

Josef Zvěřina on Friendship

My Friend, the Unbeliever

He is a strange guy. If he says he will be there and then – rest assured he will be there, even if it were raining buckets. Unlike my believing friends – some of them – who will definitely not be there even if the buckets were not raining.

He is something of a bear. He will never hurt, but sometimes he feels he has hurt, so he apologizes, clumsily and tenderly, and is ashamed of this triad of things in the process. In contrast to some of my religious friends who take it for granted that I must forgive them for everything: “I implore you, if you don’t, who should forgive?”

I don’t remember him talking about anyone or less so slandering anyone. It is as if people represent some vague whole that he likes and would not like to take apart as he would be unable to put it back together. And that would make him unhappy. Unlike some of my believing friends who are very fond of taking things apart and not only can they not put them back together but they do not even consider it.

The unbeliever is – imagine that – pious! He has this strange reverence for all that is good, a reverence for truth, and becomes emotional in the face of things unknown. Does God belong there? I do not know. I have some religious friends who have known everything for a long time, have infallible recipes for everything. How could they not? They are in cahoots with the Lord God!

He never told me he liked me. I must not tell him either: I would be under the impression that he would be under the impression that I was trying to bribe him in some way. And so we are like two binary stars, circling each other as they are attracted by a force that at the same time divides them. That force is probably freedom. And I have other friends who assure me they love me, but they flash by like a comet. They appear irregularly, usually when they need something from me.

He is an unbeliever. He knows I believe; he knows I long for him to believe as well. He does not mind because he is extremely good. But here, he is particularly sensitive: I am simply not allowed to talk about this matter. I do not even try. My believing friends reproach me: “That is religious indifference or cowardice on your part! – Give him a hard punch to wake him up. – Are you so little afraid for his immortal soul? – After all we must urge in time and out of time. – See how belligerent they are...” (and now, they name some religious communities). So on and so on they advise me. I cannot act on this advice. I think of Christ – and somehow, it does not rhyme with his patient love, his wisdom, and his sense of “the right time”.

But I wanted to ask: Don’t you see such friends around you, too?

Reference

Zvěřina, Josef. 1995. “Můj přítel nevěrec.” In *Pět cest k radosti* [The five ways to joy], edited by Jolana Poláková, 79–80. Prague: Zvon.

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