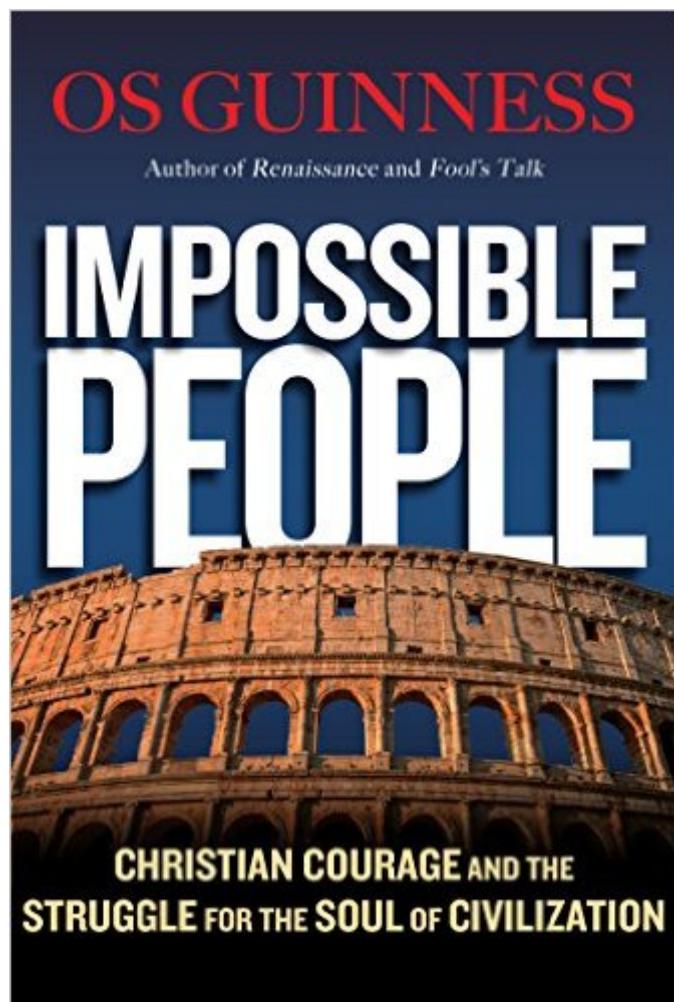


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Impossible People: Christian Courage And The Struggle For The Soul Of Civilization



Synopsis

The church in the West is at a critical moment. While the gospel is exploding throughout the global south, Western civilization faces militant assaults from aggressive secularism and radical Islam. Will the church resist the seductive shaping power of advanced modernity? More than ever, Christians must resist the negative cultural forces of our day with fortitude and winsomeness. What is needed is followers of Christ who are willing to face reality without flinching and respond with a faithfulness that is unwavering. Os Guinness describes these Christians as "impossible people," those who have "hearts that can melt with compassion, but with faces like flint and backbones of steel who are unmanipulable, unbribable, undeterable and unclubbable, without ever losing the gentleness, the mercy, the grace and the compassion of our Lord." Few accounts of the challenge of today are more realistic, and few calls to Christian courage are more timely, resolute and hopeful. Guinness argues that we must engage secularism and atheism in new ways, confronting competing ideas with discernment and fresh articulation of the faith. Christians are called to be impossible people, full of courage and mercy in challenging times.

Book Information

Hardcover: 239 pages

Publisher: IVP Books (July 2, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0830844651

ISBN-13: 978-0830844654

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (11 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #9,079 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #12 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Social Issues #13 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Sociology #13 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Church & State

Customer Reviews

Once again, Os Guinness gives clear indication why he is so highly respected by significant numbers of people from across the social and political spectrum. Each book just keeps getting better and better. Written as a companion volume to his earlier work (Renaissance), it expands the theme, but also has a more somber tone, Holding no illusions concerning the precarious direction in which Western Civilization (and the world) are veering, it is a serious challenge to all who love the

truth, beauty and hope of human flourishing that the West has sought to embody for several centuries now. But it is especially a strong prophetic urging to Christians who hold to the historic, orthodox faith to stand strong in recovering the Gospel and proclaiming it in a winsome, informed and compassionate manner. And much of it focuses on the titanic responsibility of the Church in the world's current lead society, the United States. He employs a metaphor that is very apropos for America. Having willfully severed our the roots our Founders planted, we have become a cut-flower civilization and the extended consequences of that should be obvious by his choice of terms. As always, Dr. Guinness' eloquence, wit and insight are seasoned by his humility, grace, candor and his unswerving commitment to Christ and His Gospel. This has been his fifth book in the last few years (Free Peoples' Suicide, Global Public Square, Renaissance, Fools' Talk and now Impossible People). And, as I said, his prolific pen just keeps getting better and more prescient. I certainly hope it is not the last time he lifts it to exhort us. I very highly recommend it!

When Os Guinness writes, it is always a challenge not simply to sit down and read but to rise up and do something. Filled with biblical conviction and a faithful desire to be obedient to God's calling, Guinness harnesses his years of experience and knowledge of our culture to raise a battle cry for Christians to take their stand. There are four major challenges not only to the Christian faith but to Western civilization. First, the challenge of being weakened. The Judeo-Christian faith has been weakened and overrun by secularism and modernity. Second, the challenge of internal splits which has two post-Christian forces that threaten to move society toward nihilism on one side and extreme humanism on the other side. Third, the challenge of two major external forces. With a weakened Christian perspective, Western civilization becomes more vulnerable to aggressive secularism and radical Islam. Fourth, the need for courage and bold witness in the light of such obstacles. Can Christians rise up to these challenges? Guinness compares this present challenging age to the first three centuries clash with the Caesars and the sixteenth Century threats from the Ottomans. He coins the "four infamous S factors" as Secularism; Secularization; Separationism; and Statism. In order to survive against the grand showdown, we need to take a leaf from history. Be reminded about how Daniel and his friends stood up against the idolatry of Nebuchadnezzar; how the early Christians would rather die than deny their faith; and how Athanasius fought the heretics of old. The tragedy of many mainstream WWII German Christians is how easily they cave in to the political ambitions of Hitler. Will the West today commit a similar error of omission? Instead of reforming from within, many are becoming more accepting of the outside world, even compromising their biblical principles. Guinness's earlier book, Renaissance describes the response of Christians regardless of

the challenges. This companion book reverses it by focusing on the challenges and how Christians must face up boldly or be washed over. Courage and conviction are needed to be the impossible people that we have been called to be. Of the new world, Guinness looks at the changing face of Islam; the shape of China; and the impact of secularism in the West. He laments at the following three distortions of postmodernism: Pick and Choose World: From respect for authority to reveling in personal preferences Private World: Faith is Private but publicly irrelevant World Without Windows: Shift from Supernatural to SecularHe reminds us that the world we live in is more spiritual than we may think. Without acknowledging the presence of evil spirits, we are poised to let our guard down. We confuse idolatry with nationalism. We erroneously believe in the utopia of unity based on humanism. From observations about relativity, secular thought, and flaws of present western society, Guinness leaves his harshest criticisms to the evangelical group, or people who call themselves Bible-believing Christians. He laments the lack of sacrificial living and the wholesale acceptance of liberal ideas and unbiblical points of view. While atheists and secularists are dead set and convinced about the irrelevance of religion, the same cannot be said for the Christian at large. Like a frog swimming in the warming waters of postmodern environment, the Church is in danger of being cooked by the heat of various idols and gods that have occupied the altar of the Christian community. This lack of conviction about one's belief is itself a problem. Moreover, Western society is spiraling downward.Roughly, the framework for reading this book is: 1) Understand the Challenges; 2) Pray for Divine Assistance; 3) Call to Stand and be Counted. Guinness states and describes the external climate affecting society and the Church today. With particular concern for the Church, he observes that old problems are appearing in new clothes. The challenges of paganism and heresies of the past are reappearing in the forms of aggressive atheism and dismissive secularism. With the displacement of the Christian worldview; the deteriorating regard for the Church; and the diminishing influence of Christianity; the problems can only get worse. The only way forward is to stand up to be counted for God. This does not mean militant behaviour or radical campaigns. It simply means returning to the conviction of biblical principles. It is a call for Christians to get back to the truth for themselves. After all, if they are not convinced or convicted about the gospel and relevance of Christianity, they will not be able to be of much influence in this world. If the salt is not salty and the light hidden under the pillow, what good is salt and light? If we, no matter how small and how insignificant in society at present, if we are willing to be that mustard seed of faith, God can indeed help us grow. It is a call for us to be right with God. Guinness provides several tools for us to use. First, discernment and wisdom are needed to help us engage with the world and especially the arena of spiritual warfare. Only when we recognize there is a war will we be willing to

arm ourselves to be ready in defense and if needed to fight in enemy territory. Second, we need to be discerning of the ideas and when we have a grasp of the history of ideas, we will be better equipped to question the ideas' validity and truth. Third, there is the need to grasp the discipline of knowledge to become a more thoughtful Christian community. We cannot let secularists and atheistic humanists grab all the attention about what it means to be a thinking community. We must offer a Christian perspective readily and widely. We must come back to the Bible and be re-ignited with what it means to be witnesses for Christ in our society. For Western society, with Christians increasingly being marginalized, we must stand up to be counted. This means being renewed from the inside out. Guinness's call is not about taking up physical arms or getting engaged physically in the politics or institutions of the world. It is more spiritual in nature. We need a renewal of the mind to see things from God's perspective, to share God's truth widely and with conviction. We need the transformation of the heart to rid ourselves from the idols creeping into the Church. It is a call to be the impossible people that we have been called to be. Impossible as far as the world is concerned, but possible when God is in charge. Some readers may be a little uncomfortable with the strong stance taken by Guinness. Some may even accuse him of fear mongering or beating a straw man. If we do so, we must consistently apply such sentiments to the liberal thoughts and radical secularism happening all over society. Just ask who is being marginalized right now. From the school classroom to the public politics, religious thoughts are increasingly pushed to the personal private domains, protected in part by the freedom of religion act. Even then, this freedom of religion and faith have limits, especially when it comes face to face with the institutional powers of secularism and humanism. I think this book is more about a wake-up call for Christians to come out of their slumber. It is a rousing effort to remind us that we need to be faithful to God's Word. As long as we maintain that faithfulness, as long as we are bold to proclaim the truth as laid out in the Word of God, we can become the people to stand against the ills of society and in doing so, declare the righteousness of God's kingdom come. It is not meant to wrest power or gain influence in politics of social domains. It is still very much a spiritual warfare. Os Guinness is a respected speaker and keen observer of the intersections of faith and society. He is a prolific author of books like *The Call*, *Dining With the Devil*, *The Gravedigger File*, and *No God but God*. He is one of the few voices who consistently urges the Church to stay true to biblical truths. Rating: 4.75 stars of 5. This book is provided to me courtesy of IVP Books and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

This book is the one precisely needed today. It speaks to what thinking Christians are dwelling on.

His title won't make any sense until you read his reference to Peter Damian, but the book will strike the right cord on many levels. The problems are as bad as we imagined, yet the answer is not despair, but courage. He will explain how Western culture is in its death throws. He really doesn't explain a way to save it as we are too far down the line for that, but Western culture or not, Christians have an obligation just as they did in the hedonistic days of the Roman Empire. He writes about how Christians are failing dramatically these days. He compares the very thing some of us have been telling others—“how did German Christians get duped into accepting Nazism. Sounds so familiar, doesn't it? Os Guinness never fails to challenge me and this title is no exception. This book, particularly, is needed whether that sounds trite or not. There is so much more here that I don't even know what to say other than I underlined line after line as I read. This is a winner and I give it the highest recommendation. I received this book free from the publisher. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.

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