INTRODUCTION

The basic argument is simple. It is, in its barest form, that the propagation of imagery in any society is directly related to the dissemination of authority. Consequently, attempts to restrict imagery relate to changes in the extent, location and exercise of power. I believe this to be a general principle of cultural development, though I am not at all sure how far it can be pressed in contemporary conditions when images can be reproduced and broadcast with such ease. By images I shall generally mean pictures and statues; but I shall also be concerned with the role of mental imagery in the development and training of thought, and of imagery in language, especially in scientific and religious speech.

The removal of imagery from worship that took place at the Reformation was therefore both an index and an ancillary cause of a dramatic shift in the location of authority; this had significant aesthetic consequences. The central issue of the Reformation was indeed the same – the location of authority. Did it reside in the accumulated teachings of the Church, or in scripture only? And if in scripture, by whom was it to be interpreted? By a learned clergy, by the congregation, or by the individual? And if in accumulated teachings, under what system of government? Papal, Episcopal, princely, or devolved? John Robinson, the pastor in 'The Mayflower' put the matter thus:

> *The papists plant the ruling power of Christ in the pope, the Protestants in the bishops, the Puritans in the Presbytery, we in the congregation of the multitude called The Church.*[1]

Put another way – did authority flow from the top down or rise from the bottom up? In Ecclesiastical terms the test case was pre-eminently the status and power of bishops who were appointed and subsequently controlled appointments and ordination, and were held to guarantee legitimate succession. As one anti-Puritan pamphleteer put the matter in 1644 *'Dislike*

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of Bishops is the beginning of all Heresie, and needs must end in Anabaptism and rebellion'. To which we may append the axiom attributed to James VI of Scotland (James I of England): *'No bishops, no king'.*

The location of authority has further consequences of an administrative and financial character which, as we shall see, have further consequences still for the art of building, ornament and personal embellishment. At its crudest, a pastor is unlikely to build a cathedral; he could not command the resources even if he wished to. He would not wish to, whereas a bishop might and could and often did.

The location of authority aligns almost exactly with the attitude taken toward imagery by the several systems of religious governance. Briefly – the more centralised the system, the more imagery in worship. In the increasingly anti-authoritarian 'left' hand end of the spectrum, imagery comes to be entirely rejected; but here we have to do with a system of ideas in which any mediation, ritual or formal structure that stands between God and man may be inherently wicked. An image is such a mediation. This appears to be a general principle in all the major religions.[2]

Once again we should note that the suspicion of visual display that Protestant (and more particularly 'Puritan') communities have often demonstrated, even while having a distinct visual style of their own, is both a cause and an effect of their organisational structure. But the point to make is that both are the consequences of a theological definition of authority.

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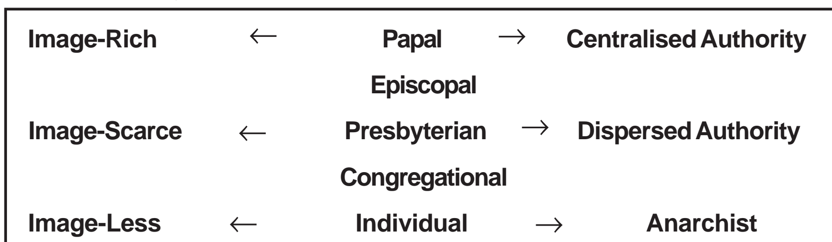
This can be shown easiest by means of a diagram that I think holds well in nearly every case, though like a strong and simple idea it is a better servant than a master. There are also problems, which we shall encounter later in the text, with the idea of a truly an-iconic worship.



It will be understood, I think, that in the central column of this chart I am referring to general principles of governance, not specific instances. Thus Presbyterian churches have had a

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variety of practices with regard to imagery, and within Lutheran and Anglican Episcopalians, practice varies from region to region in different periods. Thus the (Episcopalian) Church of Ireland, though part of the Anglican communion, is notably less iconic than its sister church across the Irish Sea because historically it has always had to mark itself off sharply from Catholic and `popish' practices to avoid being outflanked on this issue by Presbyterian and Congregational rivals. This has not been the case in England, where Catholicism was historically of smaller significance, and popularly seen to be alien and even hostile.

In the second chapter I shall be able to align this organisational scheme with others that are similar, referring to mental imagery, emblems and the training of memory.

The more we examine the issue of imagery and authority, the more we begin to see that any discussion of a possible 'Protestant aesthetic' has to begin with a study of the destruction of religious imagery during the Reformation. The account of this destruction has to be both historical – the when and the where of a varied and often zigzagging process; and the why – the spiritual and more especially theological rationale behind an activity that can only seem dismaying to anyone concerned with beautiful objects, craftsmanship and art.

For the purposes of this book we shall first concentrate upon English and Scots accounts and documents. Equivalent material from Ireland is rather scarce, and the extensive material from Germany, Switzerland and Holland refers to events in significantly different political situations. Briefly, Reformation iconoclasm in England and to a lesser degree in Scotland was part of a drive toward the expansion of secular power, and partook of a redefinition of the political state and its limits. A concentration on English theological argument through a short study of the thought of John Wyclif enables me to bring out more strongly the important Platonic tendency in the Reformers' programmes. All this forms the substance of the first chapter, entitled 'Imageless Worship'.

In Chapter Two I will argue that the elimination of physical imagery was accompanied by a deep change in internal psychic or mental imagery, particularly as it applied in memory training and the formal curriculum. It was also in large measure a reconstruction of character, since identity is preserved in memory. The process demanded a constantly vigilant self-scrutiny. The Reformers attempted

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to extirpate mental imagery just as much as they successfully removed religious statues and pictures from worship, but they were always aware how difficult this was, since the human mind is, as Calvin wrote, *'a factory of idols'*. These matters are intimately connected to the spread of printed text which progressively replaced the systematic training of memory, though they cannot be reduced to that. We may surmise that it also has bearing on the development of science and the habits of thinking in technological terms. This chapter is entitled 'Imageless Thought?'

In Chapter Three I describe the beginnings of 'the Plain Style' and the concept of 'perspicuity'. The terms were first used in reference to preaching and the language of sermons, but they also related to the demand for a style of singing in which the words had equal place with the music and were fully audible, and of course to the new appearance of reformed churches and meeting houses. The removal of imagery, the 'cleansing' of the church buildings by whitewash, the removal of altars and their replacement by tables in the body of the nave, recreated the architectural setting of worship with a plainness that soon became attached to household goods, clothing and everyday furnishings of all kinds. The term 'Puritan Minimalism' has been used to describe the new domestic setting. The spread of plainness into everyday matters indicated, during the seventeenth century, a shift in and a blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular realms. Briefly, secularisation of society had to be preceded by a secularisation of the imagination.

Chapter Four deals with the Plain Style as an orthodoxy – especially as in the American colonies where it is now often referred to as the Colonial Style. This is a misnomer, I argue; because it was the style taken by the first settlers as a sign of their reformed beliefs and, meeting with no alternative, became the characteristic aesthetic of the new States. Quaker and Mennonite settlers reinforced this transatlantic plainness, which reaches its height in the architecture and design of Shaker communities.

Chapter Five is in part a critique of the concept of 'functionalism'. Of particular importance is the technical culture of the seventeenth century, in Britain and the Low Countries, and of the relations between Puritan habits of thought and the spread of technology both through products and through an extensive technical literature. The guiding intellectual structure I suggest is an amalgamation of the utilitarian and the Platonic, typical of aspects of the Reformed

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curriculum. This amalgamation is seen as the foundation of early industrial design in Britain and America and the generator of a body of design theory in the late eighteenth century. If valid, such a thesis must modify our understanding of subsequent 'modernisms', by insisting upon a theological substratum.

At several places in the text I make use of the sociological concept of *habitus,* which in Pierre Bourdieu's terms designates the deeply 'interiorised' master patterns of a culture or a class which, persisting over time, substantiate particular cultures and modes of behaviour *in* time. The visual aspect of habitus I shall sometimes refer to as visual ideology, I have also found useful the distinction made in social sciences between *Gemeinschaft*, that form of community established on the basis of traditions, social customs and beliefs, and its modernising successor, *Gesellschaft*, which replaces custom by contract, rationality and codified law.

My last chapter has both a summarising and a critical intention. I remain interested in the historical and theological substrata of contemporary culture in much the same way as a geologist is concerned with the underlying rocks of the landscape about him. The rocks are not seen, but they are there, nonetheless, and largely determine what will grow, how the water runs, and where it is safe to dwell.

1. See Hall, B., 'Puritanism: the problem of definition' *Studies in Church History* Vol 2, ed. G. Cuming. (London 1965)
2. One can see, in both Buddhism and Hinduism, a full spectrum between a rich panoply in iconography and a spare asceticism. Islam is notionally suspicious of any imagery but introduces it surreptitiously through calligraphy, as does Judaism. In wider terms still, political authority has always been supported by imagery, and revolutions require the almost ritual procedures of statue breaking and picture defacement. For a general discussion of 'iconic' and 'an-iconic' cultures, see entries in the McGraw Hill *Encyclopaedia of World Art* under 'Images and Iconoclasm' by Silvio Ferri and Rosario Assunto: 'the more spiritualised religious conceptions – in general the monotheistic religions – tend more or less rigorously to an-iconism; the more severely aniconic the attitude, the less anthropomorphic the conception of divinity, and the less important the place assigned in the theology to intermediaries between God and Man'. But Freedberg (1989) has criticised this summary account of the matter

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