

Wk4 Icons & Saints

We explore the nature of spiritual role models, especially of those that have passed on before us. We engage with story and remembrance of them. Including a discussion of the 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Discussion of Old Testament Saints and how through story we can see spiritual formation come alive. Narrative as a tool for virtue, character, and formation in Christ. Discuss icons—their use and function in spiritual life both literal definition and figurative definition of icons. Key figures: Abraham, Naaman, Esther

Church Councils: A group of high-ranking church leaders and bishops from around the world to resolve some dispute or to clarify theology.

Early Church Councils:¹

- **Jerusalem Council (AD 48 - 50)** on whether Gentiles needed circumcision and should follow the law of Moses
- **First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** Jesus is truly God; rejected Arianism; Nicene Creed
- **Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381 AD)** Divinity of the Holy Spirit; Nicene-Constantinople Creed
- **Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431 AD)** Jesus is one person with two natures; Mary was named as the Mother of God; rejected Nestorianism
- **Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)** Christ's two natures exist together; rejected Monophysitism; affirmed the Hypostatic Union
- **Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (553 AD)** reaffirmed denying the Monophysite heresy; condemned certain writers as Nestorian.
- **Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680-681 AD)** denied Monothelitism, the belief that Christ had only one will; affirmed Christ had two wills, both human and divine.

History of Iconoclast

- 754 Council of Hieria held by 338 bishops which banned religious images.
 - Convened by Byzantine Emperor Constantine V.
 - Made a self-proclamation that it was the Seventh Ecumenical Council but the leaders of the major sections (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, or Jerusalem) were not present and did not send representatives.
 - "No graven images" Exodus 20:4
- **Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787 AD)**

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

¹ *DIU Today* (Dallas, TX). "Crash Course on the Seven Ecumenical Councils." April 8, 2025.

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us
(1 John 1:1-3)*

“The more frequently they are seen in representational art, the more are those who see them drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models, and to pay these images the tribute of salutation and respectful veneration. Certainly this is not the full adoration {latría} in accordance with our faith, which is properly paid only to the divine nature, but it resembles that given to the figure of the honoured and life-giving cross, and also to the holy books of the gospels and to other sacred cult objects.”

Icons General:

- Deeply Analogical
- Examples: Standing Stones (Josh. 4:2-3), the Tabernacle (Ex. 25-27), the Cross, Fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ), Graveyards (Catacombs), Celtic Knots, Sacred Art

Icons Specific:

- Deeply analogical
- Confronts you instead of drawing you in

Pitfalls with Icons

- “No graven images” – the spirit of the command
- Pedestals/hagiographies (Saints as flawed heroes: David, Abraham, Moses)
- False Teaching Through Icons (devil with horns; unhelpful)

Spiritual Formation Through Story

- Virtue Theory: virtues are best taught through narratives; folk tales; etc.
- OT Biggest Genre is Narrative (Abraham, Naaman, Esther)
- Not Isogenesis but Christo-genesis
- Favorite spiritual writers have my favorite stories (Augustine, Aquinas, John of the Cross, Teresa, Edith Stein, etc.)
- Own Experience: Biographies of Great Christians (Dr. Helen Roseveare, George Mueller, D. L. Moody)

Practical Application

- Recognizing & Establishing Icons
- Reading about the saints
- Finding Relational Models
- Reading OT analogically (Heb. 11; Gal 4:21-31)