

"I'M OFFENDED!"

Rudy: "I'm offended!"

Patrick: "Rudy, shut your gob!"

Rudy: "I'm telling the counselor!
... Hey, Mr. K, I'm offended."

Mr. K: "Rudy ... shut your gob!"

Rudy, as I remember him, was a fellow student at the Bible College I attended in the early 80s. Rudy was offended by everything. And as the dorm intern, Rudy had a deep need for us to know that. He didn't like "rule-breakers." He was always offended and outraged by something. Our music was always too loud, our card games always ran too late, our attitude

the law, worshiped order, enforced conformity ... and had the college handbook memorized front to back. He wasn't averse to using the rules as a bludgeon to feed his egoism.

By contrast, Patrick's generous grace created its own kind of order, grounded in our respect for his discernment about what mattered and what didn't. He saw the hearts and heard the stories behind the behavior. And he would advocate for us when Rudy became heavy-handed. "Rudy, shut your gob!"

That offended Rudy. But really, Patrick's *grace was the real offense*. Or so I recall.

the globe—innocent victims of war, poverty, slavery and abuse. I think of little children, enslaved by generations of debt to work long scorching days in Pakistani brickyards for the duration of their abbreviated lives. That kind of exploitation is surely offensive to God (if the biblical prophets have anything to say about it). At best, we can plead criminal negligence—at worst, we deliberately turn a blind eye. Our privileged lack of offense is itself offensive.

But what's more remarkable is what *DOES* offend us. No matter where one is embedded in the lie we call the "left-right spectrum,"

GRACE IS THE REAL OFFENSE

BRAD JERSAK

to his authority always stunk. Most of all, he was offended by Patrick and his posse (which included me).

Rudy was especially offended by Patrick's creative noncompliance—by all the ways Patrick ignored, bent or broke the rules. And Rudy's inventory of offenses only escalated when Patrick was chosen as a fellow intern.

Patrick led our dorm with genuine concern for his fellow students and by the spirit of the law. When we erred, Patrick didn't punish us. He had gentle conversations that probed why we did what we did, gently guiding us toward a culture of mutual care and comradery.

This offended Rudy. Why? Because Rudy loved the letter of

IN A WORLD OF OFFENSES

It is not without reason that the Apostle called our era "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Despite Christ's victory over darkness, dread and death, the dominant human response to Abba's gift of self-giving love, radical forgiveness and unfailing mercy continues to be a defiant resolve for personal and collective self-harm.

Our incorrigible rejection of divine grace creates so much destructive fruit that is genuinely offensive—our penchant for violence toward ourselves, toward others, toward our planet. What's offensive to me is our capacity for turning a blind eye to suffering, especially the afflictions of children around

those who submit to their ideological impulses and fundamentalist "othering" (the us-them mentality of exclusion), *grace is the real offense*.

And of course, this is nothing new. It's just that Christ exposed such offense for what it truly is: *an engorged pseudo-righteousness that is more outraged by grace than by the cries of broken children huddled in the world's refugee camps*.

This hypocrisy is as true of the opponents of Christian faith as it is for the religious Pharisees in our camp. Yes, the New Atheist crowd are experts at prodding our unChristlike ways, our failure to be kind, our addiction to judging and condemning, the truckload of beams in our eyes.

All too easy. But that stuff is often just for fun—self-congratulating target practice. If you want to *truly* infuriate them, forgive those they deem unforgivable, stand with those they judge as irredeemable.

You'll see. Even to the self-proclaimed “woke” crowd, *grace was the real offense*.

WOULD THAT BE A BAD THING?

What is it that so enrages us about grace? Why is it that behind both hard-headed conservatism and reactionary progressivism we find a common hostility to grace? During the course of a 12-mile hike across New Zealand's Tongariro Crossing, site of Nguruhoe (Mount Doom in the *Lord of the Rings* movies), Brian Zahnd posed a thought experiment. Here is my adapted paraphrase:

Imagine the Day of Judgment. And imagine that you can see all those you consider wicked, beyond hope and hell-bound before Christ's judgment seat. Despite 10,000 opportunities to repent in this life and join the Jesus Way, these reprobates have perished without so much as a thought of God.

Now imagine Christ, the all-knowing Judge, revealing the folly of their wasted lives, enabling them to feel the lifetime of harm they have caused in a painfully precise and



Angel of the Arc De Triomphe

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relentlessly thorough victim-impact statement. What if they were to realize these terrible truths in the presence of our Holy God and all those whom they've ever hurt? What if from this eye-opening revelation rose a torrential roar of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth?

What if the 'great and terrible day of God's dread judgment' turns out to be a cosmic truth and reconciliation commission?'

And what if, rising from his throne in “the valley of decision,” Christ, the all-merciful Judge, cited his earthly brother's words as his grand and finale verdict: “*Mercy triumphs over judgment*” (James 2:13)? What if he descends from that throne and begins to wipe every tear

from our eyes? What if he reconciles *all* victims and offenders, healing *every* offense, restoring *all things* (Acts 3:21, Revelation 21:5)—reconciling *all people* to each other as he did on the Cross? (Colossians 1:20).

And now for our thought experiment: *Would that be a bad thing? Would seeing that THEY are IN too make us angry?* Would we rejoice with the angels that our Shepherd is SO GOOD that he left not even one sheep lost?

Or, like the older brother of Jesus' parable, would we regard all our bitter striving as more perfect than their slavery to sin? It isn't. Without hell to pay (he already did), would we wonder if following Jesus had been a waste of goodness? It isn't, is it?

Would knowing eternal hell does NOT await sinners free us to follow Christ out of love rather than out of fear?

Or would we feel so ripped off we might yet choose to turn from such grace? Would such grace be the real offense?

HEARTS OF IRON

I am inspired by the 20th century monk, Silouan the Athonite, whose life prayer was, “I pray, O merciful Lord, for ALL the peoples of the world, that they may come to know you by the Holy Spirit.”

One day, another monk visited Silouan, trying to impress him with his holiness by showing glee in the damnation of the wicked. For him, *grace was the real offense*. Silouan responded:

Love could not bear that. We must pray for all.

If the Lord saved you along with

the entire multitude of your brethren, and one of the enemies of Christ and the Church remained in the outer darkness, would you not, along with all the others, set yourself to imploring the Lord to save this one unrepentant brother? If you would not beseech him day and night, then your heart is of iron—but there is no need for iron in paradise.

And St. Paul, who was so truly united to Christ that he was able to affirm: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,”—did he not say that he was ready to be “separated from Christ for his brothers”? Must not each of us plead with the Lord in the same way: May all my brothers be saved along with me! Or otherwise, may I also be

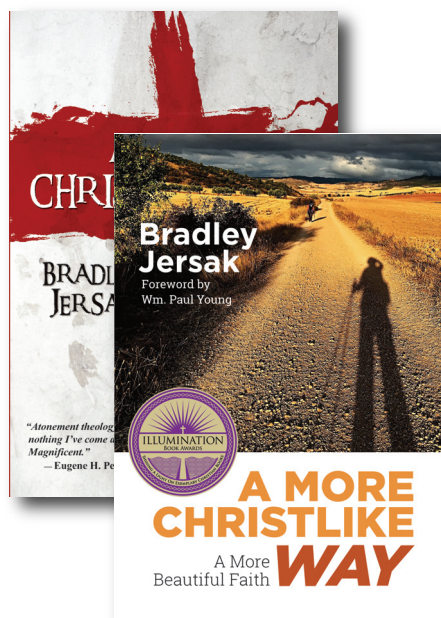
damned along with them! Does not our Lord also wait for us to pray such a prayer? And would not this prayer also be the solution to the problem of hell and damnation’?

I sometimes wonder if the other monk’s name was Rudy. No matter. How about us? If there’s any part of our hearts that finds *grace is the real offense*, we’d do well to pray for a grace-wash: “Lord, have mercy on this heart of iron! Melt it in the fiery forge of divine love. Restore in me a heart of flesh, of empathy and compassion. Renew in me your superabundant grace. Amen.” □

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A More Christlike Way: A More Beautiful Faith



Earlier this year, Brad Jersak’s latest book, **A More Christlike Way** (CWRpress, 2019), was awarded the Illumination Book Awards’ 2020 Enduring Light Gold Medal.

A More Christlike Way, the highly anticipated follow-up to *A More Christlike God*, is already receiving high praise and it promises to impact the lives of readers in a similar way. Students and seekers of Jesus will be thrilled with the transforming insights in both of these Gold Medal Award winning books.

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