



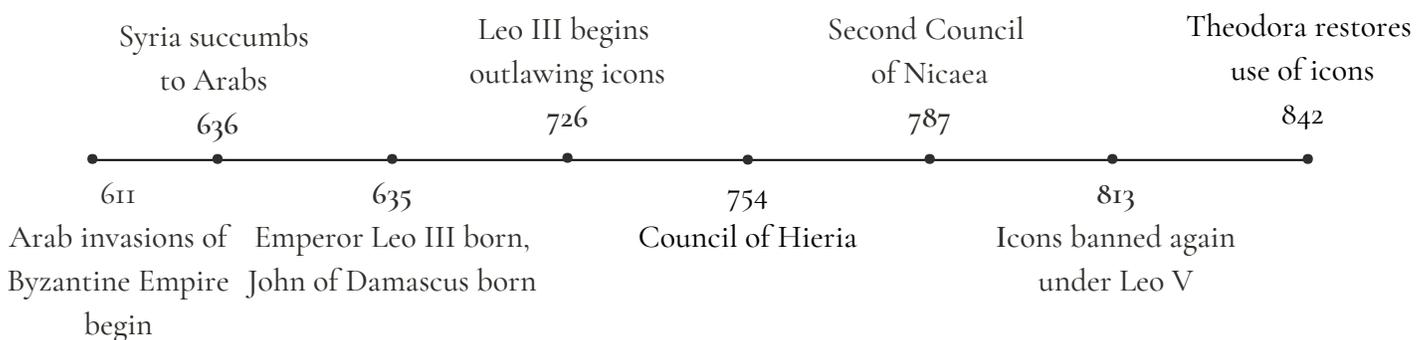
History

The seventh ecumenical council convened in Nicaea in 787. It was the last of the major councils recognized by both the East and West before the two “worlds” eventually stopped meeting. At this moment in history, greater tension was developing as the Arab conquests expanded, resulting in great political and religious turmoil. Theologically, the Church’s confession of the Trinity and the person of Christ had been painstakingly articulated after previous controversy, and now the question of the use of religious art came to the fore.

Emperor Leo III of Constantinople passed an edict in 726, which caused the destruction of Christian artwork. In 754 his view was upheld at the Council of Hieria, a council that was later rejected by this second council in Nicaea. This iconoclastic controversy would—and doe

—rear its head again and again through Church history but came to a point in the Byzantine era. Years after Leo’s death, the tension surrounding his edict grew, and Constantine VI called a council in 787. The council ultimately rejected iconoclasm and affirmed the use of images, arguing that since Christ became incarnate and the image of the invisible God became visible, it is possible to depict him in artwork. Instead of destroying such images, then, Christians are rather to respect them out of respect for the one whom they depict. Lutherans can give thanks that the use of sacred art was preserved by the council, as it remains valuable for teaching the faith. However, it should be noted that Martin Chemnitz rigorously rejected the council’s defense of the adoration of images and its promotion of superstitions surrounding the use of images in the church.

Timeline



Leading Characters



JOHN OF DAMASCUS

John was born in 675 and died December 4th, 749. Although he was not present at the Second Council of Nicaea, his writings, including one of his earlier works, *Apologetic Treatises against those Decrying the Holy Images*, were foundational to the articulation of the orthodox position. In this work, John gives a theological defense of the proper use of images and ample testimony from the Church fathers that also supports the use of images.

IRENE OF ATHENS

While John and others gave the theological underpinnings for the iconodules' view, it was Irene whose political footing won the empire's acceptance of icons once again. Irene of Athens served as regent for her infant son after her husband and Leo III's son died. Irene was a supporter of Patriarch Tarasius, who presided over the Second Council of Nicaea. Although the result was not immediately accepted, it was not long until another regent, Theodora, put the matter to rest in 843.



Sources

Latourette, Kenneth S., *A History of Christianity*. Harper & Brothers, NY. 1953.

IMAGES:

Argument About Icons, 13th century, anonymous.

John of Damascus. Icon from Athos, dated to the beginning of 14th century.

15th century mural depicting Irene and Constantine VI at the Seventh ecumenical council of 787.