

## The Second Council of Nicaea (overview)

- This was the seventh ecumenical Church council.
- It was held in 787 CE.
- It sought to correct the iconoclast (statue breaking) issue within the Church.
- Byzantine Emperor Leo III had issued a decree forbidding the worship of icons of Jesus, Mary and the saints. This went along with the traditional interpretation of the Second Commandment.
- The Council reversed Leo III's ruling and said icons deserve recognition and veneration.

## Details

- The recommendation to hold the council came because of iconoclast "heretics" who objected to the Church's use of images. It was addressed to Empress Irene, who acted as regent for her minor son, Emperor Constantine VI.
- Irene, Constantine and the Patriarch Tarasius from Constantinople all wrote letters to Pope Hadrian I to attend, but the latter did not. He sent representatives instead. When the Council was first held, iconoclast soldiers interrupted the meeting and the proceedings were put on hold until proper defenses could be attained.
- Patriarch Tarasius and the Papal representatives presided over the Council. Irene and Constantine attended. 22 canons were eventually read out loud, and the papal representatives became the first to sign the doctrine.
- Pope Hadrian wrote no letter in reply, but he defended the Council's rulings against Charlemagne, indicating he supported the rulings.
- The actual document thanks Christ for saving the faithful from idolatry, and lambasted those who fail to "grasp the truth." Those who failed to grasp the truth were apparently the iconoclast priests who criticized "the beauty pleasing to G-d established in the holy monuments." They were priests in name, but not in reality, the document states. The document criticizes the iconoclasts who compared the "icons of our Lord and of his saints" with "wooden images of satanic idols."
- The Council determined that icons are "representational art." The figure of Christ was deemed acceptable in the churches of G-d, on sacred instruments and vestments, on walls and panels, and in houses and public ways.
- The Council explained its ruling. The more these images are seen, the more the viewer will long for and remember those who the images represent. The viewer is expected to venerate these icons. The wording is careful to distinguish between "respectful veneration" of the icons and the "full adoration" reserved for the divine.

- We'll briefly record the 4 "anathemas" given in the Council, quoted from papalencyclicals.net.
  - "If anyone does not *confess* that Christ our God can be represented in his humanity, let him be **anathema**."
  - "If anyone does not *accept* representation in art of evangelical scenes, let him be **anathema**."
  - "If anyone does not *salute* such representations as standing for the Lord and his saints, let him be **anathema**."
  - "If anyone *rejects* any *written or unwritten* tradition of the church, let him be **anathema**."
- The 22 canons can be read on papalencyclicals.net. They contain references to the "venerable icons" of the Church.