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In the poem "Church Going," we find an author out of touch with his spirituality and who is trying to deal with changing times. This poem seems to have been written during the decline of the Age of Faith, since during the Age of Faith, everyone would have gone to church. The fact that the author of this poem questions his presence in the old church seems to suggest a feeling of spiritual detachment and a realization that "church going" is no longer how it used to be. Times have changed, and the author is uncertain of how to feel toward the changes that have taken place in his world. He voices his uncertainty in the poem.

In the first stanza, the author enters a church and voices his discomfort at being there. We get the first sense that the author is detached from being at church when he makes sure "there's nothing going on" inside the church before he walks in. If there had been people inside the church, he would not have felt comfortable being there, and this is why he makes sure no one is inside before he enters the church. We then feel the author's apathetic attitude toward the church when he steps "inside, letting the door thud shut" instead of allowing it to close quietly as one respectfully would upon entering a holy place. He tells us that this is just "Another church," signifying that there is nothing special about this church or the others he has visited (if this is just another church, he had to have visited others to make a comparison). As he continues his description of the church, his diction hints at his apathy toward the church. He tells us there is "some brass and stuff / Up at the holy end." The word "stuff" is a carelessly chosen word to describe objects in the church, and the phrase "Up at the holy end" serves to belittle the sanctity

of the church. The author's feeling of detachment is made clear when he tells us there is a "tense, musty, unignorable silence" in this church, "Brewed God knows how long." We see from this that the silence bothers him; once, there used to be people in the church giving praises to God, and now, there is no one except himself.

Churches are places where people come together to worship God. A church allows people to find spiritual meaning in their lives, an act that is a necessary part of our humanity. Regardless whether we find spiritual meaning in a church or some other place, we derive a greater sense of self and a connection to our world because of our spirituality. We have seen from the first stanza that the author has already lost his sense of spirituality. Being within the church has no meaning for him since church-going times have passed. He reads "a few / Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce / 'Here endeth' much more loudly than [he]'d meant" because he really feels that the Bible, the "small neat organ," and the "little books" and "sprawlings of flowers" are all for nothing--these things belong to an age that has ended. These things no longer have any meaning to him or to anyone. If they did, there would have been people in this church. However, the "echoes snigger briefly," reflecting upon the fact that the church is devoid of people. No one cares about going to church, and we will see soon that this realization troubles the author.

In the third stanza, we discover the author's reason for feeling detached from his spirituality. Although he reflects that "the place was not worth stopping for," "Yet stop [he] did. . . 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. . ." The author is asking a basic question--what do we do when times change? Perhaps the author wonders if God is still there in the church, although no one comes there to worship him or to maintain the place. When we have done something a certain way for centuries and then we suddenly decide to change, a

certain feeling of uncertainty arises. The Age of Faith is dying, and along with it, the spiritual meaning people once found in churches. The author is uncertain of the future of this church, and because the church is a symbol of his spirituality, he is uncertain of his spiritual future.

In the fourth stanza, the author expands his basic question to the far future. What do we do when times continue to change? As the Age of Faith quietly burns out, there will still be believers of God. "Power of some sort or other will go on / In games, in riddles, seemingly at random." As time progresses, the author knows that this population of believers will decline until no one believes in God and no one comes to church. He then asks the question, "[W]hat remains when disbelief has gone?" His answer is that not much will remain of the church except "Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky, / A shape less recognizable each week, / A purpose more obscure."

In the fifth stanza, the author wonders about the final fate of this place. He wonders "who / Will be the last, the very last, to seek / This place for what it was." In a new world where spirituality has little meaning, this church will be but a memorial to a dead age. He speculates about the type of person who would seek some meaning within this church--"one of the crew / That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?" Or, "Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique, / Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff / Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?" The types of people the author has described, historians and people getting high off of Christmas cheer, are not those who would come to seek a truly spiritual meaning from this church. The author seems to suggest by this that the spiritual purpose of the church will be lost, long before people stop coming to it.

However, in the sixth stanza, the author describes one person who might really come to church for spiritual knowledge. This person is his "representative, / Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt / Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground / Through suburb scrub because it held / So long and equably what since is found / Only in separation--marriage, and birth, / And death, and thoughts of these. . ." He is describing God, "for whom was built / This special shell" of a church. Although he has "no idea / What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth," he does recognize that this church once held spiritual meaning for many people. He also recognizes that long after the church becomes meaningless, God will still be there.

In the last stanza, we see that because God is always present within a church, there will always be people going to church to explore their spirituality. The author tells us that the church will never be completely abandoned because "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." The church can never be obsolete because someone will always find something that draws him to this church.

In conclusion, although the author is faced with much uncertainty about his spiritual future, he realizes he is not alone. There are others who feel a yearning to learn more about their spiritual selves, but who cannot because times have changed, and going to church is no longer the communal act of worshipping God that it used to be. Although there will be few people visiting the church, the author understands that it will never be completely empty, because God will be there.