



Fools for Christ

Os Guinness

In this talk, Os Guinness considers how we can communicate creatively in our evangelism and apologetics. By considering the nature of comedy and the precedent of the fool, Dr Guinness considers whether the late Renaissance Christian understanding of fool-making can help us to understand better what can be an effective apologetic for today.

A few notes and quotes from the talk:

How do we deal with blindness to the Gospel in a secular, relativistic society?

1 Kings 22 – Micaiah prophesies for Ahab.

"There is a discrepancy between the expectations that are built up in one direction and the effect which is suddenly brought about in another direction.... Subversion through surprise."

"If you examine something of what underlies comedy and what underlies something of the prophetic persuasive communication in the Scripture, you see that some of the things underlying each are deeply biblical and deeply suggestive in terms of what we should be doing today in our communication with a society increasingly tone deaf and colour blind."

1. The problem we are facing in the Western world

"99% of what we say is directed at only 1% of our contemporaries at any one moment."

"Most of our evangelism and apologetics assumes a high degree of interest, or openness, or need."

"The challenge is to speak to people most of the time when they are not interested, not open and not needy."

2. A precedent in Christian history for creative persuasion

The idea of 'fooling' and 'fool-making' in the Renaissance world.

Erasmus' Christian notion of fooling – his work *In Praise of Folly*.

The Biblical types of 'fool':

The fool proper – because God says so (Psalm 14:1)

The fool bearer – those seen as a 'fool' by the world's inverted values (1 Corinthians 4:10) – the discrepancy between the immediate and the ultimate

The fool maker – *"The Christian who sees that the world's perceptions are inside out, upside-down and so on, and is prepared to get inside them to turn them upside-down from the inside."* (See 1 Corinthians 1:18 ff) *"The fool-maker is supremely God himself."*

Parables – indirect, involving, imaginative.

"In the Scriptures, the story doesn't illustrate the truth. The story is the truth."

To the objection 'Isn't this just manipulative?'

"Much evangelism is highly manipulative. Much apologetics is highly manipulative.... this approach is not manipulative at all. Why? Simply because no-one comes to any conclusion which they don't reach for themselves."

"Not only does [this approach] open people up but it respects their integrity. No-one is persuaded against their will. They reach conclusions that they have to reach for themselves."

In the Mediaeval world, there used to be two symbols for apologetics:

the closed fist – tough, logical, close-knit reasoning
the open hand – winsome, spiritual, creative, persuasive under God

Preponderance of apologetics is the closed fist.
We need more of the open hand.

Steve Turner's poems illustrate this approach.

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