

THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

1. The Heresy Of Iconoclasm

a) Origin and Evolution

- * the "theologian" emperors
- * Leo III Isaurus: confident of absolute powers under God
- * the Monophysite influence
- * the Islamic influence
- * private interpretation of Scripture resulted in the conclusion that:
 - + God prohibits images as one can see in:
 - Exodus 20,4
 - Deuteronomy 5,8
 - + God is to be worshipped "in spirit and truth":
 - John 1,18; 4,24; 5,37
 - Romans 1,23 & 25
 - 2 Corinthians 5,7

b) The Persecution

- * began in 726, when Leo ordered the destruction of the icon of Christ over the bronze doors of the imperial palace, which resulted in a confrontation and a riot
- * many people were arrested, tortured and mutilated
- * icons are immediately defended by the patriarch of Constantinople, who wrote among many other things:

"...in eternal memory of the life in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ...we have received the tradition of representing Him in human form, that is His visible Theophany...; it is possible to make an image of the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father because HE DEIGNED TO BECOME MAN...;...we make the image of His human form...THUS SHOWING THAT IT IS NOT IN A PURELY IMAGINARY WAY THAT HE PUT ON OUR NATURE..."

- * the most powerful opponent of iconoclasm during this first phase was John of Damascus(675-749); between 726 and 730, he wrote three important works defending the veneration of the icons; his is a strong Christological argument also, and here are some of his remarks:

"If we made an image of the invisible God, we would certainly be in error, but we do nothing of the sort, for we are not in error if WE MAKE THE IMAGE OF THE INCARNATE GOD, WHO APPEARED ON EARTH IN THE FLESH, AND WHO, IN HIS INEFFABLE GOODNESS, LIVED WITH HUMAN BEINGS AND ASSUMED THE NATURE, QUANTITY, SHAPE AND COLOR OF FLESH"

John of Damascus also made the important distinction between adoration, which can only be given to God, and veneration, honor, respect, which is paid to persons and things of special dignity and association with God.

- * because of his refusal to cooperate with the emperor, patriarch Germanos was sacked and replaced with Anastasius, the chaplain of the emperor
- * a systematic destruction of icons began; the only allowed by law was the cross

c) The Persecution during Constantine V

- * Leo's son came to power in 740 and proved himself to be a greater enemy of the icons
- * Constantine V called a false universal council in the city of Hieria, just north of Chalcedon, which:
 - + was attended by 338 episkopoi
 - + presided by Theodosius of Ephesus, one of the original iconoclasts
 - + none of the 5 patriarchs attended
 - + there were no legates from Rome
 - + the episkopoi were forced to sign a document which condemned the icons and was entitled the Horos
- * in 761 the emperor ordered all his subjects to take an oath against the images; many of the monastics who were very militant in defending the icons, were tortured and killed; the patriarch of Constantinople, Constantine, was publicly beheaded, his head affixed to the doors of the palace

2. The Seventh Ecumenical Council: Nicaea 787

- a) after Constantine V died, his son Leo IV granted a measure of toleration to the iconophiles; then, after his death, in 780, his wife Irene and her son Constantine VI came to power
- b) Irene called another ecumenical council, which:
 - * began on September 24, 787, in Nicaea
 - * was attended by some 335 episkopoi, including:
 - + representatives of Alexandria
 - + representatives of Antioch
 - + representatives of Jerusalem
 - + the legates from Rome
 - + eight Sicilian episkopoi and six Calabrians
 - + Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople presided
 - * a letter from Hadrian of Rome was read and accepted as Orthodox
 - * the Horos from the council in 754 was read, sentence

by sentence and condemned; the episkopoi quoted a lot from the works of Saint John of Damascus who was praised as a great defender of the faith.

- * on October 23, the council issued the definition of faith regarding the images; among the many important statements:

"...we keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical traditions handed down to us, whether in writing or verbally, one of which is the making of pictorial representations, agreeable to the history of the preaching of the Gospels a tradition useful in many respects, but especially in this, that THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF GOD IS SHOWN FORTH AS REAL AND NOT MERELY FANTASTIC...;...FOR THE HONOR WHICH IS PAID TO THE IMAGE PASSES ON TO THAT WHICH THE IMAGE REPRESENTS, AND HE WHO REVERES THE IMAGE REVERES IN IT THE SUBJECT REPRESENTED..."

- * these are some of the biblical argument used by John of Damascus and affirmed by the council:

+ Exodus 25, 17-22
 + Exodus 26,1
 + Numbers 7,89
 + Joshua 7,6
 + Hebrews 9,1-5 & 11
 + John 1,14
 + 1 Timothy 3,16
 + Philippians 2,7-8

- * many holy tradition resources were also used, such as quotations from:

+ Tertullian
 + Eusebius of Caesarea

3. Leo the V-th renews the persecution

- a) Leo V, the Armenian:

* ruled from 813-820

* called another false council in Constantinople in 815, which repudiated Nicaea 787 and reaffirmed the council of 754

- b) among the defenders of the faith against iconoclasm was Theodore, abbot of the Studium monastery, who also left us important works about this topic, and the patriarch of Constantinople, Nicephorus; in his treatise "On the Holy Icons", Theodore argues that "if one says that Christ cannot be portrayed, it would follow that is because He lacks a genuine human nature as the Docetist heretics held or that His human nature is absorbed into His

divinity as the long condemned Monophysites maintain".
Theodore also insisted that when Christ is pictured,
IT IS HIS HYPOSTASIS WHICH IS PORTRAYED NOT HIS DIVINE
OR HUMAN NATURE. THE PROPERTIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL MAN
JESUS, WHICH SUBSIST IN HIS HYPOSTASIS, CAN BE PORTRAYED.

- c) during the reign of the Empress-Mother Theodora, regent for her son Michael III, in 843, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Methodius declared the sacred images lawful and condemned the iconoclasm; the first Sunday in Lent was instituted as the Feast of Orthodoxy and the restoration of the holy icons