



By

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Os Guinness wrote in his new book, *Fool's Talk: Recovering The Art Of Christian Persuasion* (IVP Books, 2015), that his own journey to faith was more than intellectual. He said it included a long, slow, critical debate in his mind during his school years.

“On one side, I listened to the arguments of such famous atheists as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and on the other side to such Christian thinkers as Blaise Pascal, Fyodor Dostoevsky, G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis.”

Guinness began writing books more than 40 years ago (*The Dust of Death: A Critique of the Establishment and the Counter Culture, and the Proposal for a Third Way*) and quickly became known as one of the best thinkers in Christianity. He went on to write more than 30 books (e.g. *The Call, Doing Well and Doing Good, The Devil's Gauntlet, Dining with the Devil, Time for Truth, In Two Minds, God in the Dark, Unspeakable, A Free People's Suicide, The American Hour, Long Journey Home, The Case For Civility, The Global Public Square, Renaissance: The Power Of The Gospel*

However *Dark The Times*) while working as a freelance reporter with the BBC, as a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, and as a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies. He is also the founder of the Trinity Forum and project director of the Trinity Forum Study Series and was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter and the Global Charter of Conscience. Guinness is currently a Senior Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.

Dr. Guinness (DPhil, Oxford University) is known around the world as an influential speaker, social critic and thought-provoking writer. So, with all that he's already said, what else can he possibly write that Christians should read?

In *Fool's Talk*, Os Guinness turns to what may be the most important subject for Christians to consider, especially Christians who think of themselves as 'apologists.' That subject is Persuasion.

“We are all apologists now, and we stand at the dawn of the grand age of human apologetics, or so some are saying because our wired world and our global era are a time when expressing, presenting, sharing, defending and selling ourselves have become a staple of everyday life for countless millions of people around the world, both Christians and others. The age of the Internet, it is said, is the age of the self and the selfie. The world is full of people full of themselves. In such an age, ‘I post, therefore I am.’ (Introduction, Fool’s Talk, p. 15)

Guinness raises an important question for Christians to consider. With human interconnectedness in the global era raised to a truly global level, with unprecedented speed and on an unprecedented scale, ‘are Christians ready for this new age?’ Are Christians prepared to persuade people who are closed, indifferent, hostile, skeptical or apathetic?

“Loss of persuasion? It might seem bizarre, almost unimaginable, that Christian communication has lost something so central to its mission. Yet in profound ways it has, and that is why our challenge is to think about apologetics in ways that are not only fresh but faith and independent—faithful in the sense that they are shaped by the imperatives of Christian truths, and independent in the sense that they are not primarily beholden to ways of thinking that are alien to Christian ways of thinking.” (*Fool's Talk*, p. 18)

One of my favorite chapters in *Fool's Talk* is Chapter 6 – ‘Turning The Tables’. Guinness quotes from G.K. Chesterton’s dramatic story of Innocent Smith and the philosophy professor in the book *Manalive* (Arc Manor, LLC, 2008, original publication 1912), then launches into two pitfalls that await every Christian intent on serving God. The pitfalls come from the relationship of apologetics and evangelism.

“... in the overall task of Christian advocacy, we have to face up to two equal and opposite errors. One is the apologist’s temptation, which is to emphasize apologetics at the expense of evangelism, and the other is the evangelist’s temptation, which is to do the opposite and emphasize evangelism at the expense of apologetics.”

*(Fool’s Talk, p. 110)*

Guinness goes on to explain that the two tasks (apologetics and evangelism) ‘should be joined seamlessly.’ He wrote that the isolation of apologetics from evangelism is the ‘curse’ of much modern apologetics, ‘and why it can become a sterile and deadening intellectualism.’ Guinness’ conclusion is that whenever apologetics is needed, it should precede evangelism, but must always lead directly to it (evangelism). ‘The work of apologetics is only finished when the door to the gospel has been opened and the good news of the gospel can be proclaimed.’

You may be wondering why Guinness titled his new book, *'Fool's Talk.'* He referred to a tiny silver donkey sitting on his desk. Guinness wrote that the donkey reminded him of the proper role of the apologist.

“Balaam’s ass is the patron saint of apologists. Madness, as we shall see, is an appropriate term for the unreality of unbelief. In order to counter it, we play our part, and we do the best we can. But even when our efforts are serviceable, our role is always humble and all too often inadequate and somewhat ridiculous. Christian advocates who understand their calling would never be too big for their books. The tai is not about us. It’s all about him [God], and he may be trusted to do what matters.” (*Fool's Talk*, p. 60)



What do other apologists think of *'Fool's Talk'*?

“In this landmark work, I am thrilled to see Os’s unique thinking on these crucial subjects, co-extensive with a lifetime of doing apologetics. It is a must-read for anyone interested in engaging the skeptic or seeker. Few thinkers today rise to the level that Os does, even as he plumbs the depth of vital issues in defense of the historical Christian faith.” Ravi Zacharias, author and speaker

“A remarkable book. Written with the benefit of decades of experience and reflection — this is one book on apologetics you will not want to miss. I wholeheartedly recommend it.” Michael Ramsden, Joint Director, Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, International Director, RZIM for Europe, the Middle East and Africa

“Hardened skeptics and militant unbelievers are often a puzzle to Christian apologists. Arguments alone sometimes fail to stick to the souls of these unbelievers. Because of this, we need the rhetorical wisdom of Os Guinness, evangelicalism’s greatest living social critic. *Fool's Talk* will

make its readers wiser and more creative in commending the matchless gospel of Jesus Christ.” –Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy, Denver Seminary

Thank you, Dr. Guinness. May we all recover the 'art of Christian persuasion.'

*Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, IVP Books, 2015, hardcover, 270 pages

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