

**The poem: *Church Going***

**The poet: Philip Larkin**

**The stage: Forth stage**

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## **Text**

Once I am sure there's nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.  
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,  
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off  
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Move forward, run my hand around the font.  
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new -  
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.  
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few  
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce  
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.  
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door  
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,  
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,  
And always end much at a loss like this,  
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,  
When churches will fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep  
A few cathedrals chronically on show,  
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,  
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.  
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come  
To make their children touch a particular stone;  
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some  
Advised night see walking a dead one?

Power of some sort will go on  
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;  
But superstition, like belief, must die,  
And what remains when disbelief has gone?  
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,  
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who  
Will be the last, the very last, to seek  
This place for what it was; one of the crew  
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?  
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,  
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff  
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?  
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt  
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground  
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt  
So long and equably what since is found  
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,  
And death, and thoughts of these - for which was built  
This special shell? For, though I've no idea  
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,  
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,  
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.  
And that much never can be obsolete,  
Since someone will forever be surprising  
A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
And gravitating with it to this ground,  
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,  
If only that so many dead lie round.

## **New reading of " Church Going"**

The speaker who is portably the poet decides out of boredom to visit a church and this is not the first attempt. The timing of the visit is so suggestive and copes with the general aura of the poem. The visit occurs at Sunday after the religious ceremony is completed. The emptiness of the location copes with the collapse of faith that the poem announces in every line and behind the words, the flowers of the previous ceremony is faded away as if Larkin hints for the spiritual emptiness and impending death of religion. The eyes of Larkin picture every concrete items in the church save the spiritual ones which are supposed to be the main concern of the visit. He depicts the little monuments and the new ceiling. He denotes six pence to the charity box. The speaker raises appalling question marks like what is the future of the churches in the retreating of religion. He continues in examining every detail in the church as if he wants something to believe in the church.

He walks to the alter to read some verses aloud and finalize his reading with "here endth" instead of amen. He expects that the churches can be diverted into museums or may be suitable place for grazing sheep. The speaker also guesses the final visitors of the church with the death of religion will be either bored ignorant persons or spirituous visitors who

still believes in the power of churches. In spite of his bitter criticism of the church, the poem makes a sudden lovely reversal in the previous attitudes when he admits the significance of this place for human spirituality; man does not only needs this for announcing the beginning of life through birth or the end of the life through death, but the place is significant for humanity and within it the human wisdom can be gained here. In spite of the lack of believers the speaker finalizes his poem with the everlasting church a serious place. The poem cannot be a poem of atheism with the final stanza. Thus, the poem turns from the exploration of the meaninglessness of the church into the importance of its existence.

### **Structure**

The poem is a lyric of medium length, it consists of seven stanza with nine lines in each. Each stanza has a thematic role the first two stanzas set up the conflict and raises the philosophical question about the future of the Christian churches. While the second pairs participate in creating a world without churches, the final stanza finalizes the debate with peace by acknowledging the importance of the church. The lines is iambic pentameter. The interesting rhyme -scheme is ababcece.

### **Diction and language**

The poem is ambivalent since it is rich with different mixture of vocabulary for instance the combination of the following:

"Hectoring / Here endth" combinesthecommon word of bullyng with biblical phraseof ending ermons "Here endth". The combination of assonance and vowel variety occurs in " door thud shut/ some brass and stug"

## **Title**

The title of the poem is illusive since the first impression of the title hints that the poem is a religious one whether in reality it is not. The church goer of the poem seems to be museum goer.

## **Signs of Disrespects**

The poet proves to be agnostic and he shows irreverence for church through some reference :

- 1- The raising of the bicycle clips instead of hat as a sign of disrespect .
- 2- Denoting worthless amount, six pence, reflects his humiliation for this place.
- 3- Foretelling the future attendants of the church will be superstitious woman who looks for miracle to cure her son or another woman who looks for the spirit of her dead and a bored person like the poet.

4- Saying " here endth" after reading engraving verse instead of saying amen and the echo of his loud reading turns into laughing to suggest the meaningless of the words.

### **Physicality versus spiritually**

The poets during his agnostic journey drags the attention of the readers to the location of the church and its design and he mediates in the structure and engraver of the building without having any opportunity to indulge in spiritual mediation. This seems a way of escaping from belief to disbelief . the matter will be diverted with the final stanza that shows the futility of any attempt to belittle the importance of the church.

### **Attitudes and Tone**

The poem is ambivalent the tone varies from atheist to not devoted to peaceful one since it depends the thematic scheme of the poem which is a cynic journey checking the religious appreciation. The journey passes different stages of spirituality to travel from ugliness of disbelieving to final end in peace. ambivalence is clear in everything in the poem to include language as well as theme. The persona is unsure of his religious believe and unsure of his purpose of frequent visits to the church that he is attacked and mocked bitterly and the appreciates it to be " a serious place"