

The Second Council of Nicaea

787

Physical imagery (i.e. icons, sculptures, statues, the crucifix, etc.) had been in use in the early church but there was a strong movement called iconoclasm against their use. Iconoclasts were driven by: 1) old testament prohibition against images in Ex. 20:4 & Deut. 5:8; 2) the desire to make converts amongst Jews and Muslims who prohibited imagery; 3) monophysitic notions that tended to downplay the humanity of Christ and therefore the images of him; 4) dualist tendencies among Manichees, Paulicians, and others who regarded all matter as evil such as the human body and images; and 5) the influence of neo-Platonic philosophy where images were viewed as dim reflections of reality. Politics also entered into the arguments. The Byzantine emperorship was being passed from father to son: Leo III's (717-41) son was Constantine V (741-75) whose son was Leo IV (775-79). Leo's wife was Irene. When Leo died, their son, Constantine VI, was still a minor so Irene became Empress. The emperors were iconoclasts, particularly, Constantine V who convened a synod at Hieria, attended only by bishops sympathetic to him, that affirmed his iconoclastic position, giving him a front to continue a program to destroy icon 'worship'. However, Empress Irene was an iconophile which was crucial for *The Second Council of Nicaea (Nicaea II)*.

Charlemagne Comes to the Aid of Pope Hadrian



At the request of Pope Hadrian in 773, Charlemagne defended Rome and later ensured the peace.

The single most important figure at *Nicaea II* was Empress Irene. Tarasius was a new patriarch of Constantinople in 784 and he suggested to Irene that a council be convened to deal with the issue of physical imagery. Irene obtained Pope Hadrian's support for it along with his letter describing the proper use of physical images and his opposition to the findings at Hieria. She then called the council, outwitted those who sought to disrupt it, brought it to a successful conclusion, and ordered promulgation of the decrees. However, in political circles, she could be ruthless.

Empress Irene



Nicaea II moved the Church toward Reasonableness In the Use of Physical Images

Physical Images



Supported their use with reverence and honor directed to the person they represented but not the absolute worship given to God.

Pope Hadrian



His description of the proper use of imagery was fully supported by the Council.

Result of *Nicaea II*:

The iconoclastic movement was slowed but it did continue.

It started up strongly again in 814 and was not stopped officially until 843.