

The Priest and the Atheist By Rich Norman

I am an atheist and a drummer. Some 15 years back, I had the unwelcome privilege of traversing the country in a large airplane stuffed full of people. I do not enjoy air travel. The noise and the stale air trapped so close to my fellow man, the strangers one must accommodate one's self to, the rude children and their even noisier parents all conspire with my dislike of being out of control, and make for a very unpleasant experience. Who knows who will sit in the next seat in one of these sardine cans with wings?

I find my seat and relish a private moment among the multitude, an oasis of tranquility! I am alone in the seat with no other passenger to impede my thoughts...Bliss! Perhaps the windfall will persist and the flight can be spent blissfully alone amongst the many? I might stretch or read. Ahhh. Then the monster, the abomination approaches, his tall, frail, graceful visage and strange scent draw near, a pale man who hardly moves as he walks, he floats, his large head suspended as a round still balloon above the hangman's collar, the mark is upon him, he is coming to the adjoining seat, and oh despair of all despairs... He is a Priest! The collar, the large pale head floating above it, so white and red about the ears, his skin as ivory, and the hands — delicate and white, large, smooth and uncalloused. So opposite my own, dirty, creased and cut are my drummer's hands, scarred from hitting things all day, scarred, calloused and creased with all manner of life's struggles and plenitude!

I am always the most respectful warrior and never fail but honor another zealot, no matter how foolish his cause, and so, I do him privilege and introduce myself. He is also gregarious by nature, and so into the fray we go, for words are a carnival to those such as us, and immediately I declare myself, in the way the rude show the greatest respect, and stand to watch and measure the height of his character:

"I am an atheist and am sure from life's experience that there is no god, and have found this truth in all hope."

He is quick and responds: "I am sure, and have met God, so *know* he exists and in this have found all hope." I fall into the pregnant silence he has crafted for me, and behold— I blush and laugh, caught off guard, I understand! I know, he is sure as I am, and so, is not offended! Like me he is curious. How could such a man exist? We each look upon the other as if we have beheld an impossibility!

So we talked gladly of all things but and including shame, and were fast friends as only the best of enemies can be. Who could be more interesting? Every honest man asks such a question, and finds the best company —

So the moral is clear: When two different, **self-secure** people meet, a conversation is the result. When two different, **insecure** people meet, the result is a fight or worse— Silence. Nothing is more undignified than silence. When Silence is named Restraint, cowardice imagines itself— "virtue." How disappointing. Let us speak and respect, for only then, might we become worthy of the same!

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