

The major subject for this council was the issue of iconology and the reactionally movement of iconoclasticism. With it is a general consideration of the things used in worship.

Leo, the Isaurian (emperor, 717-740) was caught in the rush of the controversy with Islam. Islamic hatred of idolatry is axiomatic and it included anything that seemed like idolatry whether it was the real thing or not. Leo opined that part of the Mohammedan objection to the church and Christianity was to be found in the wide use of pictures and statues in the churches. He decided to solve this problem by removing these "objects of assistance to worship."

The pictures (properly) and the statues (less-properly) are called icons...a transliteration of the Greek word for image. Included are the bas-reliefs as well as the artistic pictures and the stained glass windows, etc. The pictures became the most important part of the lot since they could carry more of the life of the persons portrayed. Highlighted eyes, facial expressions, etc., are more graphic in pictures and the study of such in the annals of the church is a good study. (Note Schaeffer's: HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE.) One could easily imagine that the picture was looking at the worshipper and the eye to eye contact "did something" for the beholder. So, Leo decided to remove these, to break the images and thus the iconoclasm...the icon breaking...moved into the life of the church. An iconoclast is, therefore, someone who smashes the sacred images while an iconist is one who uses them in some way in his worship.

The edicts of Leo were bitterly contested. Many persons tore the icons from the churches and hid them in homes and secluded monasteries...one of the most famous being that of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. Some of these wild monastic places became treasure troves for icons and other valuable church properties, apparently including manuscripts and documents. Even after restoration was permitted, many things remained in the place of refuge, perhaps the persons who hid them had died or the monastery had become too attached to let them go.

The matter came to the council of Nicaea in 787 after fifty years of debate, opinion, oppression, resistance and argument. Tarasius, Bishop of Constantinople, made great use of the works of John