

KONTOGLOU'S STORIES

As Told to Archimandrite Panteleimon
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Introduction

Every generation needs to be catechized and instructed in the Faith. Although we older folks may have heard the lessons many times, the younger people have not heard them at all. And so, the parables need to be repeated. In any case, as the saying goes, "repetition is the mother of learning." That's why we read the Gospels again and again.

The following are some very instructive (and humorous) stories that the famous iconographer, Photios Kontoglou, liked to tell, and which we repeat here for the benefit of the young people who have never heard them before.

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Many Years, Sultán Efféndi!

Once, in the East there lived a King — a Sultan. He was evil, and hated by all; and he knew it. One day, he decided to disguise himself and go for a walk in the streets and alleys of the city which he ruled, in order to see and hear what the people said of him. Everywhere he went he heard nothing else but people cursing him. Of course, they did not realize that, disguised as he was, he could hear everything that they were saying. And it so happened, as he was passing by a narrow alley, a certain grandmother was sitting on her doorstep and, seeing him, she said: "Many Years to you, Sultán Efféndi, Many Years!"

The King was astounded, hearing something in his favor for the first time, and thus he said to her. "So, you recognize me? You know who I am?"

"Well" she said to him, "I am very old and know your whole genealogy. I knew your grandfather, your father, and many of your kindred. How then

could I not recognize you? You may have changed your clothes, but you have not changed your face or ways."

"So," said the King, "you knew my grandfather and my father. Pray tell me then, my grandfather — what kind of man was he?"

The old grandmother answered him: "He was an evil man, bloodthirsty, a beast of a man; all feared him, and trembled in his presence. No one could approach him to speak to him."

"And my father — what kind of man was he?" asked the King.

"Two times worse, even more bloodthirsty, of the vilest to be found among men, a true monster. If he looked at you, and he didn't like your looks, he'd cut off your head — for no other reason. The whole Kingdom shuddered before him," said the old woman.

"And I?" asked the King.

"For this reason," said she, "did I wish you 'Many Years, Sultán Efféndi'. It suffices that I have lived to see three of your lineage. I pray that you will live *many* years and that I die in your lifetime, so that I will not live to see a fourth come out from your lineage. For in every succeeding generation you turn out to be thrice worse monsters than in the previous. I am very old and do not care if you kill me — for this reason I tell you the truth."

"You see," Kontoglou would say, "one should wish the present Church leaders many, many years, because, for sure, worse ones will follow. Behold, Meletios Metaxakis, and Athenagoras, and those that come after them"

The Loony Water

Once there was a King who was just and wise, much loved and famed. All loved him, and esteemed him for his virtue and prudence. Everything, therefore, was going well in that Kingdom, and all were happy, when, suddenly, one day there came to the palace some astrologers and said to the King: 'O King, most glorious and serene, may thy years be many! On such and such a day, a loony water shall fall as rain upon the face of the earth, and whosoever drinks of this water shall himself become loony. For this reason it is expedient for you to build large cisterns and to gather much water, so that you may have it and that, when it rains loony water, you shall

not become loony also; otherwise there shall be no one to rule the Kingdom with wisdom."

The King, therefore, undertook to build large, covered cisterns, and gathered whole lakes of water. And on the appointed day, some weird clouds appeared on the horizon and the loony water rained down, and it fell into the lakes, and rivers and cisterns, all except the King's, and all drank of it and became loony. The King alone, with two or three governors and satraps from his court, did not drink of the loony water, and did not become loony.

Then one could see a strange thing. Whereas before, the King was considered the most good, the most just, the most wise by all the people, now everything changed and in the eyes of the people he was the most evil, the most unjust, the most loony of men. For, most assuredly, since all became loony, and the King alone with two or three others remained sane, it followed that the people would see the King in a different light. Everyday things became worse — when suddenly, one day, there reached the ears of the King the report that there was a plot to murder him or, at least, to dethrone him and send him into exile. Upon hearing this, the King paused and thought for a moment, and then said to his counselors: "Go and bring that loony water, so that we may drink of it, and thus this whole situation may be brought to an end." Thus, they drank of the loony water also, and they became loony as well. And then everything became "well" again, and the King was once more "the most good, the most just, the most wise" in the eyes of the people, and everyone lived happily ever after.

"Do you see what we have come to?" Kontoglou would say. "Blessed are they that hold fast in these days and do not lose their Faith and do not become loony, like most who have bent the knee to Ecumenism, and have become betrayers. Whereas before, we were thought to be good and holy, intelligent and prudent, illustrious and wise; now, for the reason alone that we do not wish to betray our Faith, we have become evil, sinister, bigoted, loony, and what have you. Because two or three have remained sane in the midst of insanity, all point to them, and laugh and say: 'Behold, the crazy ones!' But our looniness is blessed. Blessed, therefore, and thrice blessed are they that hold out until the end and do not drink of the loony water of apostasy."

This can be said about our society in general, can it not? Can a sane man govern a society that has gone crazy, and has lost its spiritual bearings? One has to be crazy himself in order to deal with a deranged people.

FOOTNOTE: One sees how Mr. Kontoglou's words proved true in his own case. He was a nationally acclaimed writer and recognized as Greece's foremost liturgical iconographer, yet when he proved to be a staunch Orthodox Christian confessor against the heresy of Ecumenism, one noticed that the public's regard for his work began to sour. John Rexine of Colgate University even expressed a certain surprise that Kontoglou should have penned the pamphlet "What is Orthodoxy and What is Papism?" which he considered "unworthy of Kontoglou's pen." He could not believe that such an eminent man, such a great writer, would stoop so low as to enter into polemics; for this is how the defense of the Faith appears to those who do not know or acknowledge the truth of our Faith.