Sock It To 'Em, John The Baptist, Baby!

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"There was thunder and lightning, and the gathering of dark clouds. A great wind arose in Heaven, and God spoke."

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SOCK IT TO 'EM, JOHN THE BAPTIST, BABY!

There was thunder and lightning, and the gathering of dark clouds. A great wind arose in Heaven, and God spoke.

"I suppose that you're wondering why I called you all together here." The undercurrent of conversation ceased as abruptly as it had started, among the congregation of angels and archangels, thrones and dominations, the militant hosts of Heaven, and assorted holy people. They turned their attention to God's words.

"As you probably all know, Satan's recent offensive has dealt us a serious setback." A murmur of comment swept through the assembly. A peal of thunder signalled for order.

"The enemy's twentieth-century campaign has met with startling and almost irreversible success. A number of Satan's elite, fully indoctrinated, have infiltrated mankind's ranks and caused this havoc." God paused.

"Silence." Everyone wondered what He was leading up to.

"I want a volunteer," came His voice suddenly, louder than the sound which had toppled the walls of Jericho, "I want a volunteer from among you to carry the message of salvation to man, I want that volunteer to let men know that I am sending My Boy to redeem them once more."

The silence of the catacombs descended. Martyrs, saints, angels and archangels exchanged nervous glances. None of that hole host relished the assignment. Everyone waited for the other fellow to say something first.

"How about you again, John?" God asked.

John the Baptist felt God's inquisitive stare, and the eyes of the assembly focused upon him. It had been quite a few centuries since he had carried the Good News to man, back in Judea over two thousand years ago. He was unsure of himself, and did not quite know if he could do it again. It had been so long ago. However, he accepted. John's acceptance was hailed by the blaring of trumpets, a chorus of angelic voices in song and a round of "Three cheers for John!" The Prophet to Modern Man had been found.

II

John did not know what to make of the streets of this Twentieth-Century city, all so different from the desert wilderness of Judea. So many towers even higher than the one at Babel rose above him! Yet the hurrying throngs looked far different. His own garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle about his waist, seemed to be out of place. John had been out of contact with mankind for quite some time. Anyway, it warmed his heart to think of how happy these anxious-looking tense crowds of people would be when they learned that the Son of Man was about to return.

"Repent, O ye children of the Almighty Father! Repent and hearken unto the Good News, for the hour of thy deliverance from the snares of sin is at hand!"

"Mommy, look at that funny man," said a little girl.

"Hush, Mary, keep away from him!"

"Ah, sighed John, "May God be with thee."

"How dare you swear at my baby, you dirty old man!" said her mother, jerking the child away suspiciously.

John stood in puzzlement as the woman snatched away the little girl, muttering something about his being a degenerate or a nut. So John moved on to a less crowded though shabbier district. On a corner by a broken-down building he saw a young woman turn with an alluring smile. She seemed to draw him to her with her eyes. Perhaps she would listen to the words of salvation. John went over to her. The young woman motioned towards the door and seductively asked if he was willing to pay for her services.

"Ah, my poor misguided child, repent and follow the Lord."

"Shove it, dad!" she snapped. "Haven't you heard? God is dead. You take what you can get in this world and look out for number one." She stalked off to another corner and turned her enticing smile upon another man.

John was discouraged.

III

In an attempt to recapture the flavor of the old days, John wandered down to the river. It was not the same peaceful, rolling river as was Jordan. The water was green with slime and full of garbage, with many huge ships anchored in it. He was soon engaged in conversation with a chubby man in a shirt of many colors, who was unloading boxes. He seemed to be very affable. John asked if he were sorry for his sins. "Sure, pop," he said.

"Would he care to be cleansed with water and the spirit? The chubby man did not seem to understand. He snapped his fingers, and then spoke.

"Oh, I see. Sure pal, I'd love to go swimming, but the damn water is polluted. No swimming allowed."

John walked on. He met a wino who hugged him drunkenly and a queer who tried to kiss him. He was spat upon by a bigot who called him a dirty Jew and was bitten by a dog. When he asked a muscular young man where he could get something to eat, he was escorted as far as an alley and mugged.

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IV

Not even the days of the Pharisees seemed so bitter to John. He was thoroughly confused as he regained consciousness in the alley. He staggered on in a daze. Clearly, the work of the devil was widespread. Yet he was still determined to spread the message of peace and love.

"Hey dad!" John gazed with blurred eyes upon a raggedly dressed young man. He wore a sort of toga, heads, and sandals; and he had long hair and a beard. In fact, he looked very much like John.

"You look like you're one of us, dad, even if you are over thirty. That beard and those threads really look sharp. You seem to be ok to me. How would you like to freak out and take a trip with me and some friends? My chick's got the grass, the cubes, and some speed, too. What do you say?"

John thanked the young man for his hospitality. However, he was already on a trip and did not want to speed along any faster. He did not especially care to eat grass like the sheep of the field, even if he was very hungry. He would though, he said, take any locusts and wild honey that the young man might offer. The young man shrugged his shoulders and walked off, saying "Health food nuts aren't my bag." John tried to follow him, but lost his way and ended up in a slum area. He was chased by several dark-skinned men, who called him "whitey," and told him not to come around slumming again, or he would get his honkey head busted. Fortunately, John lost them by hiding behind some garbage cans.

V

After wandering around for awhile, John saw a group of young men who were shouting things like "Peace," "Love," and "End the War." John was pleased. At least there were some idealistic people in the world. He himself was soon shouting along with the rest. They began singing, so John too joined in.

A number of burly men, many of them in blue uniforms, others wearing white helmets and all of them with clubs, approached them. They were probably the local centurions. Someone shouted something at the angry centurions. The men with the clubs ordered the young students to disperse. Several youths pulled out little white cards which they burned.

"Hell no, we won't go! Hell no, we won't go!"

There was a flurry of fists and swinging clubs. Several youths were hustled off with bleeding heads, still singing. John tried to stop the fighting, shouting out that they were all brothers and should be at peace.

"God damn overage hippie!" grunted one of the centurions, battering his skull with a club. John, streaming blood, was arrested.

At least the place of imprisonment was better than Palestine's dungeons. John was confined in a large room with a score of bloodied youngsters. Each of them told the story of where he had been arrested and spoke of the value of their demonstration. They seemed to be proud and unified in their misery. John was taken out of the room. His wound was treated, and then he was questioned.

"What's your name, fella?"

"John the Baptist."

"Name, bud. I don't give a damn about your religion. Nothing to say? Ok, John Doe, back to the cell then."

He sat in bewildermont back in the room, while the young men congratulated him for his defiance. The next day, John was tried. Justice meted out a thirty day jail sentence to him.

VI

John had plenty of time to think and listen in those thirty days. When he was released (with a warning not to be caught in an anti-war demonstration again), he reported directly to the Father. He told Him how man was troubled with war and unrest. Many had too much money while others starved. When young men asked for peace, they were beaten up and jailed. No one would even listen to his Good News. Taxes were worse than under the Romans. Some of the spiritual leaders kept asking their followers for more money to build churches like palaces, while they themselves drove around in expensive cars, never venturing near the poor.

John shook his head as he explained that if he began preaching now, he would be arrested for being a public nuisance, or not having a license. He would be sent to a psychiatrist. It was most discouraging. God asked if He should still send His Son. Again, John shook his head. It was no distinction to become a martyr nowadays, he said. There were throngs of them already. The finest of men were always being shot dead. Every day others died in wars and riots. What chance did His Son have of standing out from the rest? The two of them tried to devise a solution. There had been a situation similar to this one long ago. There was only one thing to do. It had worked well before.

And so it was, on Earth the next day, unnoticed at first, it began to rain.

Robert Sanders