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CODE SUJET : EHP

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SUJET JURY

SUJET CANDIDAT N°

Philip Larkin 'Church Going' 1955

- 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
5 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.
- 10 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
15 '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.
- 20 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,
25 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
30 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;
35 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
40 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
45 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
50 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,
55 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,
60 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.

'Oral Roberts', unsigned obituary in *The Economist*, January 2-8, 2010.

Oral Roberts, preacher of prosperity

Oral Roberts, preacher and televangelist, died on December 15th, aged 91.

The first time Oral Roberts heard Jesus's call on his life, he was 17 and had been bedfast with TB for five months. He was a stuttering, faltering, disbelieving young man, much like the young Moses in his pride. But as his impoverished family knelt round his bed in their cabin in the dust of Oklahoma, praying a desperate prayer to the Lord, he saw his
5 father's face fade into the countenance of Jesus. It broke him up.

He had never seen Jesus before, though his preacher-father and his mother often spoke with Him, and he knew Him as a friendly presence, unlike terrifying God. His sins flooded up within him and he wept out his repentance, crying "Jesus, I'll even preach for you if you'll save my soul."

10 Jesus took him up on it. Mr Roberts next saw Him, in 1980, as he stood praying by a giant unfinished skyscraper in Tulsa. This was his City of Faith Medical Centre, built on the Lord's instructions but running into financial delays. He was now a rich man, in an Italian silk suit and with solid gold bracelets on his wrists. His annual income from
15 donations was \$120m; he bought a new Mercedes every six months, and had a luxury home in Palm Springs. His inspirational shows were broadcast on hundreds of radio and TV stations. Richard Nixon and Elvis Presley had sought his spiritual counselling, as had millions of other hurting people. But Jesus towered over all this. He was 900 feet tall, with eyes that burned to the very pit of Mr Roberts's soul. He assured him the Centre would be finished and, just to show him how easy it would be, He picked it up.

20 These encounters stoked high the fire of the spirit in Mr Roberts, enabling him to travel and broadcast coast to coast and as far as Australia with a heavy anointing. But they were not strictly necessary. God spoke to Mr Roberts all the time. He told him to preach from the age of 18 in sweltering 3,000-seater tents across the south-west, and in 1954 to let the television cameras in, so that the Pentecostal spirit rolled all across the land.
25 He told him he could heal with his right hand, know the number and names of demons, and cast them out, so that thousands saw him in sweat-soaked shirt and tie gripping and wrenching the believers and yelping, weeping his praise ("Oh God, loosen that little foot up! Glory to God! Glory to God!"). Mr Roberts was empowered to heal via TV screens and through prayed-over handkerchiefs sent by the mail. The Lord told him to build a major
30 university: the result was Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, with 5,400 students who, by a

miracle, neither drank nor fornicated. There in the Prayer Tower, under the eternal gas flame, Mr Roberts prayed for all who asked him to.

Most insistently, God told Mr Roberts that He wanted him to be rich. One day in 1947, when he had pranged his car, Mr Roberts opened the Bible to 3 John 2: "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Almost
35 things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Almost instantly, he found he could afford a Buick, rather than one of those smaller economy cars. He began to preach that word. God would return a miracle harvest from the seed sown (1 Cor. 3: 7; Gal. 6: 7-9). Every dollar given to the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association—"or \$30, Amex, Visa, whatever the Lord leads you to do"—would eventually
40 return to the giver multiplied as much as a hundredfold. Those who doubted could survey the ORU campus at 7777 South Lewis, and see what God had wrought through the man who was now a director of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce and the Bank of Oklahoma.

Weeping and fasting

To help the process along, his followers were sent sachets of healing water to anoint their
45 wallets, as well as any part of their body where they had need. Mass mail-outs and computerised lists were mobilised, for the first time, to do the Lord's work. The Precious Seed sent in return ended up with Mr Roberts, but "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things of the temple?*" (1 Cor. 9: 13).

Yet God also worked in mysterious ways, for His thoughts were higher than men's
50 thoughts (Isaiah 55: 9). In 1986 He ordered Mr Roberts to send out medical missionaries in His Name, and to raise \$8m in scholarships for them, or He would call him home. Mr Roberts prayed, fasted, wept on prime time and raised the money, but the City of Faith closed down within two years, despite what Jesus had assured him. God said: "I did not want this merging of My healing streams of medicine and prayer localised in Tulsa." God
55 also decreed that Mr Roberts should be persecuted for this effort, as well as for saying that he once had to interrupt a sermon to raise a child from the dead.

Over the years therefore the harvest appeared to dwindle in dollar terms, and his debts grew. But Mr Roberts was still elegant, with a fine head of hair filled with the Holy Spirit. A multitude of preachers and healers had been raised up in his image, with their own TV
60 shows and motivational books, to carry on the work. And God spoke to him one last time, telling him that although his heavenly home was prepared, he was not about to be taken from Oklahoma. He would rule and reign over the ORU campus until the end of time, when hoodlums and sodomites and disbelievers together would be repaid for laughing at him with everlasting fire.



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Louis Comfort Tiffany: *The New Jerusalem*, 1902. 335 x 142 cm. Leaded glass.
May Memorial Unitarian church window, now on display at The Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse,
New York