

7.2 Iconoclasm and Orthodoxy: The Second Council of Nicaea (787)

Another primary religious dispute within Eastern Christianity was the tradition of worshiping images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. Although this was acceptable practice in Western churches, in 726 the Byzantine emperor Leo IV abolished the cult of images by imperial edict. This was called “iconoclasm,” and it is a primary example of Caesaro-papism. In 787, however, the empress Irene, who served as regent to her young son, reestablished the veneration of images at the Second Council of Nicaea, as the following source indicates. This policy remained under dispute for centuries.

Source: “Iconoclasm and Orthodoxy” is from Joseph G. Ayer, Jr., ed. *A Source Book for Ancient Church History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), pp. 696–697.

We, therefore, following the royal pathway and the divinely inspired authority of our holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church for, as we all know, the Holy Spirit dwells in her, define with all certitude and accuracy, that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic, as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God. . . . For by so much the more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much the more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them; and to these should be given due salutation and honorable reverence, not indeed that true worship which pertains alone to the divine nature; but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life—giving cross, and to the book of the Gospels and to other holy objects, incense and lights may be offered according to ancient pious custom. For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who shows reverence to the image shows reverence to the subject represented in it.

Those, therefore, who dare to think or teach otherwise, or as wicked heretics dare to spurn the traditions of the Church and to invent some novelty, or else to reject some of those things which the Church hath received, to wit, the book of the Gospels, or the image of the cross, or the pictorial icons, or the holy relics of a martyr, or to devise anything subversive of the lawful traditions of the Catholic Church, or to turn to common uses the sacred vessels and the venerable monasteries, if they be bishops or clerics we command that they be deposed [and] be cut off from communion.

Question:

1. What reasons are given to justify the veneration of icons?

7.3 A Western Attitude Toward the Byzantine Greeks (1147): Odo of Deuil

One of the primary obstacles to the eventual success of the Crusades was the lack of trust and cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Greek Orthodox Church in the East.

These two Christian churches had separated in 1054 over doctrinal differences, and this rift fueled a political and economic competition between Western forces and those of the Byzantine emperor. The following selection notes Western disgust for the Byzantine Greeks at the beginning of the Second Crusade.

Source: "A Western Attitude toward the Byzantine Greeks" is from Odo of Deuil, *De Profectione Ludovici VII*, ed. and trans. Virginia G. Berry, p. 57. Copyright © 1948 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

ODO OF DEUIL

We know other heresies of theirs, both concerning their treatment of the Eucharist and concerning the procession of the Holy Ghost, but none of these matters would mar our page if not pertinent to our subject. Actually, it was for these reasons that the Greeks had incurred the hatred of our men, for their error had become known even among the lay people. Because of this they were judged not to be Christians, and the Franks considered killing them a matter of no importance and hence could with more difficulty be restrained from pillage and plundering.

And then the Greeks degenerated entirely . . . putting aside all manly vigor, both of words and of spirit, they lightly swore whatever they thought would please us, but they neither kept faith with us nor maintained respect for themselves. In general they really have the opinion that anything which is done for the holy empire [that is, Byzantium] cannot be considered perjury.

Question:

1. What does this tell you about how heretics were viewed by the Roman Catholic Church?