Philip Larkin
Church Going

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 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 or other 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 butress 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 whta 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 grown-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 recognisd 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.