Introduction

> Our attitude towards the image is inextricably bound up with our whole idea about the universe.
>
> Ernst Gombrich[1]

During the years that this book has been in the making, the study of iconoclasm has turned into a flood. It may seem hard to keep abreast of the rising tide of publications, let alone wise or desirable to launch another item into this jostling shoal. The effects of Protestant reform that bore on the arts as well as beliefs of Christians across Europe have received their full share of attention – even if the entry on iconoclasm in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* long continued to restrict itself to the conflict in Byzantium. Iconoclasm most emphatically played a large role in the remodelling of European belief in the sixteenth century. In the course of a generation, it has become impossible to ignore this facet of religious change, which seems for long almost to have been airbrushed out of the acceptable face of Reformation. The breakages or ruptures of the past have now moved centre stage, thanks perhaps in part to more recent experiences of militant destruction, and during the last thirty or so years images, idols, idolatry and iconoclasm have been the topic of increasing attention in different disciplines.

There have been some fine exhibitions, in England and abroad, new books and even some new terminology to add to our engagement with the topic. The huge and inspiring *Bildersturm* exhibition in Berne and Strasbourg in 2000 could not fail to impress English viewers both with the extensive range of surviving ecclesiastical artefacts and furnishings from the pre-reformation period in Switzerland and Germany (so far beyond what is left in this country), as well as with the extraordinary thoroughness of the work of sixteenth-century iconoclasts, who succeeded in wrecking and entombing within yards of Berne Cathedral so much religious sculpture. We have yet to attempt a comparable exhibition here, though steps have been taken in that direction. Before the recent Victoria and Albert Museum gathered in its

[1] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p. 125.

show of *Gothic* (2003) a display of the range of art works (ecclesiastical and otherwise) surviving from the period before the onslaught of sixteenth-century destroyers, the Tate Gallery's *Image and Idol* (2001–2) showed a selection of medieval sculpture which highlighted the outstanding quality of twenty-three sculptural works that, damaged or intact, survived the perils of those years. As Sir Roy Strong had shown thirty-two years earlier, including some broken images in his Tate Gallery exhibition, *The Elizabethan Image* (1969–70), it is impossible to take account of our artistic inheritance without setting the incalculably huge toll of deliberate reforming destruction on the balance sheet. Only careful selection and investigation – of texts as well as images – can help us to break through that culture shock and loss. This has lately been helped both by the Henry Moore Institute's show, *Wonder* (2001–2), looking attentively at a collection of painted sculpture from medieval England, and by Richard Marks's recent book *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, with its insights into the proliferation and uses of images.

As for the story of England's Reformation on this score, we already have helpful surveys, and this book joins a growing flood. This includes, most notably, the accounts in John Phillips's *The Reformation of Images* (1973) which described the period 1535–1660, Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992) which tells the story up to 1580, and Julie Spraggon's *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (2003). Keith Thomas's 2006 essay on 'Art and Iconoclasm in Early Modern England' offers the stimulus of a wide-ranging survey of the whole period. Beyond that, recent publications have told us much about the changing face of the church arts and activities of iconoclasts in the Civil War period and beyond. Our knowledge of English worship as it evolved in the changing ritual and artistic developments of chapels, cathedrals and parish churches has been enriched by the work of Kenneth Fincham and Nicolas Tyacke, Annabel Ricketts and Graham Parry (all of which overlap with my work, proving the hazards of overlong gestation, so I owe some apologies for what must now seem like repetition).[2] Phillip Lindley has demonstrated the extent of the damages and losses inflicted on tomb monuments in the reformation period, and the important question of the impact of religious change, while Protestant

[2] See Trevor Cooper's edition of *The Journal of William Dowsing*, and John Walter in several articles and *Understanding Popular Violence*. Fincham and Tyacke (eds.), *Altars Restored*; Ricketts, *English Country House Chapel*; and Parry, *Anglican Counter-Reformation*, all appeared after my text was written, though I have done my best to take account of these works. For Thomas, 'Art and Iconoclasm', see n. 15 below.

teaching on the arts had been set on a new course by Tara Hamling and Richard Williams in their *Art Re-Formed.*[3]

Obviously England did not stand alone, though the course of Reformation in this country was peculiar to itself, and that peculiarity, as I hope to show in this book, bore significantly on its iconoclastic history. We can learn from analogies of comparable actions at different times and places, from thinking about the inherent power of images,[4] and the ways in which different reforming leaders in the sixteenth century came to terms with an aspect of medieval religion that could not be ignored. Idolatry loomed large everywhere as the return to scriptural roots seemed to prove the disreputable face of the Church of Rome in having set aside the image-prohibition of the second commandment.[5] Luther's solution, entirely *sui generis* as it was (and in England provocative by its very conservatism), throws important light, as recently demonstrated by Joseph Leo Koerner, on the central image of the Crucifixion.[6] And of course, beyond the important examples set by different centres of reform across sixteenth-century Europe, our apprehension of the cause as a whole may be helped by looking at the image-breaking of other times and other places, seeing this as a phenomenon that is both global and inherent to our perceptual understanding.[7] Whether our thinking is advanced by the proliferation of terms remains to be seen. 'Iconoclash' has been proposed to cover violent acts of destruction of ambiguous or doubtful motivation, or alternatively to indicate the ambiguity of the image itself; describing the ancient and long-lasting theory that the viewers of religious icons were expected to see through and beyond them to the spiritual presence of the saint they represented.[8] On this view, all art inherently clashes with reality; a portrait as much as an icon is to be 'crossed out' of the viewer's receiving mind because (like any crucifix) it seemingly makes present a person we cannot set eyes on, an unseen presence.

Iconoclasm (which has come to include so much more than the breaking of images) is a topic of today. If world war was not enough to turn our attention to the destruction of art as a tool of aggression, the fall of communist regimes and demonstrative terrorism have implanted programmed art

[3] Lindley, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship*; Hamling and Williams (eds.), *Art Re-Formed.*
[4] See Freedberg, *Power of Images.*
[5] The first part of my work *England's Iconoclasts* was devoted to this aspect.
[6] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image.*
[7] See Boldrick and Clay (eds.), *Iconoclasm*, and the editors' Introduction.
[8] Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, p. 12, and for a different definition, Latour, 'What Is Iconoclash?', pp. 14–37.

or icon attack as a phenomenon of our time.[9] Global culture and communication have transformed the attention value of such deeds. Breaking of this kind was always to some degree a sublimation of latent animosities or fears. But the enlarged arc of potential address has increased the value of this act to the extent that (like 'terrorism' itself) it has become effectively the pursuit of war by other means. The world can be stunned by the defacing of a centuries-old Buddha regardless of the potential for reverence in the eye of the beholder. All great religious artefacts have become potential idols in the eyes of cultural tourists around the world; all museums are the shrines of the gazers of today, whose spiritual quest may have no relationship to religious places of worship. In moving so far beyond the old theology of image-worship, a new phenomenology of iconoclasm has come into being. It is almost as if we had moved from the destruction of art to the art of destruction.

This work is an attempt to plot the course of iconoclastic objectives and activities in England from the late fourteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth. It moves from what has been dubbed the premature reformation of Wycliffites to the Civil War and what is no longer called the Puritan revolution. Iconoclasm therefore, intermittent and various as it was in its manifestations, is presented here as part of England's 'long reformation', the 'radical Puritan continuum' that punctuated this entire period with a campaign for further reformation.[10] Image reform, the completion of what Edward VI and (with less effect) Elizabeth had begun, was the fulfilment of a tabled programme of essential purification. A long series of parallel efforts, unrelated except in shared conviction and intent, deserve to be looked at as a whole for their contribution to the religious history and experience of the period. Convictions and actions moved in ways that punctured politics as well as informing theories of resistance.

The book pursues its theme topically as well as chronologically, and readers need feel no obligation to start at the beginning and proceed doggedly to the end. I hope that reading selected chapters, even starting with the last, will make sense. Particular art forms and topics in Parts 2 and 3 are examined through the period as a whole and are more or less free-standing, so the reader who wants to know about the cross or church glass is invited to begin with Part 3. Part I presents a chronological overview,

[9] See Gamboni, *Destruction of Art*; and on destruction in the French Revolution, Haskell, *History and Its Images*, ch. 9.

[10] See Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation* for the editor's reflections on the topic of the 1998 Neale Colloquium; also Fincham and Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, pp. 107, 117, for observations of Brett Usher and Patrick Collinson.

exploring in the first two chapters the motivation for destruction, and the effects of dispersing a wide range of parish possessions and utensils of worship into secular hands. Chapter 3 is concerned with the premises and practices of the change of direction in the early Stuart period, and the scriptural model that was its sanction. The text then turns to examples of different kinds of ecclesiastical images and utensils, to study the actualities of breaking and destroying church images.

Part II takes several case histories to demonstrate the wayward inconsistency of a magisterial Reformation conducted by Tudor Supreme Heads of the church. Two important saints met utterly different fates at the hands of Tudor monarchs, in one case perhaps with a little help on the side from a subject of Henry VIII. St George's eventual survival was arguably a piece of sheer happenstance, and but for the early death of Edward VI things might have been very different for today's football fans. Iconoclasm affected ears as well as eyes. Thereafter, two chapters illustrate the ways in which the reform of church sounds as well as church sights bore on parishioners. The losses of bells and organs, though less profound and wholesale than the pictorial, also contributed to sensory deprivation, and show that the destruction and reconstruction that began with images made itself felt in the aural context of village (and cathedral) life.

Part III offers overviews of the whole period from three central aspects. First, the medium of church glass that, for the best of practical reasons, had been left on the sidelines, and effectively was a class apart from the altarpieces and paintings and carvings that had initially been the main focus of iconoclastic attention. Looking at the continuity of blame attached to this neglect adds a significant dimension to our understanding of the destruction of the 1640s. The sense of climactic success at that time is also visible in the treatment of the cross in its various forms. This central issue, the topic of my longest chapter, which traces the contested standing and use of cross and crucifix through the entire period, may be seen as the heart of the matter, as it must be in all iconoclastic movements. Looking at it from the time of Lollards to the execution of Charles I reveals much about the continuity and changing dimension of iconoclastic purification, and also has something to tell us about the motivations of those who took to arms in the 1640s.[11] If freelance image-breaking was spurred by the urge to combat idolatry, as well as to score personal points, iconoclastic violence could reinforce popular royalism. Many words as well as wounds were exchanged on this score. Finally, consideration of the prioritising of the

[11] As observed by Holmes, *Why Was Charles I Executed?*, pp. 68–9.

senses, the relative standing of hearing and seeing, ear and eye, word and image, sums up and illuminates the perceptual challenge that lay behind the whole phenomenon of religious iconoclasm. It started from and attempted to impose something like a sensory revolution.

There were different kinds of images as well as different kinds of image-breakers, and different ways of annulling the perceived dangers of imagery. If England's record on this entire score seems remarkably inconsistent as well as of remarkably long duration, it is worth taking proper account of these factors. To start with there is the matter of recognition or non-recognition of saints. Reforming logic dictated pruning on scriptural lines. This was an aim that Archbishop Cranmer worked towards and which the Prayer Book calendar reflected. But the power of the Supreme Head of the church rocked this boat – initially so seriously that the existence of the Henrician regime was itself at risk in the 1530s. The campaign to destroy St Thomas Becket as England's premier saint owed nothing at all to the reshaping of English devotion and the church calendar on scriptural lines, but everything to the political venom and rapaciousness of the church's new master. This remarkable iconoclastic achievement certainly pleased some reformers, but it was quite inconsistent with the current reforming programme. This glaring inconsistency was repeated in the opposite direction in the case of St George. Some (Edward VI included) clearly recognised the anomaly of retaining national respect for so uncertain a saint. Had the young king lived, this patron would surely have been exiled. As it was, England – church, court, Supreme Head and country at large – stuck to the honours of a patron saint who caused embarrassment to some good Protestants awarded Garter honours who were uncomfortable with this saintly association.

The inherent perils of images depended on their medium as well as their subject matter, and – never to be forgotten – their location. Imaging the Godhead was on a quite different level of danger from imaging Christ. But was someone who wrongly venerated a carved and painted saint likely to pay the same respect to a comparable figure in a stained glass window? If we can see iconoclasm as some kind of movement, intermittent and various as it was, it is obvious that it was always both official and unofficial; imposed by recognised authority as a required action, and promoted by independent individuals or groups as a duty enjoined by divine law. This bifurcation was present at the start of England's reform in the 1530s, and still apparent a century later. What changed fundamentally in between was the atttitude of constituted authorities towards religious imagery and its potential danger. Bishops had always differed in the extent to which they

were eager or reluctant to call their diocese to account for the removal of images (or other offensive items) from the parish churches under their control. This meant that zealous locals who took seriously the commands of divine law (and the self-professed aniconic regime of the English church) felt obliged to press their case, sometimes to the extent of assuming the duty of destruction. While sixteenth-century bishops varied in their iconoclastic fervour, some certainly took this obligation seriously, and effected purifying alterations in both parish and cathedral. In the seventeenth century, it became more common to find a bishop asking whether ornaments and church possessions had been damaged or gone missing from the parish, rather than whether they had properly been defaced and obliterated. The change of climate affected the shouldering of the magisterial role of destroyer by secular individuals who saw themselves as called to supply the deficit and take action – including the reform of images in places quite removed from churches. The core obligation remained throughout the prevention of idolatry in the places of worship in which it had (as it was believed) so long been sanctioned, and in which it was most likely to occur. But ardent purifiers were not constrained by the limitations of place, and well before parliament in the 1640s sanctioned action against dangerous imagery in public places, activists had seen fit to undertake such work.

To what extent is it possible to think of iconoclasm in this period as a *movement*, rather than a series of repeated, repetitive, displays by ardently committed individuals or groups? That is something for the reader to judge. Certainly, the fact that similarly minded individuals had similar intentions and destructive aims at widely separated times need not point to anything more than recurring fidelity to Biblical commands. The endeavours may often have failed, and they may been the work of only a small minority of individuals, but that does not mean that they were divorced from a consciously wider agenda, or insignificant in their long-term effects. Intermittent and discontinuous events can reflect conjoined purposes, and in this case we may discern a prolonged sense of urgent need to complete work unfulfilled, to bring to its proper conclusion the inaugurated but unfinished purifying reform of the Tudor Reformations of Edward VI and Elizabeth. The avoidance of idolatry was accepted as a primary obligation of the faith, and woe betide magistrate or individual who bowed to idols or failed to root them out. Image-breakers knew God's law was on their side. Arguably, so also was the law of the land, once the Church of England had publicly endorsed the supreme Peril of Idolatry as part of its belief.

Part of the justification for tracing this story, fragmented and dogmatic as it may seem, is indeed the presupposition that minorities (especially extremist ones) can have an important – indeed disproportionate – effect on events. Today, we hardly need to be told this. If every age has its fifth column, heads of state in early modern Europe were alert to the dangers of dissidents who, in the name of religious truth and scriptural fidelity, claimed their right to challenge authority. In England, objectives in the cause of image reform that in the fifteenth century were essentially heretical, were in the sixteenth century subsumed into the orthodoxy of a reformed state religion – but with sufficient qualifications and shortcomings to allow for plenty of altercation and questionable action. For some combatants on this score, critical issues that had long been tabled were only settled when the contest became actual war, in the 1640s. There was a traceable continuity of objective in some quarters to achieve a reform that seemed to have been tabled by the Tudor church of Edward VI and the Elizabethan homilies.

The problematical embracing of image reform, which took different forms on the Continent, produced an essential wobbliness in the English reformed regime, an instability of position that proved ultimately fatal. In the Tudor Settlements of the 1540s and 1550s it seemed that iconoclastic clearance had been fully endorsed and accepted as part of the English church's position. That seemingly clear-cut stand was, however, undermined in two ways. First, in the failure to complete the church clearance of imagery. Second, in the potential for divergence between magistrate and people; between the role and practice of the Supreme Head of the church, and the church's own avowed dogma, which (in an essentially pragmatic English way) was unclear on this matter in that it resided in authoritative documents of different kinds. Beyond the official formula of worship, the Prayer Book (of no assistance on this score), the published articles and injunctions, both for the country as a whole at set moments, and in different dioceses throughout the period, spelt out unclear and differing messages. The fullest statement (*post hoc* rather than *propter hoc*) was that of the Elizabethan homilies, and the long tripartite address on the Peril of Idolatry left no doubt about the great importance of this issue and the firm position of the reformed Church of England against church imagery. Given the discrepancy between this official extreme iconoclastic position and the proclivities of the queen in whose name it was issued, the stage was set for division. It was to manifest itself in act and argument for years to come, as is shown in the chapters of this book. A great deal of anxiety and disturbance stemmed from what may be seen as a structural fault or peculiarity in the church itself.

As the fissure lines of disagreement over the exact boundaries of the divine law became more visible, the question arises of how contemporaries differed in their interpretation of the second commandment. The exigencies of the scriptural prohibition perceived by contemporaries proved malleable – and deeply divisive. That it was transgressive to attempt any imaging of the Godhead was (perhaps paradoxically) one of the arguments of Henry Sherfield that his judges in 1633 could unanimously agree over. But the application of the law as applied to religious images in places of worship was capable of widespread disagreement, particularly – as Sherfield's trial also showed – when it came to the authority of the Elizabethan Homily against Peril of Idolatry. Divine law could not be denied. But it could be variously interpreted. Was this Tudor text to be taken as a pillar of the established church, including all its strictures on imagery of Christ? Or was it to be interpreted in the light of what the actual dangers of idolatry were perceived to be, generations later? Was it possible to adhere faithfully to the commandment text without subscribing to the whole of this long instructive sermon? There was plenty of contention on this score as church patrons started to restore images to places of worship in the reign of James I. And it is surely significant that among the earliest examples of church art to win their way back into parish churches, the dove of the Holy Spirit and the figures of Moses and Aaron guarding the commandment text were prominent.[12] Scripture seemed a sure warranty – but who could warrant agreement over its words? Calvin's utterances might seem security in themselves to some, but for others they were deeply contentious.

There was an important sense in which the image question in England was bound up with the idiosyncratic pick-and-mix fabric of the Church of England. The authority of the secular head and the continued role of bishops who were themselves secular lords was at variance with a ministry which at least in part was wedded to a programme that derived from continental models of city state churches. Bishops and preaching ministers, great cathedrals and parish churches, called for very different approaches to the reform of church buildings (and the possibility of reaching the ultimate purification which some so earnestly desired). Making do, not

[12] See Ricketts, *English Country House Chapel*, pp. 144–5, for the sculpted figures (painted and gilded alabaster) of Moses and Aaron protecting the commandment tables made for the London Charterhouse in the mid-1630s under Laud's guidance, apparently as part of a stone reredos. See also Fincham and Tyacke (eds.), *Altars Restored*, pp. 89–90, 108, 256, 267, for commandment tables before 1640 which had representations of Moses and Aaron, whose figural presence is significant, but particularly when in three dimensions (as was possibly the case with one of these examples). See Haynes, *Pictures and Popery*, pp. 129–33, for a perceptive assessment of the resonances of the figures of Moses and Aaron in the late seventeenth century.

building anew (on the lines that were possible for a period in France) was the challenge to the most committed evangelicals, and while the seventeenth century produced some experiments, the conversion of existing parish churches was the common problem. Meanwhile, England's medieval cathedrals proved as problematical to diehard reformers of the seventeenth century as they had to those of the fifteenth, who had aired thoughts of razing them to the ground. The story that is related here is focused on the contents of ecclesiastical buildings, which in these circumstances bore the brunt of efforts to reforge the English church on the lines of the best contemporary European models.

Of course, there was a European dimension to the whole of this story as root and branch reformers took their cues from Zurich, Geneva and elsewhere. This is part of the story that, properly explored, would have made it still longer, as well as richer. More is certainly to be said, for example, about the church glass of France and the Netherlands, as well as the musical models that bore on would-be reformers of English church music. In the early seventeenth century, when English patrons, the king included, were such knowledgeable patrons of the arts, much of the change of direction observable in the Church in England has to be seen in this world of expanding courtly connoisseurship. Antwerp, as well as Italy and Spain, has to be taken into account. The arts and the church seemed capable of remarriage – making due allowance for English kinship and affinity.

Prime targets throughout the entire period were to be found in church glass. The reform of the large areas of church walls that were occupied by windows was problematical. It was expensive for parishes to replace the panels of imagery in their glazing by plain glass, and the situation varied accordingly from parish to parish and place to place. This remained a difficulty for the entire century, and if there were many who were not bothered and (perhaps increasingly over time) did not notice or care much about the saints still visible in the church windows, or even the Crucifixion at the east end, others were correspondingly outraged, and some individuals and parishioners did their best to push on with this reform. This raises some largely unanswerable questions about the nature of imagery of this kind. Apart from the matter of whether figures standing in painted glass were ever accorded the same kind of veneration as three-dimensional representations, there is the possibility that the temporising of the authorities over this aspect of image reform might have had the effect of accustoming (at least some) parishioners to regard these images as insignificant, given the long-lasting possibilities of postponing payment for their replacement. Certainly, much stained glass remained, and it included crucifixion windows as well as panels