

celebrates change, and, as a consequence, death, as the very engine of life, Christianity has always celebrated God's changelessness. "Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me."

On one level, I am persuaded to agree with Jobs. After all, what sense can we really make of life, unless it involves some reference to change. Surely even the very minimum description of life must take in notions of growth and vitality, all of which involve change. What is the difference, I want to ask, between something that never changes — indeed, can never change — and something that is dead?

On the other hand, I have always understood divine changelessness as being more about God's constancy. God will always love us, and that love will always be there: something to reply on, never wavering, never in doubt. Jobs's celebration of change, however, makes me feel like one of his fancy products — valued only when new, but to be disposed of when out of date. His line that "you will gradually become the old and be cleared away" is chilling.

It feels significant that Apple HQ, whose address in California is 1-6 Infinite Loop, feels a bit like a bad view of heaven — full of perfect-looking people: thin, beautiful, and young — and set in perfectly manicured lawns and pervaded with that sense of beatific calm which is often ascribed to eternity itself.

My own sense of God's constancy is wholly different: it is that, even when we are old and broken, finishing our days in a home for the elderly, God will always love us and value us. Human beings are not commodities with built-in obsolescence.

The Revd Dr Giles Fraser is Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral and Director of the St Paul's Institute.

and knowledge of modernity. They do not recognise the Chief Rabbi's authority, a position shared by several other Orthodox groups that have emerged in the past century.

These tensions first erupted into the open in the mid-1960s, and then simmered down into an uneasy truce. They have flared up again during the incumbency of Lord

the national debate on a range of ethical issues, from his Reith Lectures to his many books to his interfaith work. His elevation to the House of Lords did not come with the job, but reflected his personal stature.

The internal story is very different, however: when he became Chief Rabbi, there were great hopes that, because of his abilities, he would

Auschwitz survivor Hugo Gryn as a destroyer of Judaism. Both episodes aroused widespread condemnation, even among his own flock, and have remained like an albatross round his neck ever since.

Many Jews who admired the religious pluralism that Lord Sacks preached to the wider world were bewildered by his refusal to apply the same principles within the Jewish

character.

On his retirement, Lord Sacks will remain in the House of Lords and play a continuing part there, but he should be known as the final "Chief Rabbi". British Jewry may lose a once-convenient figurehead, but we will gain a new maturity.

Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain is minister of Maidenhead (Reform) Synagogue.

Why are the atheists shy of debate?



POLLY TOYNBEE is a prolific journalist. She is certainly not a woman of few words. Yet she has been uncharacteristically reticent for the past three months over why she pulled out of a debate with the Christian apologist William Lane Craig, the philosopher and New Testament

scholar whose "Reasonable Faith" tour of the UK begins next week (News, 12 August).

Professor Craig has emerged in recent times as the scourge of the New Atheists. Over the years, he has debated persuasively, as video evidence on YouTube shows, with Peter Atkins, Daniel Dennett, Laurence Kraus, Lewis Wolpert, and Sam Harris. His exchange with the man who was once the world's leading atheist, the philosopher Anthony Flew, was said to have been instrumental in Professor Flew's late conversion to deism. Sam Harris has described Professor Craig as "the one Christian apologist who has put the fear of God into many of my fellow atheists".

Perhaps that is why Richard Dawkins and the philosopher A. C. Grayling refused to meet the American in debate. So it was all credit to Toynbee when, as president of the British Humanist Association, she agreed to open Professor Craig's tour on Monday with a debate on the existence of God. That was in April.

But then, in August, she pulled out, with the

Paul Vallely probes the New Atheists' thin arguments

bald statement: "I hadn't realised the nature of Mr Lane Craig's debating style, and having now looked at his previous performances, this is not my kind of forum." She has said nothing more since, apart from apologising for the inconvenience that her withdrawal has caused, after many tickets had been sold. Perhaps she had seen Professor Craig's debate with Christopher Hitchens, of which an atheist website said: "Craig was flawless and unstoppable. Hitchens was rambling and incoherent, with the occasional rhetorical jab. Frankly, Craig spanked Hitchens like a foolish child."

Professor Craig is not the Dawkinsites' preferred fundamentalist-creationist opponent. He is an analytic philosopher who has attempted to breathe new life into the old cosmological, ontological, teleological, and moral arguments for the existence of God. But when Professor Grayling was invited to debate whether objective moral values can exist as more than social conventions without God, the atheist scornfully riposted: "I would be happy to debate him on the question of the existence of fairies and water-nymphs." I'll bet he would.

Professor Dawkins has responded similarly, accusing Professor Craig of being a "deeply unimpressive . . . ponderous buffoon" who uses

"chopped logic" for "bamboozling his faith-head audience". He had, he said in a phrase that recalls pots and kettles, "no intention of assisting Craig in his relentless drive for self-promotion".

To outsiders, all this looks bizarre. So much so that an atheist philosophy lecturer from Oxford, Dr Daniel Came, has written to Professor Dawkins, warning him that his refusal to debate with Professor Craig was "apt to be interpreted as cowardice".

In a way, that is true. The classic Dawkins-Grayling-Toynbee style of debate is a relentless catalogue of historical outrage, cheap jibes, and dismissive phrases about the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Professor Craig, by contrast, focuses relentlessly on his opponents' failure to address the internal logic of his philosophical theology.

In the face of this, the New Atheists' *ad hominem* insults get only more shrill. Professor Dawkins has called his opponent "a truly disgusting person", and blogged on his "almost visceral loathing of 'Dr' Craig's odiously unctuous, smug and self-satisfied tone of voice".

Why the doctorates are apostrophised is unclear, since one was a Ph.D. under John Hick at Birmingham, and the other a Th.D. from Munich. And objecting to his voice is as persuasive as dismissing Professor Grayling on the grounds of his bouffant hairstyle. The British Humanist Association lists as one of its core values "engaging in debate rationally, intelligently and with attention to evidence". We are waiting.

Paul Vallely is associate editor of The Independent.