

I left the office at around five yesterday, having just had the news that we were NOT going to be getting the long awaited info about our jobs today. I wasn't particularly pleased and I think I was a bit snarky when instant messaging Ang. I left the building and ran to try to catch a bus, only to have the doors slam in my face as I reached it. Frustration welled. "It's like that, is it?" Getting to the station was fine, the train was on time and I dozed like normal most of the way back to Peterborough, waking around ten minutes before the train pulled in. Outside it was dark and miserable and my mood matched it.

Mood Change

Max, 16th October 2002

There were four things that affected Anne's ability

to do what she wanted to do.

She had angina, so her heart stopped her doing it.

She had emphysema, so her lungs stopped her doing it.

She had lymphoedema, so her legs stopped her doing it.

But then, she had bloody-mindedness, so she did it anyway.

Dave Langford emailed me shortly after Anne died, and I sent him the following lines which he was kind enough to quote in Ansible 171. I still can't do better than this. Anne had other qualities, but her nature as described in the final line informed everything she ever did.

Some people reading this won't have met Anne. I was going to write something new today which captured the screen what she was like in real life. I can't do that. I tried and it didn't work.

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Life without Anne

September 5th, 2002

The new is full of of year-after-the-trade-centre. It does't help.

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Conversations 1

Because talking about it makes it better

Conversations compiled by Douglas Spencer

Issue 1 published 1st November 2002

Future issues published when I feel like it.

Available for the Usual.

Because you're mentioned.

Because you helped.

Because of your LOC.

Because you found it in the bar.

Because you sent me yours.

Because.

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Flick says "I'd rather you didn't."

Max says "I quite like the format.

It has got a touch of map-folding about it though."

It can't rain all the time.

door it wasn't raining. The pavements are drying up.

my bag in case I needed to change when I got to work. When I opened the dancing in the light. This morning I expected the rain and I put spare clothes in dry out. It was worth it, though. There's something magical about the water

Getting home I had to peel off my clothes, put my trainers on the radiator to didn't matter.

made the getting wet worthwhile and for a short while the job uncertainty

had lifted and it didn't matter any more. The sound of the water splashing

point. It was cold enough to urge me onwards quickly but by then my mood

everywhere, my bottom half was soaked, my feet approaching squelching

like it.

The river is a pleasant feature of Peterborough, I miss the sea. Water's water. I

So what if I was getting wet? I could get dry again at home. I like the water.

was beautiful.

rain coming down, the streams of it running along the tarmac, the puddles. It

fascinated by water; for a moment I saw the scene from that perspective. The

specks of water driving through it. My parents have a new cat and he's

lighting up the rain in front of it and it looked so pretty. Bright white light and

Then something happened. A stationary car's headlights came on, beams

Moving forward the rain lashed down in a right to left diagonal and although I

didn't sigh I felt like it. Push the pedals, feel my legs getting soaked, move

against the wind and make the short journey home. It has to be done.

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The LOC Box

The LOC box is empty: this is issue one, after all.

That's not strictly speaking true. I have one throwaway comment from Max which might be regarded as a Letter Of Comment. We were discussing the two articles on this page, whether she'd be in the market to include them in one of her publications, and she said to me "Have you considered doing a fanzine yourself?"

It's all Max's fault. Blame her.

Faith and Religion

DougS, 23rd October 2002

With thanks to Max for the questions.

Tell me about your faith and religion.

This is not a small question, it's a big one. I can go into this in more detail face-to-face, with anyone who wants to learn a bit more.

You're a Christian. Why?

Yes, I'm a Christian. It would be easy to sidestep the "why" question, fudge the issue by saying that I grew up in the religion, but that's only half an answer. Anyone can grow up in a religion, but coming to faith is a separate matter: unless you grasp the distinction between faith and religion, much of what I'm about to say will be misunderstood, because mostly I shall be talking about faith.

How long have you believed in God? Always? What does this mean?

I've believed in God since first I understood what the question meant. More specifically, I accept the deal offered by God through Jesus: that he loves us, and that nothing can come between ourselves and the love of God except our own blindness, stubbornness and stupidity. Once I realised that this was the deal, that all the business about church and the bible were peripheral and that the love of God was central, then I was sold: sold for life. And "always" means just what it says, twice over: always, and in all ways.

Or do you not believe in God, just in what the religion stands for?

Ah, you do understand the difference between faith and religion after all.

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Almost all of religion is nonsense. Some of us only feel at home in a church where the priest is mumbling in Latin sixty yards away on the far side of a three-hundred-year-old wooden screen. Some of us only feel at home with our hands in the air, singing breathy lyrics with our eyes closed. Some of us only feel at home stood on a street corner lambasting our fellow human beings, threatening them with damnation unless they turn their backs on their godless lifestyle. Some of us only feel at home sending hate mail to the Muslims, or bombing the protestants, or ... Please, God, save us from religion. Give us faith.

Maybe the church is more of a social thing?

Of course it's a social thing. Can you appreciate Science Fiction without Fandom? Sure you can. Can you have Christian Faith without Church? Sure you can, but it's a bit empty. Just me and God? Who else can I talk to about it?

If you base your understanding of Church life on your understanding of Fandom, you can't go too far wrong. We have biblical scholars, music junkies, prayer groups, study groups, fundamentalist fascists. We have book fans, media fans, convention fans, fanzine fans, <insert your parallel here>.

How authoritative is the bible? Do you believe the bulk of it? How does it all affect your life?

The Bible is the infallible word of God. Unfortunately, he wrote it in a different language, in a different time, for a different audience. All the fallibility arises in our failed interpretation of the text.

This means that the people who interpret it unflinchingly word-for-word are doing it — and themselves — a terrible injustice. They make it — and themselves — look stupid. That's how religion starts, and is one of the ways in which religion gets in the way of faith, in the way of a right relationship with God. I can claim that the Bible, *interpreted by faith*, with *the help of the spirit*, is an authority in my life. Different people have different interpretations, naturally: a central plot device in some recent writing of mine.

I could say a whole lot more. I should learn to summarise.

Tell me about your faith and religion.

Faith good, religion bad.

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Belief and Proof

DougS, 25th October 2002

Max wants more, of both.

In the message in which Max asked the original questions, she said "I don't believe in God. I tried to for a long time." Later in the same message she said "I got nothing out of the worship, kept hoping I'd start believing in God. It never happened." In my answer to one of the questions I said "... that nothing can come between ourselves and the love of God except our own blindness, stubbornness and stupidity." Max replied "I don't see why he must therefore love us ... with no evidence whatsoever that it's true." I hope I haven't abridged unfairly.

In mathematics, belief is easy.

There are things which are proved: that the integers form a division ring, that the Rationals are countable, that set theory are consistent — these things we believe.

There are things which are disproved: that two is the square of a rational number, that there are finitely many primes, that set theory is complete — these things we disbelieve.

There are things in a third group, things which are neither proved nor disproved — we're entitled to take a view either way about things like this.

In science, there's a similar trichotomy.

We have a tool to deal with beliefs in the third group: it's called

"scientific method". I have faith in scientific method.

It works like this: I believe in something as yet unproven, I make

predictions based on this belief, I test these predictions. If the evidence

is inconsistent with my belief, I discard the belief: I cast it out into the

collection of things I disbelieve.

I am now persuaded that it is not the case that remembering to take my

umbrella prevents the rain from falling.

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The difficulty — difficult for both sceptics like Max and evangelists like me — is that the belief that God loves us is not amenable to scientific method. Neither the belief that God loves us, nor the belief that he doesn't, nor the belief that there is no God, generate the sort of testable predictions which the scientific method demands, on which the scientific method depends. If a belief is not amenable to scientific method, then it's not possible to disprove it. It's not possible to prove it either, for that matter.

Something analogous happens in mathematics also — there are certain propositions which are consistent with set theory, but which have negations which are also consistent with set theory. We can't prove whether the Riemann hypothesis is true or false, so we can study the sort of maths we get if we assume it's true, or the sort of maths we get if we assume it's false. But we can't tell which is "really" the case, and we have no techniques for persuading another mathematician of the validity of our own particular point of view.

Max again: "I don't believe in God. I tried to for a long time."

I don't think that it's the sort of thing you can "try" to believe. Either you believe, or you don't.

Hear the words of Jesus as recorded in Mark 16:15. *He said to them*

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

That's our job, that's what we're commissioned to do as Christians. But we can't enforce that belief in others, because that's not how belief works. We pass on the good news, and some people get it and some people don't.

The attempt to enforce belief in God is nothing to do with faith: it's the province of religion. Religion like that causes distress and conflict, contrary to the will of God, providing evidence that the enforcer has missed the point. It's my belief that God loves me, and that he loves Max too. Like she says, "*it's a bloody wonderful deal*". But then she says "*But I'm not convinced the deal is being offered by anyone who has that to give.*" I pass on the good news, but that's all I can do. I don't have any evidence.

Evidence which might convince a jury, maybe. But never a scientist. I was never convinced by evidence, I just believed.

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