

Start Somewhere
29 October 1967

"This is a no-where world," said the boy, "a strictly no-where world."

"and I like it," said the girl. "Being no-where is Kinky. It is op, pop, and switched on, baby. It's a revolving door."

They were married, I think: a sort of a mini-skirted skeleton of a girl, wedded to a bushy-haired mop of a boy in tights... I wondered what sort of surrealist grandparents they would make some day –

Supposing they survived, and their grand-siblings asked them indecent questions like "what do you believe, Grand-op?" or "what is life about, Grand-mod?" What will a wrinkled "Grand-op," what will an aged "Grand-mod" say?

Will Grand-mod say to her grand-siblings someday something like this? – "Listen Sibs, I think I used to believe in God. But the signs went up. They said 'God is dead,' and I un-believed right away. After that, your grand-op and I believed in Sex and Science, but soon unmistakable signs said, "Sex is dead," and "Science is deadlier," so we un-believed again, and we've spent the rest of our lives laughing, dying laughing at Abraham, and at Hugh Hefner and especially at I.B.M. It's a no-where world, sibs, neither Christians - nor computers – nor cybernetics can tell you anything. It's kinky. It's a revolving door."

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When "mods" gets to be "olds" will they, indeed, tell their "sibs" how they came to un-believe in one thing at a time (beginning with poor God that's always been the place to begin un-believing -) Until they un-believed in everything (Sex and Science included) until they ended up with unbelieving themselves? "I un-believe in me"...? "I am strictly unbelievable!" –

The other week, I saw the unfolding of a practical joke on campus that was, for all practical purposes, no joke. A Co-ed was slipping a sign on the back of an unsuspecting boy, a member of the great un-washed, and it said, "I am dead – whew!" That seemed to me the last of all possible signs, the final protest, the dead end of the illogic: "God is dead" – "Sex is dead" – "IBM is dead" – and now, and of course "I must be dead – whew..." ,

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How long ago was it – that it was respectable, decent to say: “Lord I believe. Help thou my unbelief.”? When did it become necessary to say, “Lordy, Lordy, I unbelieve. Help me to get rid of what nagging beliefs I still have left.”? When did beliefs become such a bother, such a source of embarrassment? When did it become required to apologize for law, for love, for faith? Why must one now say, “Forgive my being (so law-abiding) reasonable ... (or) I know this is sentimental, but ... (or) excuse me for dragging God into this conversation ...” etc., etc.? When did “for the love of Christ” become profanity instead of moral prerequisite? (“I will” or “I will not”) When did men first hesitate to trust their faith, or their reason, or their emotions? When was it first thought “gauche” to get up in public and admit, “I love God,” or “I love country,” or “I love life,” or, for that matter, “I dearly love my wife – therefore, I will - or - I will not ...” When did it become unacceptable to accept anything on faith, or reason, or even feeling? When did it become fashionable to be unfaithful, unreasonable, and unfeeling? When did the standards go? (I was palely amused, if not at all amazed, to discover, on buying a new un-abridged dictionary after the fire, that even Webster’s Third International has now abandoned all standards for pronunciation! Today you may jolly well sound your words as you please, and no one may correctly call you incorrect!

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Life without standards, without the controls of religion, or (intelligence?) reason, or affection – when did this come about? Is this a mid-20th century phenomenon? - a gradual decline since the high point of the Refor., say? Of course not. Don’t be naïve. There has always been a cult of the vulgar. There has never been a time without its share of the mindless, the mean, the deadly. The 36th Psalmist (what was his date?) describes what sounds like a contemporary the man who has “a no fear of God,” who “has b ceased to act wisely,” who c “sets himself in a way that is not good/deceitful.” St Paul, in Romans 2, deplored “those who are governed by selfish ambitions, who refuse obedience to the truth, and take the wrong for their guide.” The cult of the vulgar is eternally contemporary –

And as for poking fun at faith, that has been a perineal pastime. The 42nd Psalmist recounts how “my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, ‘where is thy God?’” The ancient brainwash.

And have you and I never felt ourselves to be rebels against all religion and all reason? Haven’t we ever felt enough pain, enough helplessness, enough despair to crucify all easy faith in us, and easy hope and love in us, and force from us the cry “my God, my God, why?” Haven’t you ever felt the pain of the world enough to dis-believe in goodness, in God? “From out of the city the dying groom, and the soul of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer.” That isn’t just Job (24:12)

– that’s us, trying to unbelieve in God because the world isn’t good. Or haven’t you and I ever felt like Dennis the Menace, who looks up from his prayers and says to his mother, “I think He just hung up on me”? Haven’t you ever had the feeling that God had just hung up on you? That life had just hung up on you? Because you were 12 years old and your folks were divorced? Or 16 + you were an outcast – or because you were 30 + 40 + 50 and fat and lost to it all? or 70 and sick and nothing made sense? Do you mean you’re as old as you are, and you’ve never lived in a “no-where world?” you’ve never felt “kinky”? that life, your life was a “revolving door”? you’ve never felt yourself as revolting-- . Then you are “an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” You are too good to be true. You are also unbelievable. Where were you when the seven golden bowls were filled with Gods wrath? Where were you when the anguish, the terror were poured out? Why haven’t you had your share of fear and guilt and unbelief. Why has your life been so much silkier/smoothen and safer and sedater than Job’s and the Psalmists ‘and Jesus’ and St Paul’s? Who are you trying to fool?

No – if, we’re honest, we’ve all had our share of the agony. So many is the time we’ve all had to feel our way back to life, | to God, | to love, | to sanity| and sense. | We’ve all had to start over somewhere, with what we had left, and still believed in, and begin again: with our creative, our useful work, our close ones, our large community, our sense of fairness, our willingness to give. In short, we’ve had to edge back again and again – toward the love of God, toward the love of Christ, to be more gentle, to be more gracious, to be more generous, orthodox it may be, | but more Christian.

Let us pray

Oh Lord, there is enough pain in the world to make any of us a rebel –

But being no-where is no fun, O God –

So help us, who keep getting lost, to start somewhere, back to what faith we can believe, to what reason we can accept, to what affection does ring true for us –

through Christ our Lord-

Amen