

1 And There Was Light

Late repentance is seldom true, but true repentance is never too late.

– Ralph Venning

What was before this? What was before the beginning? It comes not at first thought—we usually focus on what is present, from the beginning on. But upon the introspection, we wonder what happened before it all happened. We find even before the original beginning, in fact, before “In the beginning,” it turns out there was not nothing, not even way back there; not empty was the void at all—not completely. I had thought that, too, you know, that it was creation *ex nihilo*: out of nothing. When I did hear what had been there, it opened some doors of thought, what such circumstance might have spelled.

If you read carefully, Genesis said that the Earth was formless and void, and what I found that this meant was that before all things existed was a primordial chaos. To the Babylonians, this was symbolized by the monster Tiamat. In the Old Testament, the beast of that chaos was named Rahab. In the old myths, the progenitor god slays the beast of the chaos and from the body is formed the world that is. We can see that myths themselves change, but there seems to be a deep memory that we share of the old things of the world.

Note that the term “chaos” may be misleading. One may think of things flying around randomly, electric like or a sandstorm. It was nothing like that. Think, instead, of a watery goop, with little, if any, definition at all. When I heard that description of what it was supposed to be like, I had in my head that perhaps the chaos may have been the remnants of a previous creation, af-

ter it had attained a heat death: maximal entropy. Perhaps not, but that was a not unworthy speculation. Whatever this formless mush may be likened to be, it was as if from out of this that God made the heaven and the earth. And out of the darkness He said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.

There is also a very interesting line that is written in the book of Revelation, almost completely without context: after calling Jesus Christ the Lamb, it says he was the Lamb slain at the foundation of the world. It brings us back from the end of the Bible back to the beginning again. I think it tells us a thing or so about how time may work, for this speaks of an event in eternity. But we’ll return to this idea. For now, suffice it that (outside of eternity) there was at the beginning, God—and the Word was God—plus the primordial chaos. Which, if you think about it, doesn’t really seem to be the type of stuff that God would make. There is perhaps another story there, another myth at work. And you know what they say about myths: they are lies that tell the truth.

This book is about a myth, of which very little is written of in authoritative sources: the War in Heaven. Jesus Christ mentioned it once, saying that he saw Satan falling from Heaven like lightning. And in Revelation, it says that Satan and his angels were forced out of the place above by Michael and his angels. That’s pretty much it. There is supplemental material, of course, the most notable being Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, but that is about as reliable as Dante’s account of the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*. These weren’t prophets, as far as anyone knows, or that they claim.

Insofar as it relates to my own circumstance, the events of the War directly impacted the life I lived. I write from experience, not imagination, though you may be tempted to think that at times my imagination ran away with me.

As it happened, the beginning for me—where anything like a saga begins in my life—that would be October 7, 1988, at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. I was 19 and invincible and heavily into dropping acid at the time. There had been floating around the circles I haunted of this LSD from Georgia, which had a print off a Grateful Dead album on it. We called it the “Dead acid”. In other words, its name was a warning. People were having bad trips on it; it was too strong, maybe there was strychnine in it. I of course got my hands on some. By that time, I was already doing multiple hits every time I tripped, which came down to a schedule of about once every weekend.

So I told everybody I was going to take 5 hits of it. I had planned on trying 5 sometime and what the heck? This sounded like a fun time to follow through. People were like, “No, don’t! Take a half a tab, see what it’s like first.” OK, so maybe I did listen a little, was a little bit afraid, I suppose. I told them I was going to take 3, then. “No, don’t! Try a half a tab...” So I took 3 hits. I had taken 3 hits of a strong acid before; I figured, what’s the worst that could possibly happen? Even now having something of a gut feeling that this was going to be one for the books. And I knew almost immediately after taking those 3 tabs that this was not going to be your regular hallucinogenic experience.

Usually it takes about a half hour to start tripping, but as 20 minutes cut in, I was already tripping *hard*. I thought to call my friend Bob and told him I was losing touch with reality, and he said, “We’ll be right over.” I remember watching the patterns flow over the carpet waiting for them to show up. Indeed, my regular group of stoner friends came over, and we were hanging out in my dorm room, and of course, we were passing around a bong. There I was, sitting on my bed—the cause for concern that night—taking hits from the bong, basically unable to speak. I simply forgot how to make that leap in functionality.

There were other people who were tripping, and they seemed as if to glow in comparison to the normals. I wondered if the ones tripping could also see that. Then my mother called, and my roommate answered; he looked at me and saw that I was not capable of anything like regular conversation and so he said to her, “He’s not here.” Which did something psychological to me. (I was nowhere: I was not but lies. And one thing I would learn, through all these experiences: the madness has a memory.) She said she would call back at 9. I might say that it really started right then, my descent into the Dark Wood... to be followed by my ascent out beyond.

I remember some things about what came next, in small vignettes, disconnected, confused. I think they took me for a walk at some point, when I was making absolutely no sense. I’m not sure I was speaking real English in the snatches of conversation that I seem to recall. When I was in my room, not sure if that was before or after the trip outside, and I remember sitting in my dorm room, and the smell of when someone knocked over the bong. Pungent, if you know the smell of “fresh” bongwater.

Maybe this was it, what really sent me over the top: right after I exited the bathroom, which was semi-private, shared with the room next door, my friend Aaron asked me how I was doing, which was nothing in itself, but then he made a gesture with his eyebrows, innocent like a playful, “Hm?” and WHAM! (I understood later that people tripping actually had battles twitching their eyebrows in such provocative manners.) Right then, I had a satori—an awakening—which was like a SATORI, such a rush, but terribly twisted: a sudden realization that I had been so whacked out on drugs they had put me into a drug rehab center without my knowing, which the current reality actually was, and now I was being awakened, finally, to know what was REALLY going on, that my parents and such were waiting for me on the

outside. And now, that I was aware of what was the underlying reality, I needed to get out. Get OUT.

The theme, you could say, was waking up. I went out my door into the hallway and I saw the exit sign at the opposite end, and I started running to it. Out! Out! Of course, there happened to be a set of double doors midway down the hall, which, since I could see through their windows, I think I assumed I would run right through them, apparently just like light. So, I literally *ran* into those doors, face first. I was knocked for a loop. I was floored. I chipped a tooth. I had this vision and thought I saw this guy who dropped out the semester before walk across the ceiling. That had been a guy named Sam, who freaked out while tripping on a bunch of acid while at home winter break. And then things become scattered vignettes again.

I think Bob went out to find me, and actually, was *this* when they took me for the walk? Confused, that whole sequence of happening. Because I remember it was three of us, though I also remember just me and Bob when we had the nonsensical conversation. But there we were, three of us, when we were outside the dorm and they hinted that someone had the keys to get in. And I picked up on it! I was beginning to get a clue. Waking up to reality. The way things work. You know, sense and sanity. Then we went upstairs, back to my room, now evacuated. Innocently, I asked Bob what time it was, and he said, “9 o’clock.” And then WHAM! In a rush: my mom going to call me at 9, parents waiting for me outside, the drug rehab center, everything was FAKE! I ran out again, pushing my way through the double doors in the middle of the hall now, out the back door of my dorm, and I said, dramatically, “I’m off drugs!”

I ran down the stairs, and down a driveway where there was a big EXIT sign, and running, staring at the word “EXIT”. And something quite remarkable started to happen: I began to lose

contact with my body. Seriously, like my soul were coming loose, the connection between me inside and what was staring at the word, “EXIT”; and my legs running began to come loose, and in the space of a few seconds, I lost control of my body completely. So I fell, and skidded on the asphalt. That was the *beginning* of the weirdness, if you haven’t had enough yet.

As my body lay there, I became a completely loose freeform entity. I passed *down*, through layers of consciousness, I saw the connections to how we come to perceive the world around us, then where the symbols we use were grounded, and then completely OUT of my body, so that I was a pure sphere. A sphere, but whose whole surface was an eye: I could see out in all directions without having to turn my head (as if that were the issue, since I had no body parts at all)—but where was I? Part of me, the spherical eye, could see where I had just been, the hallway of my dorm and the door and the exit sign above it. Was this it then, the exit I had been looking for?

I got a little scared. Mostly from confusion, plus the absolute strangeness of what had just happened. And then appeared there before me two of my friends, but I knew they weren’t really my friends, rather that these two beings were symbols of all that was right and good about the cosmos, of heaven and earth. One of them said, “John, this is the only reality you’ve got. Up, up!” And I knew exactly what I needed to do. I wonder now if anyone else had visited where I had been, and were not able to get back. Would they have been catatonic? Would it have been a coma state? I was lucky, and with that cue, “Up, up!”, I passed back up *through* my layers of consciousness, *back* into my body, and I stood up. I started walking back up the driveway, saying, “I love this place, Hunt Library...” Then I saw Bob coming down the stairs.

All he said when he saw me was, “John, where are you going?” But I was having none of it. Because he was a symbol of that which was below, the darkness, of all that was wrong, the drug rehab center and the fake reality I was trying to wake up from, trying to escape. Ironic that he had come because he was concerned about me. So, as my state of mind had determined the course I was to follow, I veered right and ran away, yelling, “I’m off drugs!” Later Bob told me this only added to my legend, and that I was a particularly fast runner. But where was I going, actually?

I had it in my mind to get out of this fake reality/drug rehab center, and I had a vision of a fall. I had decided that whatever it took, however it would feel, I was going to *get out*. So I was making a beeline (if bees turned 90 degree corners) to Schenley Bridge, about 100 feet high off the ground, midway—to jump off it.

And then what happened was the best thing ever. This was worth the price of admission, and a half. I was running up this hill, and I heard a voice inside my head say something like, if you want to get out, you’ll have to run forever! And this maze appeared in my mind, extending beyond my vision’s reach, and I was supposed to fill it with my running. Short hesitation while still running full throttle, when I decided, “Yes!” And at that instant, there opened a white light in the maze, the middle of my imagination; and when I tried to wrap my mind around it, the white light completely overtook me, and now was there nothing but the light, so bright as to be solid, more solid than steel or diamond whatever you could find in any earthly realm—and it was as if I did not exist in comparison to the light, and I was told I was not that light. It was then my perception closed upon it: the circle whose center is everywhere, its circumference nowhere: INFINI-

TY. And I was dropped back into my body, which had fallen for a second time onto the pavement.

As soon as I perceived what I could of it, it let me go. But the thing was: I felt I had gotten out. Ha! I didn't realize what was going on there until much later. That the forces of evil were directing me to go and kill myself, but basically had no chance of getting that done. For I had a destiny to fulfill. After perceiving that light, I didn't need to jump off the bridge anymore. I was awake. I had been rescued, from out of nowhere, *ex nihilo*: out of nothing. There had been nothing in the way between the asphalt where I decided to go and jump from life, and the bridge where I was going to do it. I was saved. In fact, I had no idea *how* saved I actually was.

And the story continues. I got up from being sprawled on the sidewalk, sort of dazed, and I walked around to the front of Hunt Library and saw this girl passerby, and I guess I must have thought, she'll do. I told her, with my finger pointing at her, in no uncertain terms, "I don't care who you are, I want you to call my mother and tell her I'm off drugs!" Yes, this is what made sense to me just then. It was my version of being thankful, I think. She looked at me as one might expect, as if I were the old meaning of the word, "queer," and I hope I didn't scare her too bad, and she walked off.

I guess she must have told someone about that little encounter because as I swung around to the back of the building, two big ROTC guys (perhaps Marines) found me and tackled me and held me down. I forget if they tried to talk to me or each other... At that time, I remembered the martial arts I took in high school. Not that I've ever been violent to anyone but myself, no matter how insane I ever got. Thank the Lord for that. But I did think, *I can get out of this hold*. And I could almost see the pathway out, and 1, 2, 3, twisted myself free. As I walked away, Carnegie

Mellon security showed up in their little squad car. And that was a thing I wasn't going to try and escape from, for the moral dimension had I been bound to, this whole trip. I dropped to the ground. *Busted*. The security guy cuffed me and asked for my name, and I said, "John Doe". "Yeah, right." "ID, back pocket." "What do you know." Then he asked me what drugs I was on, and I said, "Acid, 3 hits". And then I suppose he called for an ambulance, because one came.

I don't recall the ambulance ride. I remember arriving at the hospital. I was restrained. I vaguely recall the catheter being put in. (I certainly remember when they took it out!) There was an orderly next to my bed. As I said, I was restrained, but I could sit up. And every time I did, spouting this or that nonsense from the world according to drugs, the orderly shoved me back down. And maybe it might have been that they sedated me, because I went to sleep. I certainly was past the peak of my trip. Hallucinating lightly, staring up at the ceiling, I drifted off.

When I woke up, I was all, "Where am I?" "Why is my lip bloody?" (Where I chipped my tooth.) "Why am I tied down?" "What happened?" And about then, Bob showed up with my other friend, Boris. Boris hadn't really been there before, but was just concerned about me. I suppose the news had already started spreading. And I must admit it must have gone over pretty well. It was not like I was a newbie tripper, and I end up in a hospital. I once heard the description of that night from Bob's point of view. He said, we heard that John was admitted to Presby so we decided to go down and see how he was doing. As we were being led to where he was being kept, we weren't sure if he was still gone or not. But when we got to his bed, he turned and looked at us and said, "That was wild!" And we knew he was back.

[END EXCERPT]