



Church Going

-Philip Larkin

The poem 'Church Going' represents the thoughts of the poet as he enters a church. He is an agnostic but accepts the importance of religion in human culture. In the poem, the speaker questions the utility of churches and hence religion in our life & also seems to make an attempt to understand their attraction. Failing to realize their allure, he wonders to himself that what will happen to the churches, once they go out of fashion and fall to disuse. The poem that seems to be an inquiry into the role of religion in our lives today, describes the curiosity of the speaker on the same subject. However, in the end the narrator comes to the conclusion that churches will never go out of style, not only because of the integral role of religion in our society, but also because mankind has an innate need to believe in something greater than themselves.

**Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.**

The poet enters the huge, empty and still expanse of a church, after making sure that no one is there inside as his purpose of visiting was to just understand what attracts the people to this place.

**Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books;**

The word 'Another' signifies that the poet had visited a number of churches and had a habit of doing so, with the same matting, seats and Bibles, in his search for some difference of one of them from others. Being a weekday, the flowers of the Sunday church had not been removed and hence they were withered and had turned brown. An organ or a smaller piano was kept near the holy altar. He added that the church had an atmosphere of absolute stillness and which could not be ignored.

Taking off his cycle clips in a clumsy show of respect, he moved towards the Font, the place where the holy water is kept for baptism. Instead of looking at statue of Jesus, he first looked at the roof which seemed clean or renovated—stating that the church had a caretaker. He then stood on the lectern, from where the priest gives his speech, and quickly tried reading some verses imitating the priest's voice, mocking in contempt.

**Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.**

In his next stanza, the poet admits that although it is worthless to visit a church, he still does it often. He wonders, what will happen of the church when people completely stop visiting them.

**A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.**

As if answering himself, he feels that some cathedrals would be converted into museums with the holy manuscripts, communion plate and small boxes kept for display in locked cases. Or it would be rented to nature for free, meaning that it will be abandoned with rain falling and sheeps grazing in it. After dark,



superstitious women would bring their children to the place to touch a stone or pick some herb which could cure cancer while some superstitious men would visit the place hoping to see their forefathers & relatives' spirits in the church's graveyard. The church will have grasses, weeds on pavements and support and thorny bushes all over.

**Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random.**

Week by week, the churches will deteriorate making it less recognizable. The poet wonders that who would be the last person to visit the church for religious purpose. It could be a research student tapping on the walls and making notes or a research addict, attracted to old buildings and ruins for antiques and historical things. It could also be a Christmas loving person who loves visiting the church on Christmas to get the feel of celebration. At last, it could be a person of his kind, questioning the purpose of existence and credibility of these religious institutions.

**Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground.**

Finally, the poet says that even when the churches are dusty and unclean, people will still go towards them. Even though scrubs and bushes have grown and they are spreading acres and all over, churches have existed for the genuine reverence of the celebration of rituals, marriages, birth and death and have been an integral part of our lives. If not for any other, then for at least this the churches will remain in human mind forever.

**For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here.**

He admits that although the stuffy things kept in the church are of no meaning to him, still it pleases him to stand in the church. It gives him tremendous peace, pleasure and an aura of something above human.

**A serious house on earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.**

Although dilapidated, the church will remain the most serious place in the world-overwhelmed with peace and satisfaction. It is in the atmosphere of the church that all kind of our desires are finally met or recognized and are regarded as our fate by the Lord, and this thought cannot be outdated ever. Its ambience enables us to contemplate on the philosophy of life that culminates in death as the dead buried around in the yard only prompt serious pertinent thoughts.

While the fear of God's wrath holds people accountable for their actions, religion gives humans guidelines to live their lives. It teaches us 'right' from 'wrong' and thus becomes a necessary entity to keep society running smoothly.

Since someone among the non-believers will always surprise the others by visiting the church or having a hunger of being far more religious, the church will continue to draw people towards it as it is the church where a person grows wise and all your desires are changed to your destiny. The poet, at last reaffirms his faith in religion.