Well done'. But they don't break a sweat themselves or shed a couple of pounds in weight. They read and read about sports and lie around. That's not doing them any good. All they have is the pleasure of reading.

Some secular-minded people read newspapers, others read a romance or an adventure, or go to the stadium to watch the game and pass their time. Some of those who read spiritual texts do the same. They may stay up all night madly reading spiritual books and they're happy. They pick up a spiritual book, settle down comfortably for a bit and start reading.



‘That’s done me good’, they say. Better to say you’ve enjoyed yourself, that you’ve had a pleasant time. Because it hasn’t done you good at all. It’s of benefit only when you see what you’ve read, examine yourself and then try to make an effort to put it into practice. ‘What does what I read mean? Where am I spiritually? What should I do?’ And there’s the fact that the more you learn, the more responsibility you have. I’m not saying not to read, not to know a lot and not to have responsibility, because that would be misleading. But don’t read just for pleasure.

The bad thing is that if you read a lot and you’ve got a good memory, you remember a lot. You can then say a lot and fool yourself into thinking that you’re actually applying what you’ve read. In this way, you create a false picture, both for yourself and for other people. So don’t be content only with reading a lot. Make sure you apply it. Wide reading edifies people in a general way. The aim is, however, to become educated in a God-centred way. I’ve no intention of going and becoming a university professor*, in which case I’d be obliged to know all sorts of things. If I need to learn something from another sphere of knowledge, I’ll be able to easily enough, as long as I’ve acquired God-centred education.

*** Had this been his aim, he’d have made a fine one. I remember when I translated his book on Saint Arsenios, Elder Paΐsios asked me to write an introduction to the English text. I did so and we then met at the Monastery at Souroti to discuss it. The meeting took me straight back to tutorials at Oxford. The Elder went through the text with me, essentially, though very gently, indicating that it wasn’t much good and then went on to**

give me specific directions on how he wanted the introduction to be [WJL].

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