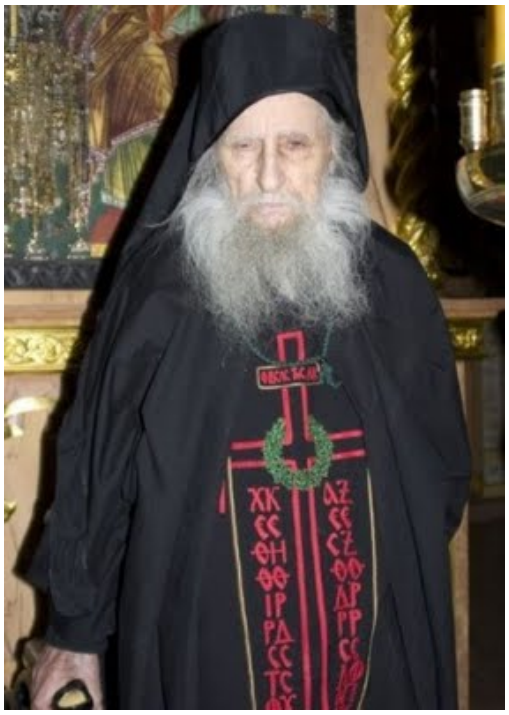
7 Σεπτεμβρίου 2016

# Unwavering fidelity to the holy tradition (Dive Ascent)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English

Image not found or type unknown



*Dr. Constantine Cavarnos*

*An interview conducted by Dive Ascent (DA), Vol. 3/4, with Dr. Constantine Cavarnos (DC) about his life's work, and in particular his focus on Photios Kontoglou, the Greek iconographer, painter, and writer of the last century.*

***

**DA:** Over the years, Orthodox Christians of North America and Greece have come to know you through your many books and articles. When you began writing, did you set out to become a prolific writer?

**DC:** While I was still an undergraduate at Harvard, I developed a strong aspiration to become an educator and a prolific writer. This aspiration was occasioned by my growing awareness of the great ignorance, the false teachings, the wickedness, violence, and suffering throughout the world. I saw the way out of these as

enlightenment through the written and spoken word.

**DA:** How many books have you written?

**DC:** About sixty, 70% of which are in English, the rest in Greek. After winning the Bowdoin Prize at Harvard in 1947 for my work *A Dialogue Between Bergson, Aristotle, and Philologos,* I was appointed a Traveling Fellow in Philosophy for the academic year 1947–48 to study philosophical trends in Greece, France, and England. During this time, I was working on my Ph.D. dissertation on *The Classical Theory of Relations,* benefitting on this subject from my conferences with the leading philosophers in these countries. In Greece, I had private discussions with leading philosophers: Voreas and Theodorakopoulos from the University of Athens; Bachelard, Schuhl, and Souriau from the Sorbonne in France; Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, Gilbert Ryle from the University of Cambridge and Oxford University. I also sat in on some of their classes and seminars. When I returned to the United States, my dissertation was accepted by the Philosophy Department at Harvard. Then in 1949 I had my *Dialogue* published. That was my first published book. Eight years later, I published my second book, which I began working on in 1952, when I first met Photios Kontoglou: *Byzantine Sacred Art.*

**DA:** Which has been published several times?

**DC:** Three times. It was published in Greek last year for the first time, at the completion of thirty years since Kontoglou's death—a kind of memorial to Kontoglou. The publishing house was Astir Publishing Company, of Alexander and Evangelos Papademitrou. This is a very prestigious publishing company. The book has some fifty color plates of great masterpieces of Byzantine iconography and two dozen black-and-white ones. It is a folio of 270 pages, beautifully printed, with a case. This is my most impressive-looking book. Its title is *He Hierá Byzantiné Techne.*

Photios Kontoglou

**DA:** This relationship with Kontoglou was really an inspiration for much of your later work, was it not?

**DC:** Yes, Diogenes, the Athenian philosopher, walked around with a lantern, daytime or anytime. People said, what are you doing? He said, I am looking for a man, for a real human being. I went around as the Sheldon Traveling Fellow in Greece, in France, and in England, and I did not find the man I was looking for with the lantern. I found him in 1952, at the recommendation of a Greek friend of mine whom I had met at Oxford—the philologist Basil Laourdas. Late in 1948, I wrote about Kontoglou very enthusiastically, in Greek, in the periodical *Hellenism Abroad.* Kontoglou saw this and wrote a very nice letter to the editor. That article helped Kontoglou be recognized as a remarkable writer and a painter.

**DA:** Why was Kontoglou "the man" you were in search of on your travels?

**DC:** Well, what I believed and how I felt was found in Kontoglou written large, so to speak.

**DA:** He personified your ideals?

**DC:** Our ideas, ideals, and perspectives all coincided. Very forcefully. What I found in Kontoglou was Greece, the whole of the Greek Tradition: *Paradosis.* The national tradition, the Greek tradition, Orthodoxy. All of them in Kontoglou—a great master of Iconography, an enthusiast for Byzantine music—all of the things that I prized so much were found embodied in Kontoglou's work and in his beliefs and thought. If I were to single out any human being—teachers I had in high school, college, people I met in the different countries I visited—Kontoglou stood out for me as the most

important figure.

**DA:** What followed after your first meeting with Kontoglou?

**DC:** When I met Kontoglou in 1952, he lived in a garage that some wealthy family gave to him and his wife because he had to sell his house to make a living during the German occupation. Together, Kontoglou and I went around visiting churches that he had decorated with mural and panel icons. Then we went, together with his publisher Alexander Papademetriou, to the monastery of Father Philotheos Zervakos, Longovarda, on theisland ofParos. Kontoglou and Papademitrou used to go to Zervakos to confess. One outstanding figure led me to two others. I had found my mentor, Kontoglou, and he introduced me to my future publisher, Papademetriou, and to a great spiritual figure, blessed Elder Philotheos Zervakos. The Papademetriou Publishing Company, Astir, became and has remained my chief Greek publisher.

**DA:** Didn't your interest in theHolyMountain grow out of these relationships?

**DC:** I went to theHolyMountain to study the art, life, and thought there. With regard to art, I was teaching a course in aesthetics, that is, the philosophy of beauty and the fine arts, at theUniversity ofNorth Carolina inChapel Hill. I needed slides, and I borrowed many from the collection of the professor of Art History there. However, he did not have any on Byzantine art, in which I was greatly interested. So I went toMount Athos equipped with my camera, photometer, and tripod and did a considerable amount of photographing. When I returned toAthens, I spent many hours on the Acropolis, studying the architecture of the Parthenon and photographing it. Thus I built up a good slide collection for my class in aesthetics. Then I went deeper and deeper into the Byzantine Tradition through Kontoglou and the holy Church Fathers. During 1957–59 I had a Fulbright grant as a research scholar in modern Greek thought. This was a very productive period. Almost every Sunday I would go to see Kontoglou at his home and talk with him, and he took me around to churches he had decorated. My relationship with Kontoglou was very intimate, very important.

**DA:** He was like a spiritual father to you?

**DC:** A spiritual father, yes. He was what the Russians would call a *staretz,* for me. He was very open. I could call on him anytime at his home, and he would open up, and we would converse and sometimes eat together. His wife would join us. A very friendly atmosphere. The door was always open. And sometimes important people came on Sunday to speak with him. I met many good people this way: painters,

writers, professors, clergymen, monks.

**DA:** Could you summarize the principle upon which this relationship operated and what he chiefly communicated to you?

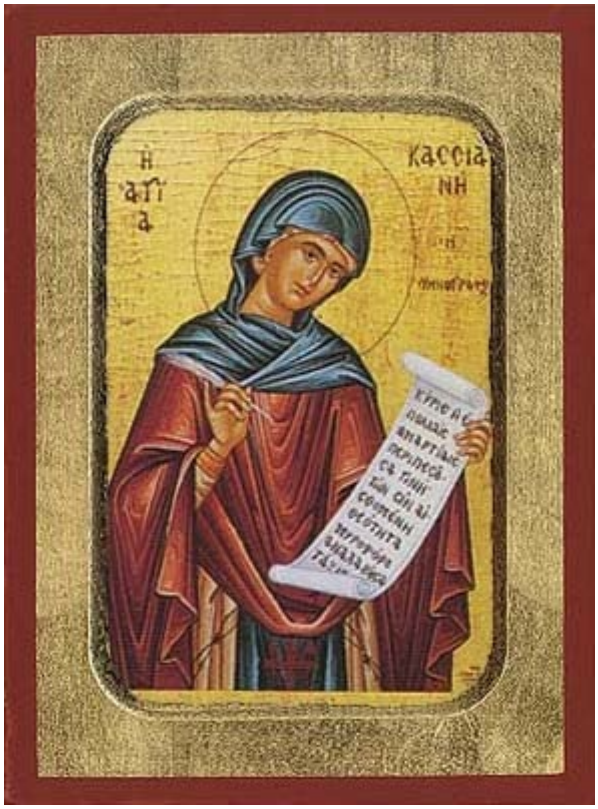
**DC:** It began with my interest in the aesthetics of Byzantine Art as a part of the course I was teaching at the time. I wanted firsthand knowledge, and Kontoglou was the best teacher I had found. Then it spread out to music, because Kontoglou had written about Byzantine music and was proficient in chanting. Sometimes he brought excellent cantors *(psaltai)* to his home so that I could record them chanting—just for me! Several of the leading cantors of Greece came at Kontoglou's invitation. So a lot of things developed. I met many others through Kontoglou because he was known by pretty much everyone of any significance. He also put at my disposal the totality of what he had written in books, encyclopedias, newspapers and periodicals. He would sometimes tell me to go to such and such a place to find other articles. So Kontoglou greatly helped me gather the material for *Byzantine Sacred Art.*

**DA:** Where do you think he received the treasure he had that he was giving to you? Where did he draw this treasure from?

**DC:** I would say that initially he owed much to Stephanos Kontoglou, his uncle who was a monk. Kontoglou was born in Asia Minor, in the city ofKydoniai, which is across fromLesvos, where my origins are. His uncle was abbot of the Monastery of Hagia Paraskevi, outside of Kydoniai.

**DA:** This was Photios Kontoglou's initial inspiration, a monastic uncle?

**DC:** Yes, that's how he learned to chant, from his uncle. And how he learned to read the holy books of the Church. He received his monastic training with his uncle. He also attended one of the best Greek schools at that time, a school of higher learning at Kydoniai. They had a very solid program of studies and character-building.




*Icon written by Photios Kontoglou*

**DA:** How would you describe the first principles that Kontoglou operated on? What are his basic life principles or values?

**DC:** His roots are in the Orthodox Church and Faith, including its sacred arts, especially iconography and Byzantine chant. He read many religious books. He also went toParis to study art, going to art galleries, making copies, and so forth. Earlier he had gone from Kydoniai toAthens to study at theSchool ofFine Arts for a year or two. His art education was pretty much of a secular nature, because Byzantine Art at that time was despised both inAthens at theSchool ofFine Arts and inEurope. He was well trained in that tradition; he knew the Renaissance painters and could talk about them in a learned way. Then he went back to Kydoniai and taught history of art and French language at a girl's high school. In 1922, the Turks killed or expelled all the Greeks of Asia Minor. He left, before he was to be killed by the Turks, and went toLesvos by sailboat with the surviving members of his family. He was a refugee without anything except what he was able to carry. He was very particular about bringing along his icons. He kept them with him at home until his very last day. These were very old, traditional icons that had come down to his family through the monastery of Hagia Paraskevi.

**DA:** You say in your article written soon after his death that in the prologue to *Pedro Cazas* he set forth some of the basic ideas on the arts, by which he abided ever after.

**DC:** On the basis of that prologue and something he said in his second book, *Vasanta,* I wrote an article on these ideas.

**DA:** Can you describe any of those for us?

**DC:** He laid great emphasis on clarity and simplicity of style, sincerity, and vigor. These were his leading principles of good writing. He accepted the French saying, “Style is a man,” that style is the expression of the character of a man, of his inner resources. He believed that very strongly and remarked that many writings that were published by others lacked vigor. His writings have vigor of expression because he was a man of strong character. He thought the contemporary scene lacked that. The older writers had it: clarity, simplicity, sincerity, vigor, good organization—not things hastily put together, loosely written. He also held that everything written should contain and convey some wisdom from the author to the reader.

**DA:** Where would he say this wisdom chiefly comes from? Where would a writer acquire this wisdom?

**DC:** Through good education and wide reading. He believed in encyclopedic knowledge, to know something about everything. To know something about history, geography, what writers have done outside ofGreece, your own cultural tradition, the Byzantine tradition and ancient Greek culture. All of this was encompassed in the encyclopedic knowledge of Kontoglou. He took in the whole culture and tradition ofGreece—from the ancient poets, legislators, philosophers, to the Byzantines, to the heroes of the Greek Revolution of 1821, to the contemporaries. He admired heroic people. That admiration was very strong in him. This was carried on to the admiration of the Christian martyrs and ascetics. The most heroic individuals were for him the great martyrs and the great ascetics. The heroic spirit is part of the unbroken Greek Cultural Tradition: there are the heroes of Homer, those ofMarathon, and the Early Martyrs and the New Martyrs. Heroism began as a kind of moral heroism and evolved into a spiritual heroism. This is something Kontoglou was very alive to, and it comes through in his works.

**DA:** What do you think Photios Kontoglou would say today about what has happened to our educational system? He was broadly educated and knew many subjects well.

**DC:** Kontoglou would have said that our educational system has broken away from the classics and from Christianity. He himself knew the Greek language in all its historical forms: ancient, Hellenistic, Patristic, modern—both purist and demotic. In his writings you will find many quotations from ancient Greek writers, from Holy Scripture, from the hymns of the Orthodox Church, from the holy Church Fathers. He had access to all these treasures because he knew the language in which they are written. He also knew French well and had read Pascal's *Penseés,* which are a defense of the Christian religion, and French editions of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*—another Christian classic—and of other important Christian writers, such as Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky.

**DA:** Why do you think that he broke out of the mold that seemed to be formed inGreece at that time? He took his own path and spoke against modernization, did he not?

**DC:** What happened with famous recent Greek intellectuals and writers, such as Kazantzakis, Sikelianos, and Seferis, was that they lacked the most important dimension of Greek culture, that is, Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Byzantine Church Fathers and Saints were not assimilated by them. Kontoglou had close contact with the spiritual dimension of Hellenism that they had lost. He had that continuity within him, encompassing all the treasures of the Greek cultural tradition, religious and secular.

**DA:** Do you think that a contemporary writer attempting to write a novel inspired by the Orthodox tradition could look to Kontoglou as a modern example of someone who was successful and faithful in combining all of these elements with Orthodoxy at the center?

**DC:** Yes. However, many writers who tried to imitate him in his language and style have not succeeded because it was only an imitation and did not spring from within, from the source. With Kontoglou, this vigor of expression, sincerity, appreciation of the treasures of the Greek tradition were not mere imitation, they were real, he lived them. Another writer may try to imitate something stylistically in Kontoglou, but it doesn't really have the power that Kontoglou has. The novelist Kazantzakis was a great admirer of Kontoglou. He admired him for his style, not for what he said or what he believed in, but for the sheer power of his expression. He

was also admired for his style by writers like the poet Sikelianos and the novelist Prevelakis, who had cut themselves off from the Byzantine heritage. That's an important thing for Kontoglou; he emphasized this point to me.

Once I learned that he was writing for the daily Athenian newspaper *Eleutheria.* I immediately subscribed to it and renewed my subscription to it until he died. On one opportune occasion, I told him that I thought he wrote too many times about pirates and sea stories. Kontoglou said, "I have to do that because otherwise the newspaper will not print my religious articles. They say that people don't enjoy religious articles. But what happens is that by reading these stories they also begin to read my religious writings." They so admired his style that they began to read his religious articles, too, just to enjoy the style of Kontoglou. Yet, they also began to absorb the religious content of Kontoglou's writings.

**DA:** What would Kontoglou say about some of the real challenges that are facing the Church today? What would he say about modernization or ecumenism? How did he approach this? Was he unique?

**DC:** We often discussed that. I have a whole collection of letters where he discusses modernism and Ecumenism. Kontoglou was a clear-minded man. He knew what he believed and what he did not believe, very strongly, very clearly. He was not muddleheaded.

**DA:** Some people might say that he is too black-and-white, that there is more grey in the world.

**DC:** Some would say he's a fanatic, an extremist, narrow-minded, possessing an "Old Calendarist" mentality, and missing the contemporary progress of man.

**DA:** What do you say to that?

**DC:** I mention some of these things in my book *Meetings with Kontoglou.* He was not scared by these epithets. He went on his way. He believed in what he was doing, and if people thought he was wrong he was not upset. Kontoglou was not motivated by money, although he could have been fabulously rich, like Picasso. Picasso became very rich because, as Kontoglou put it, "Picasso catered to herds of decadent souls." Kontoglou did not want to sacrifice his creed, his beliefs, his convictions just to be financially successful. That's a very important point.

**DA:** Was he outspoken in the Athenian daily?

**DC:** Yes. He criticized the Greeks for the many evils that have crept into the Greek

mentality. One of the pervasive evils was *Xenomania:* excessive and indiscriminate love of things of foreign origin and the uncritical acceptance of them. This came out again and again in his writings. *Xenomania* is still a widespread disease of the Greeks. It is one of the reasons that they disparaged the Byzantine heritage and the Orthodox tradition. This stand of Kontoglou also meant being very critical of the modern West and the papal church, which he considered a very distorted form of Christianity. He was adamantly opposed to the ecumenism started in 1963 by Athenagoras, Patriarch of Constantinople. Until the end of his life in 1965, Kontoglou was the strongest voice against ecumenism.

**DA:** Was there anything visionary or prophetic about his insights regarding ecumenism?

**DC:** I would not say prophetic, except that from what has happened in the past one could foresee what would happen in our time and in the future, if we don't heed the experience of the past. For instance, the false union at Ferrara-Florence in the fifteenth century was very vivid in his mind. Its consequences were destructive: after a few yearsConstantinople fell to the Turks. This was not a coincidence; rather it was the natural sequence of not being faithful to the Church. It was abandonment by God for apostasy.

**DA:** So he saw a direct relationship between the apostasy and the Turkish conquest?

**DC:** Yes, that is what comes through in his writings. And he felt the same thing would happen again, if we go along with Athenagoras's type of ecumenism. The end result would be that the Greeks would become puppets of theVatican and would lose their identity. He believed, for instance, if the Greeks had accepted union withRome in the fifteenth century as a result of the Pseudo Synod, their cultural and historical identity and Orthodox Faith would have been lost very quickly. It was the refusal of Saint Mark ofEphesus, whom we greatly admire, saying No! to this false union, which savedGreece from being de-Hellenized and losing its national character and spiritual treasures. Kontoglou foresaw all this development and that is why he strongly opposed ecumenism.

**DA:** Of the contemporaries of Photios Kontoglou, to whom was he closest? With whom did he share a oneness of mind?

**DC:** On the question of ecumenism, there were many, whom I mention in my book *Ecumenism Examined:* namely, his spiritual Father Archimandrite Philotheos Zervakos; his publisher Alexander Papademetriou; the Archbishop of Athens and all

of Greece Chrysostomos; Metropolitan of Phlorina Augoustinos Kantiotis; Metropolitan of Argolis Chrysostomos; Abbot Gabriel of the Monastery of Dionysiou on the Holy Mountain; Father Theocletos of the same Monastery; Archimandrite Haralambos Vasilopoulos, founder of the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union and of its organ “Orthodoxos Typos”; the professors of the School of Theology of the University of Athens: Panagiotis Trembelas, Ioannis Karmiris, Konstantinos Mouratidis, and Pantelis Paschos; the prominent preacher Nikolaos Soteropoulos; and many others. All of them also shared Kontoglou’s emphasis on the vital importance of studying the holy Church Fathers and adhering to the Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

**DA:** Why do you think that Philotheos Zervakos and Photios Kontoglou sided with the so-called “New Calender” Church?

**DC:** I explained this in Volume Eleven of my series *Modern Orthodox Saints*, which is devoted to blessed Philotheos Zervakos. From the very time the idea of introducing the New Calender was conceived, Father Philotheos wrote letters of protest saying, “No! Stop it; don’t do it,” but they did not listen to him. He wrote letters and brochures protesting this innovation until the time of his death. His predictions came true: he said that if you allow this innovation to stand, you will divide the people into two hostile parties. This prophecy of Zervakos was completely fulfilled. In his later years, when he saw that the Greek government, theChurch ofGreece, and the Oecumenical Patriarchate did not listen to him, he thought about simply returning his monastery to the Old Calender. On this matter, I suggest a careful reading of my book on Blessed Father Philotheos. His senior monk, Father Leontios, whom I happened to meet a few years before he died, said that Father Philotheos was very determined to declare that the monastery had returned to the Old Calender. But he was opposed by some of his senior monks, particularly Father Leontios. Every time the Elder left the monastery to travel as a Confessor, sometimes for weeks, Leontios was the acting abbot. So he had a strong voice. He emphasized that if they changed the monastery to the Old Calender, then the local bishop would immediately step in and force them to give up that idea, or else. The “or else” would be that the police would be sent over to expel the monks and say this monastery belongs to the local bishop of Paros andNaxos. Father Philotheos was close to the century mark, and Father Leontios was about the same age, and they pictured themselves being thrown out of monastery. It would have been a very tragic situation. So what Father Philotheos did was to die on the Old Calendar. He invited a confessor fromMount Athos, where the Old Calender is followed, to serve for his last confession and to bury him.

**DA:** And did Photios Kontoglou die with those following the New Calender?

**DC:** Well, Kontoglou himself was in a dilemma. He had followed pretty much the advice of Philotheos Zervakos to wait for the return of theChurch ofGreece to the Traditional Calender. In the 1960s, before Kontoglou died, the Archbishop of Athens was Chrysostomos, who was very venerable and traditional. I interviewed him once. He said he had made it one of his priorities before he died to return theChurch ofGreece to the Old Calender. So you see, Zervakos and Kontoglou were hoping that this dilemma would be resolved by him and that it would be done canonically by the Holy Synod of Greece. But it did not happen because the dictatorship that came into power removed Archbishop Chrysostomos from his throne and installed the priest of the palace, Hieronymos Kotsonis, a modernist and ecumenist, as Archbishop of Athens. It was a very difficult dilemma for them. What was one to do? A dilemma, you know, has two horns and no matter which one you choose it is bad. Kontoglou and Father Philotheos were hoping that the change would come down from the top in theChurch ofGreece. In the meantime, Photios consoled himself and was at peace with his conscience by attending services at a church in his neighborhood that followed the Old Calendar.

**DA:** From your fourteen years' association with Photios Kontoglou, what do you think his legacy is for us? What does his life and witness have to say to us today—especially to Orthodox Christians inAmerica?

**DC:** *Fidelity to Tradition.* In iconography, in music, in church architecture, in the liturgy of the Church, in all the other services of the Church, in keeping the faith—in all of these, keeping the Holy Canons, avoiding all compromises in the doctrines of the Church. The whole Orthodox Tradition must be preserved in this country. I am one of the people who have been trying to follow him in the struggle to preserve the Orthodox Tradition in this country. In striving to avoid all the subtle traps, innovations, and false unions of any kind, I am continuing Kontoglou's approach.

I am also studying and writing about the Church Fathers, especially the ascetical ones such as Saint Johnof the Ladder, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, and those in the *Philokalia*. We must continue to study them, write about them, and live according to their teachings. There is another thing that must be mentioned. Kontoglou was a strong lover of the monastics. He believed in the traditional, contemplative *(hesychastic)* Orthodox monastic life and not that of the activistic, Roman Catholic variety. In one of his works, he says that we must realize that wherever there were no monasteries, spirituality dried up, and wherever there is authentic monastic life and monasteries with a tradition of deep piety, Orthodoxy

flourishes.

**DA:** What about this? Today in Orthodoxy we have a lot of discussion, and not a little controversy, about the appearance of priests and monks in the West. There are those who would say that this is something for the old country. InAmerica we do things differently, because of where we are, and the situation dictates that we have to dress differently, and exterior things are not that important. What did Kontoglou have to say on this?

**DC:** Kontoglou wrote special articles about the *rasson* [cassock] for the priest. He would agree that the *rasson alone* does *not* make the priest. But it is *one* of the things, *together with others,* that make one a priest or a monk. Kontoglou would say the *rasson* is an essential. It's a symbol of Orthodoxy. The *beard* is also an essential part of the appearance for an Orthodox clergyman or monk. These things he emphasized very much, and he gave reasons from Tradition and common sense that this outer appearance of the priest or monk should continue to identify the clergyman or monk as truly Orthodox.

**DA:** So would this be correct? Photios would say that these things are integral parts of Orthodoxy, are expressive of Orthodoxy. They are not detached features, but are united with the image and symbols of Orthodoxy. Thus, abandoning these things is somehow minimizing Orthodoxy.

**DC:** Right. Some years ago, hardly any priest of the Greek Archdiocese in this country had a beard. But now, what has happened is that the younger priests have beards, most often trimmed, but still beards. Next to them is an old priest, a white-haired priest, completely shaven. Shaving off the beard cannot be justified by saying that we live in America and the beard is inappropriate here. Rather, it is quite acceptable now. Kontoglou was very resolute that a priest should have the beard and the *rasson* for his identity, the way a policeman has his specific police uniform when he goes out in the streets. Seeing it, you know he's a policeman.

**DA:** Did Kontoglou ever make a distinction between the so-called "big–T Tradition and small–t tradition"? Such a view states that there are some traditions in the realm of dogma, doctrine, and spirituality that are absolutely non-negotiable, but there are smaller traditions like beards and *rassa* that are negotiable. You don't have to have them, but you may have them. Did he ever make any distinctions like that?

**DC:** He did not make such a distinction. He believed that innumerable things organically related make Orthodoxy and give it its identity. Everything is

organically related. About the Church's arts, for example, he would say that iconography addresses itself to our sense of sight, while music addresses itself to our sense of hearing, but both seek to express the *same essence,* the Orthodox Faith. Architecture has its own tradition, particularly recognizable in the dome, in the round arch, and by the surfaces that are used for the wall paintings, which other kinds of architecture, such as the Gothic, do not provide. The architecture of the Orthodox church is a very important element of the totality; in other words, all of these arts are organically interrelated, though using different media. The iconography, hymnody, music, and architecture of the Byzantine tradition are trying to convey the *same* thing. They have the same point of origin: they all spring from and are used to communicate the Orthodox Faith and make it apprehensible to the believer through the senses. Thus, you can see the organic unity of the fine arts of Orthodoxy. You can also see it in the appearance of the priest, the monk, the form of the prayers, and the Liturgy. All of these things are organically related to one another. If you say that traditional iconography is not essential, or the traditional music is secondary and can be replaced with organs or violins, while still retaining Orthodoxy—that's not so! When you eliminate these things, what's left? Soon you'll begin toning down the dogmas because of *minimalism* or *relativism.* The Greeks have a word for this: *xephtisma,* "unravelment." Your pants are torn in one place, you let that go, then the tear spreads out. If you don't patch it up in time, it will spread more and more, and the whole garment then falls to pieces. So you have to mend it. If you don't take the time to repair any kind of break from the Tradition, then the whole thing begins to fall apart. And that's what has happened to much of the Orthodox world. It's falling apart in this way, saying: This does not matter, that is not essential, that's unimportant, that's a convention, and so forth.

**DA:** Kontoglou reminds us to "stay faithful to the Tradition."

**DC:** Yes, because the Tradition brings everything together in a meaningful, beautiful, organic relationship with everything else.

**DA:** It gives us life.

**DC:** It gives us life and solves unnecessary problems and unnecessary worries that are created by "modernization" and ecumenism.

**DA:** Kontoglou foresaw these things thirty years ago and earlier, and you have seen them while writing your sixty books in the last four decades. Are we in a place now in which we have, perhaps, progressed even further down the road than in Kontoglou's time?

**DC:** Of course.

**DA:** It almost appears that we are overcome by these innovations, which are raining down like a terrible thunderstorm on the Church. Where do we start, where does the parish and the priest begin the task of repairing before the whole garment falls apart? How do we begin on the road to restoration?

**DC:** I would say that there are different things one has to struggle with. One of the first things to see is that most of this falling apart, these innovations, is a result of *ignorance.* That is at the root of all these things. So we have to write *enlightening* books, articles, and letters, as Kontoglou did. Kontoglou wrote countless letters. I have ninety of his letters. Those who possess the needed knowledge and understanding must write and teach, in order to enlighten people, to cure the sickness of ignorance. Well-equipped bookshops should be organized in all parishes and monasteries. Also, there should be edifying lectures at the parishes, offered from time to time, especially during the fall season and Great Lent.

**DA:** It's a long process.

**DC:** Indeed. It's a process that takes time and has to be done continuously by as many people as possible. The other sad factor is *indifference.* So the religious feeling of people has to be warmed up. The coldness that is conducive to the death of the faith must be banished. Good writings, good sermons, and personal conversation with people are some means of doing this. Indifference is rooted in ignorance. People are indifferent to something they do not know, do not understand. Indifference often comes because one does not understand the doctrines of the Church, the canons, or the significance of such practices as fasting and the Jesus Prayer.

**DA:** Does ignorance, therefore, lead to a perversion of the Faith?

**DC:** Yes. Faith comes to be viewed as akin to magic. Christianity is not magical. It's a Divine-human relationship involving prayer on our part, the sincere prayer of believing Christians and other spiritual practices as well, before we can hope for a response to come from God. Erroneously, people think they can obtain Divine benefits without paying the spiritual price for them.

**DA:** So, to receive the benefit of Holy Orthodoxy one has to work hard to empty himself and allow Orthodoxy, the Tradition, and the Spirit of God to come into him; one has to have faith?

**DC:** This is the *foundation.* Faith, in the sense of espousing wholeheartedly true doctrines and practices, is the *foundation.*

**DA:** In conclusion, let me ask you: there still seems to be a great challenge for zealous Orthodox people to be connected to the life-giving tradition of the Holy Fathers. Such people are alive and awake to the holy tradition, yet could be in a spot in American Orthodoxy where that tradition is not readily accessible. What do we say to someone in this situation?

**DC:** A person must have zeal and persistently search for a place—a parish in the "world" or a monastery—where there is authentic, traditional Orthodox Christianity. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

---

*This article was originally published by the Monastery of St. John, www.monasteryofstjohn.org, in The Divine Ascent Vol. 3/4.*
*This and other publications can be found on their bookstore website, www.stjohnsbookstore.com. This article was posted here with permission.*