The architects of the Anglican churches built after the Civil War took great pains to avoid any suggestion of idolatry, both as a reaction against the excesses of High Anglicanism in the uses of art in church ritual under the rule of Charles I, who was accused of being a crypto-Catholic, and as a way of preventing new waves of iconoclasm. This raised another problem: how to avoid that these new churches would lack religious dignity and would simply become barns for the congregation, as the extremist wing of Puritans had wanted them to be during the Civil War? How to choose between what Sir Christopher Wren called ‘an Auditory’ on the one hand, and the larger churches built ‘for the Romanists, [for whom] it is enough if they hear the Murmur of the Mass’?1 How, in other words, could an Anglican architect, working after the idolatry of the Stuart Kings before the Civil War, and the iconoclasm and destruction of churches that occurred during Puritan rule, design churches that would comply with the rejection of images but at the same time convey the divine presence? How, that is, create a building that would possess religious efficacy without falling in the traps of idolatry or the danger of iconoclasm?

The sublime and awful appearance of churches

English architects may not have produced any treatises comparable to those of Alberti, Serlio or Palladio in the period before 1715, but they, their patrons and the general public, did write a great deal about one particular issue: the design of Anglican churches.2 Both the Anglican hierarchy

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2 See Eck C. van (ed.), British Architectural Theory 1540–1750: An anthology of texts (Aldershot: 2003), in particular Part III, where some of the texts mentioned here, including De Templo, the memoranda by Vanbrugh and Wren, and the minutes of the Commission overseeing the building of fifty City churches are reprinted.
and the Stuart rulers, who were also head of the church, were anxious to develop a formal vocabulary that would break away with Mediaeval traditions, but not too much, because they were reluctant to part from the English tradition, and claimed the Anglican church was in fact much more faithful to original Christianity than the Church of Rome. At the same time Anglican churches should not look too much like contemporary church design in Italy or France, for obvious reasons. As a result much was written on this issue, not in the least to legitimize stylistic and liturgical choices. All the very extensive minutes of the meetings of the Commission overseeing the building of Fifty new city churches, installed in 1711, survive for instance, but already in 1638 a very detailed, anonymous treatise *De Templis*, on church architecture, was published and widely read. Much of the discussions by the Commission limited themselves studiously to practical details, but a few statements about the religious character of these buildings stand out. In church design, Sir John Vanburgh, one of the architects involved in the 1711 campaign, advised, ‘the necessary dispositions in the usefull part of the Fabrick, shou’d be made consistent with the utmost Grace that Architecture can produce, for the Beauty of it.’ Pediments were the only ornament allowed by the Committee. Charles Wheatly’s *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*, published in 1710 and the most widely used manual on liturgy and the furnishing of churches, admitted that the early Christian churches at Tyre and Constantinople were ‘incomparably sumptuous and magnificent’, and allowed the use of expensive materials, columns and pediments, but plainly stated that ‘No Images were worship’d’; quoting Origen on idolatry, he added that

the Images, that were to be dedicated to God, were not to be carv’d by the hands of artists, but to be form’d and fashion’d in us by the word of God; viz. the virtues of justice and temperance, of wisdom and piety, &c. that conform us to the image of his only Son. “These (says he) are the only statues form’d in our minds; and by which alone we are persuaded ‘tis fit to do honour to him, who is the Image of the invisible God, the prototype and archetypal pattern of all such images.

The churches should not have too many windows but be suitably dark, because as Vanbrugh put it, windows

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