

FATHER EPIPHANIOS THEODOROPOULOS ON ZEALOTISM

Apart from the majority of the Orthodox Christians, it is fortunate that we also find many among the deceived or deceivers of Zealotism and Ecumenism admitting father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos among those men in our Church who hailed of great blessedness.

Indeed, both Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew, who recently visited Kalamata, Greece and extolled the virtues of the late father Epiphanius when he paid a visit to his old abode, and many Old Calendarists and other hyper-zealots praise this father of holiness.

Let us therefore listen to the words of this father of our Church on the problems of: a) Zealotism and b) Ecumenism.

In this article we will concentrate on the first problem, by examining his reply to fr. Nicodemus who had asked him his opinion on Old Calendarism that as a problem was at the time affecting the Church of Greece (it still does but not as much as in those days).

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Epistle in relation to Old Calendarist Zealotism



Athens, 22 July 1971
Dearest fr. Nicodemus
Rejoice in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It has been over a month since I received your epistle. I have delayed to post my reply because my busy workload has kept me preoccupied. Please accept my sincere apologies for this. I reply now in a somewhat laconic fashion with the reservation that I will return to the topic should your Blessedness wish for more clarifications.

To begin with, dearest fr. Nicodemus, I ought to tell you a bitter truth that will appear very strange to you and will surprise you. Till today I had avoided – for reasons of economy – to put forth this position or I would express it in an indirect manner; but from the moment that things have reached the point of no return and exquisite people – who have however conscience full of fear – enter the ranks of the Old Calendarists, falling victims to an unscrupulous propaganda against the Church, it is time for the truth to be told explicitly and without any reservations.

So, fr. Nicodemus let me tell you that those who fear Ecumenism and join the ranks of the Old Calendarists gain nothing more but avoid one heresy in order to join another one. Of course, they do not realise that they are joining a heresy, but this does not change things at all. Do not believe that I am being unfair or that I am exaggerating. I will prove immediately how absolutely correct my statement is.

What is heresy, dear fr. Nicodemus? The adulteration of the Faith! What does it mean though to adulterate the faith? The transgression from the dogmas? Of course this too is an adulteration of the Faith, but it is not only this. **Adulteration of the Faith is also the attempt to consider things which are not Dogmas of Faith as such.** In other words, if someone wishes to consider something of secondary

importance as a Dogma for the Faith, as a precondition for our salvation, even if that is a good thing, then he ‘automatically’¹ becomes a he-re-tic!

Do you wish for me to give you an example? Let us look at the famous Eustathians! What is it that they did wrong? Did they violate any Dogmas of the Faith? Which one? The dogma on the Holy Trinity? The dogma on the two natures of the Lord? Or perhaps the dogma on the Angels? Or perhaps the things concerning the Devil, etc, etc? No! They did not violate any Dogmas. But then what did they do? They considered as Dogmas of Faith, as preconditions for our salvation, things that were of secondary importance. Celibacy and abstinence from meat. The Church would say: these things are good and holy and pleasing to God and worthy of imitation, but they are not terms for salvation, they are not Dogmas of faith.

No! The Eustathians would trumpet! The one who does not abstain from marriage and meat cannot be saved!

What happened then? The Church through the Synod of Gangra denounced them as heretics and delivered against them a series of anathemas. Uniformity in the church calendar is a good and holy thing (which however was never achieved in the entire Church), but it is not a Dogma of faith, it is not a condition necessary for salvation.

No! The Old Calendarists shout! The disruption of the uniformity in the church calendar (when did the Church however ever live in full calendar uniformity?) deprived the Church from Grace, rendered her Sacraments invalid (listen and shudder!) and consequently the New Calendarists are outside Grace, in other words outside salvation!!

This hideous position, brother Nicodemus, constitutes terrible heresy and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. They promoted Calendarist and Festal elements to conditions necessary for salvation ... Of course no one considers the presence of two calendars in the ecumenical Orthodox Catholic Church as a good thing. It was wrong; it was very wrong for the change in the Calendar to take place. But the gap between this view and the view that considers the calendars as ... dogmas of faith making the authority of the Sacraments and the realisation of our salvation dependent upon them is unfathomable.

Had the Old Calendarists wished to do so they could have kept the old calendar; but they should have kept their communion with the Church. Then there would have been no danger. But they reached the point of cutting themselves off the Church in order not ... to lose the Grace and salvation! ... And I do not ignore the fact that there are some Old Calendarists who do not accept **these blasphemies**; but what do they gain from this fact since there are other Old Calendarists – and in fact their own leadership – who support **these heretical positions**?

Pay attention to a conversation I had some time ago with an exquisite young man who went over to the Old Calendarists’ ranks:

- Why did you leave the Church of Greece?
- In order not to be in communion with the heretical ecumenists.
- Are all the Bishops of Greece ecumenists?

¹ We have added the quotes around the word because clearly one does not become automatically a heretic (in the full sense) this way, but rather he becomes *essentially* a heretic. Since the father makes a distinction between the ‘heretic’ who is still in the Church but has not been judged yet and the one who has already been cast out, there is no real problem here. Father G. Metallinos uses the term δυνάμει αρετικός i.e. *potential heretic* or *heretic in essence* to distinguish between the former case and the latter case (the person who has been cast out of the Church after Synodical sentencing) – *Transl.*

- No, no! But they are in communion with the ecumenist Patriarch. Therefore I do not wish to be in communion with people who are in communion with the heretical ecumenists.
- Do you believe that the calendar is a Dogma of faith and that the New Calendarists are situated outside of the Grace and require to be anointed again with myrrh, like we do with those who return from heresies?
- God forbid! I do not believe at all this nonsense of the Old Calendarists. I only joined their ranks in order to avoid the – indirect, be it so – communion with the heretic ecumenists.
- Nevertheless you did not avoid communion with another heresy. **The Old Calendarists' claim that the calendar change deprived the Church from Grace is not a mere nonsense, as you characterised it before. It is a most serious blasphemy and heresy.**
- But I do not believe these things.
- **However you are in communion with those who believe them.**
- What can I do? I am forced to bear them by economy.
- **So then why would you not accept, even in an 'economical' manner, the Bishops of Greece, who were in communion with the Patriarch?**
- He: ...
- I: Do you therefore see to what an antinomy you were led to? You recognise that most Bishops of Greece are Orthodox. You refuse however communion with them because they are in communion with the Patriarch. This way you do not even accept an indirect communion with ecumenists. You accept however a direct (as direct as it gets) communion with people who preach another form of heresy. **That salvation depends on the calendar!!** So what have you gained? But again, do not believe that you have avoided indirect communion with the ecumenists.
- He: How is that the case?
- I: Listen, poor victim of artful propagandists: the Old Calendarists shout until their lungs shatter that our common prayer with the Patriarch and the others who are of a similar mindset with him make us similar to them, even if we do not believe the things that they preach. Were they at least consistent with this position of theirs! But consistency does not exist in their ranks... Go my friend to some of the Old Calendarist Hermitages, particularly in Lycovrisi of Attica and you will see a line of cars dropping off New Calendarists to go to church there, for the Liturgy! (I have heard that the New Calendarists who go to church there are more than the Old Calendarists!) In fact, the Magazine of the Hermitage in question occasionally asks the "pilgrims" who wish to go to church there to arrive dressed in appropriate attire, both men and women and children. They do not ask for New Calendarists not to come at all. No! The only thing that they stress in their magazine, and that they find that it is all they need to mention, is for pilgrims to avoid turning up dressed in an indecent manner. If decency is satisfied nothing else is examined. If decency is satisfied, New Calendarists are welcome to participate in the services and pray together with them. And I know quite a few cases of Old Calendarist Priests who accept New Calendarists to the Mystery of confession; even that of Holy Communion, without examining any preconditions. In other words, we have the Mysteries given to people who at other times are characterised by the Old Calendarists' leadership as being away from the truth and salvation because they are in the Church of Greece that is in communion with the Patriarch. **In**

other words, a tangled unnatural mess! So, since your like-minded [friends] proceed to common prayers and to intercommunion with us who pray and commune together with the Patriarch, you still have an indirect communion with the Patriarch! So what have you gained? You did not avoid the indirect communion with the ecumenists **and** you were led to direct communion with persons who preach a different form of heresy! ...

These things were said at the time during my conversation with that young man. I copy them here so that you, my dear fr. Nicodemus, can come to certain conclusions.

And here are some brief replies to your questions:

1. Philaret's recognition of the Old Calendarists in Greece was a "blunder" of great proportions. He probably became a victim to wicked counsel. Information has reached my ears *a posteriori* that he has repented for his actions after getting to know the Old Calendarists of Greece. However time will show. I believe we shall become witnesses to the unfolding of many developments... As far as I am concerned, however – and I believe that the Church of Greece is anything but heretical – the decision of Philaret's Synod not only does it not have any authority as it opposes the Canons (since it constitutes interference into the internal affairs of another homodox Church) but it also creates responsibilities for the Synod in question as regards the Canons.
2. Had Philaret believed that the Church of Greece had fallen into heresy then he would have been allowed to intervene in her affairs. However, he ought not to have acknowledged the Old Calendarists, who, granted, are not ecumenists but who nonetheless do preach a different kind of heresy as I said above (viz. that salvation is dependent upon ... secular and church calendars), but from the start ordain Priests (or even Bishops too) for the fold of the Greek Church. The Priests in question could follow the old calendar, however they would not be preaching the above heretical teachings² and they would also accept into communion faithful who would follow the new calendar, exactly as Philaret does.
3. The present situation (common prayers, modernisms etc.) does not excuse the "hyperorion" [i.e. acting beyond one's jurisdictional borders]. Only the fall of a Church to heresy gives the right for *hyperorion* Bishops to intervene.
4. If an Orthodox Church sentences someone, the Synod of another local Church cannot acquit him. And even if such a thing happens, the latter's decision is void (invalid). In other words: if a Cleric of the State Church of Greece is convicted by her and he appeals to another Church, e.g. the Church of Serbia, and asks to be judged by her, then the Church of Serbia will reject his request, by declaring that she is fully unauthorised while the only one who is authorised is the Church of Greece. If perchance however the Church of Serbia accepts the request and proceeds to judge the Cleric in question, her decision (having been issued against the Canons) would be completely void

² Fr. Epiphanius actually uses the word *phronemata* i.e. mindsets instead of *teachings*. What this means is that the priests or bishops in question have not just made a few cacodoxical statements, which could have been due to ignorance or a temporary lapse. These clerics know well what they are saying and they preach these teachings with full knowledge having thus clearly acquired a heretical *phronema* (mindset). The same holds further down in the article when the word 'teachings' appears in place of 'mindsets'. – *Transl.*

and would create responsibilities as regards the Canons. If the offences of this Cleric are not an obstacle to Holy Orders and he repents for these later on, then the only Church who can reinstate him is again the Church of Greece. Never is the intervention of an Orthodox Church to the internal affairs of another Church allowed. It follows that it is a different thing altogether if a Local Orthodox Church asks from another Church or from other Churches their help for the solution of an internal problem she is facing. In that case we are not dealing with arbitrary interference but with brotherly solidarity. Only an Ecumenical Synod, as an utmost Office, can interfere with the internal affairs of a Local Orthodox Church and to proceed to regulate them according to its judgment. It is possible e.g. for a Cleric of a Local Church (and in fact for a Head of that Church), who believes that he was sentenced by his Church in a completely unfair fashion and against what the Canons dictated, for him to take to other Local Churches through an appeal and after relating tragically his unjust mishaps to ask for justice to be given. If the other Churches find his complaints to be justified they can even arrive at the convocation of a Great Synod whose decision will be compulsory for all. One-sided interference of a Local Church to the internal affairs of another is inexcusable. It goes without saying that all these things refer to Local Orthodox Churches and not to heretical ones.

5. When dealing with Mysteries, the word “invalid” sometimes expresses those Mysteries that are completely without substance (i.e. non-existent) and at other times those Mysteries which have substance but which were executed anti-canonically. It depends on the meaning that we give each time to the word “invalid”.
6. For reasons of leniency, a “zealot”³ who returns to Mother Church may become accepted even through a mere Confession in front of his Spiritual Father. If he happens to be a Cleric, he will ask from his Bishop to restore him through the canonical procedures. The changes and membership shifts in [Old Calendarist] Groups which occur once in a while clearly shows instability. Unfortunately, this is a common phenomenon with the Old Calendarists.
7. Without a question one cannot be “both with the ones and with the others”. It is a different matter if for reasons of economy one puts up with the latter ones, hoping to eventually bring them on the right path.
8. If someone is so simple-minded that he cannot comprehend certain things and he does not insist on his fallacious positions out of conceit, obstinacy etc. but out of simple-mindedness, it is possible for him to be rich in the Grace of the Lord. The judgments of the Lord are unfathomable. There had been situations when wise men of the Church had fallen to *plani* (delusions). God however, who looks at the heart and not at face value, did not judge them to be unworthy of His favour. The Great Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, was not free from dogmatic delusions. And yet he is a saint and a Father of the Church.

³ The quotes are by the father; the term zealot is used here in the euphemistic sense to denote the Zealotist or hyper-zealot. This usage is common and we must make note of it because some hyper-zealots and ecumenists exploit this fact respectively in order to either claim that they are glad we call them such because we must be zealots for the Church (of course, but this is an excessive zeal that reaches the realm of fanaticism and we use this term for them only because they fancy themselves to be proper zealots; we use it out of kindness and not because we believe them to be proper zealots for the faith!) or that all zealots are schism-inducing (not true; only those who cannot discern the spirits and go beyond a normal zeal can be led to such schisms and heresies; otherwise good zeal is expected from all of us). – *Transl.*

Also, when the devout Dionysius of Alexandria would theologise on the Son, he would not express himself with dogmatic accuracy and for this reason, and without meaning to, he helped support many of the Arians' arguments, who would quote him for this. For this reason Athanasius the Great was forced to write a full treatise for St. Dionysius in order to defend his dogmatically unseemly expressions.

9. We can have good relations with "zealots". However we are not permitted to receive mysteries from them. If these happen to be, as you write, in communion with our Church, then things differ. Are there though any "zealots" who are in communion with our Church?
10. Unfortunately, the return to the old calendar is not an easy task for the Church of Greece. Perhaps it is not even possible. But even if it were, do not think for a moment that the Old Calendarists would all submit themselves to the Church. Most of the Old Calendarists' Clerics desire to have lack of restraint and they would never accept to be placed under "harness" and control. They would find one thousand and seven "arguments" in order to excuse their insistence in insurrection (they would claim e.g. that the Bishops are Masons and the like). I know many Old Calendarists' Clerics very well ... One of the Old Calendarist leaders was telling me some years ago: "I do not dare to censure any of my clerics with 'vacancy', not even for 10 days; for if I do, they tell me that they will go to the others" (in other words to another Old Calendarist Group). From this, you understand what attitude for discipline exists in the ranks of the Clerics of the Old Calendarists; with some exceptions ...
11. The positions of the "Epistolary Thesis"⁴ are valid provided our Church is Orthodox and not heretical. The words "enjoy good health" have a great breadth in their meaning. Absolute health (in the Canons, in administration, in ethics etc.) is not something we can demand from the Church, since she consists of imperfect and sinful people. It would be a blessing if she was healthy in everything. But is such a thing possible? It suffices therefore for her to be an Orthodox Church and not a heretical group. And I am far from characterising the Church of Greece as ... heretical!!! If others undertake such frightful responsibilities so easily (i.e. to characterise an Orthodox Local Church as heretical), let them proceed...
12. - 13. Without a question the Orthodox should not pray together or in any other way have a religious communion with the heretics (Papists, Protestants etc.) (The same holds for the schismatics). If however, someone prays together (or is in communion in some other way) with heretics, he is of course a transgressor of the holy canons and worthy of ecclesiastical sentence; he is not however automatically a heretic. It is possible that he believes in an Orthodox manner, that he condemns every non-Orthodox teaching, but that he does not consider religious contacts with heterodox to be a bad thing. I repeat, he is a terrible transgressor of the holy Canons, but he is not a heretic.

If however he does not stay at his transgressions of the canons but he also proceeds to preach heretical teachings then things differ. Then he is a heretic. He is a heretic so long as he preaches heretical teachings even if he has no communion with other heretics.

⁴ This thesis had been written before this epistle by the father and had been sent to fr. Nicodemus and to his Attendance. – *Transl.*

However heretics are of two types: those whom the Church has judged and sentenced and cut them off her Body, and those whom she has not yet judged. Those who have neither abandoned her out of their own will but who are still situated inside the Church. One such case is the case of the Patriarch. Patriarch Athenagoras has preached heretical teachings. However neither has he been sentenced by the Church yet nor has he renounced the Church and abandoned her. He remains and acts inside the Church. Consequently he is still a channel of Grace. He performs Mysteries. What can we do?

- a) Pray for his disillusionment and repentance.
- b) Protest against him and struggle. And if someone's conscience does not bear to commemorate his name, he has the right to go one step further and to cease his memorial, in accordance with the 15th Canon of the First-Second Synod. This however is the ultimate step to which he can proceed if he wishes not to be found in schisms and insurrections. In other words, by ceasing the memorial, he will not be commemorating another Bishop (unless he believes that our entire Church has fallen into heresy!) but he will await, as I wrote before in my "Epistolary Thesis", the decision of a Synod with a calm conscience.

Another problem: those who cease the memorial; how will they behave towards those who are in communion with the Patriarch? Those who are in communion with the Patriarch belong to two categories: a) the ones who are of a like mind (such as Iakovos of America, Meliton of Chalcedon etc. are); and b) those who do not agree with him (such as almost all the Archpriests of the Church of Greece). Opposite the first ones they will behave as they do opposite the Patriarch. However, opposite the second ones, even if these happen to be in communion with the Patriarch or with the others, **they cannot behave in the same way. In other words, they cannot reach the point of ceasing their memorial.** In other words, according to the holy Canons avoiding communion with them is impermissible. The holy Canons provide the right to cease the memorial of that Bishop or Patriarch who preaches heretical teachings. However they do not provide the right to cease the memorial of those who, even though they are Orthodox, put up with him.

Let us pay great attention to this point! We need to be in a position to discern between the two situations: the one who preaches heretical teachings is one thing, whereas the one who believes and teaches in an Orthodox manner but for reasons of economy puts up with the first one and stays in communion with him is another thing.

Also: it is another thing the situation where one preaches heretical teachings but has not abandoned the Church nor cut himself off her; and another thing the situation where one has left the Church (and has created his own "Church" or joined another similar heretical or schismatic congregation) out of his own volition or who was cut off from the Church after the commencement of [Synodical] trial and sentence. With the latter, every Orthodox Christian ought to have no communion whatsoever. The Holy Canons leave the question of communion with the former one to the free judgment of every Orthodox faithful (until his official sentence commences).

In other words, we have a right, which is provided to us by the holy Canons, to cease his memorial; however we are not obliged to do so. Consequently, if someone, makes use of this right and proceeds to cease the memorial, he does well and he must not be checked by the others. If someone else, after weighing the various factors together, proceeds with the judgement that he must not use the right that the Canons

give him but to await the “Synodical diagnosis”, he is not blameworthy nor – much more so – unworthy of keeping in communion with! At this point, one could apply the words of Paul, in a somewhat altered fashion: “*Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth*” (cf. Rom. 14:3).

You will ask then: what do we gain if we avoid the memorial of the Patriarch since we will remain in communion with the Bishop of Druinoupolis, for example, who commemorates the Patriarch? Are we not thus polluted this way by staying in indirect communion with the one who preaches heretical teachings?

But the ceasing of the memorial “before Synodical diagnosis” and sentencing take place does not aim at avoiding the pollution from the heresy being preached! No, my brother! If it had that purpose, then the Canons would not merely provide us with the right to cease the memorial for reasons of heresy “before Synodical diagnosis” took place, but they would decree explicitly and clearly that we **have** to cease the memorial under threat of the heaviest possible penalties if we failed to do so.

The ceasing of the memorial for reasons of heresy “before Synodical diagnosis” takes place has a different purpose. It constitutes intent but also ultimate protestation of the Orthodox conscience providing a way out for those who are scandalised; and at the same time it aims at the creation of a stir so that the Church hurries to clear up the situation.

There is no danger that we may become ... polluted, neither if we commemorate the Patriarch (since he has not yet been sentenced) nor, much more so, if we accept those who commemorate him and stay in communion with him. Any other things said to the opposite are nothing but foolish “zealotisms”. St. Cyril of Jerusalem was not polluted even though he had received his episcopal ordination from the Metropolitan of Caesarea Acacius, who, while still an open supporter of Arianism (he was in fact the head of a group of Arians), still remained inside the Church acting inside the Church. St. Anatolius had also been ordained a Bishop (and in fact the Patriarch of Constantinople) by the Patriarch of Alexandria Dioskorus, who while he was a Monophysite and great protector of the heresiarch Eutyches, he had not yet been sentenced by the 4th Ecumenical Synod. Therefore if not even the ordination of Bishops, who while they are of a heretical mindset have yet to be sentenced by a Synod and in the meantime remain inside the Church, pollutes, much more so does their memorial not pollute and even more so does the communion with persons who put up with them by economy by keeping their memorial not pollute.

The Old Calendarists “neither knowing what they say nor what things they are assured for”, support the exact opposite things (see also the book by Theodoretus Maurus). But if that is the case then these miserable souls are also polluted. Why? Because, as I said before, they too, despite their theoretical declarations or rather in ‘howling’ and tragic antithesis to these, they accept in practice intercommunion (common prayers and the provision of Mysteries) with persons who belong to the Church of Greece which is in communion with the Patriarch! So what then???

If they wanted to be consistent they should not accept not even one (number: 1) member from the Church of Greece in their congregations (let alone to confession or to communion), if he did not first declare that he abandons the Church of Greece and that he enters their ranks in repentance. However, without fear or hesitation, they allow common church-going, common prayers and common participation in the Mysteries with a multitude of New Calendarists who arrive at the temples of these Old Calendarists; even in some of their hermitages.

Do these things reveal ethical consistency? Are these things ethical, are they allowed? Are these things accepted by the Canons? At the very least, are these things honest? They might say that they do all this by economy. But then why should we create schisms and divisions and splits and wounds on the Body of the Church? If someone who goes to an Old Calendarist group ends up praying once again together with those who are in communion with the Patriarch, then why not stay in the Church of Greece and put up with the Patriarch and his like-minded followers by economy? This way he will in fact be putting up by economy with one heresy: Ecumenism. Whereas, by going to the Old Calendarists, he will be putting up with two: Ecumenism (since Old Calendarists pray together with New Calendarists who in turn are in communion with the ecumenist Patriarch) and Greek Old Calendarism that teaches the heresy that the secular and church calendars are conditions for salvation!...

And I say “Greek Old Calendarism” **because I do not wish to sentence the old calendar which is followed by so many Orthodox Churches but the heretical exaggerations to which the Greek Old Calendarists have sunk to without thinking.** And for this reason – and for other reasons I will not go into – I am frightened and I shake with fear when I think of the insurrections and the schisms. The spirituality of most of these people is this:

In the end they end up supporting truly heretical positions! Dearest fr. Nicodemus, I had written these things for you and for your holy and God-bearing Attendance. And I wrote “out of much affliction and anguish of heart” (2 Corinth. 2:4). The whole situation in the Orthodox Church today is very sad. Perhaps in the end we will not avoid becoming witnesses of great mishaps.

Let us stand well! In humility, in prayer, in fasting, in devoutness, let us ask from the Lord to enlighten us for the way in which we must approach those things which are coming. Double is the danger for the Church: on one hand we have the Satan-controlled Ecumenism and on the other the Fanaticism that infects souls and in the end leads to atrocious blasphemies and heresies, hiding the truth. We should become frightened of both and avoid them. We will deviate neither to the right nor to the left. We will walk the middle and royal path. This is the path of the unpolluted Orthodoxy that knows to protect *acrivia* (exactitude) while not ignoring the display of *oeconomia* (economy).

Rejoice, brother. And I will say it again, rejoice! Rejoice, in the middle of every affliction and every sorrow. For Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

I ask that every one of you pray earnestly on behalf of my wretchedness for I am found in many struggles. I grieve in everything. “Without were fightings, within were fears” (2 Corinth. 7:5. Cf. interpretation by P. Trembelas).

I am always eager to provide every type of service. Asking all your prayers, I remain yours in great love and honour in Christ.

From the book:

THE TWO EXTREMES – ECUMENISM AND ZEALOTISM

Epiphanius I. Theodoropoulos

Edition of the Holy Hermitage of the Blessed Theotokos of Troezen