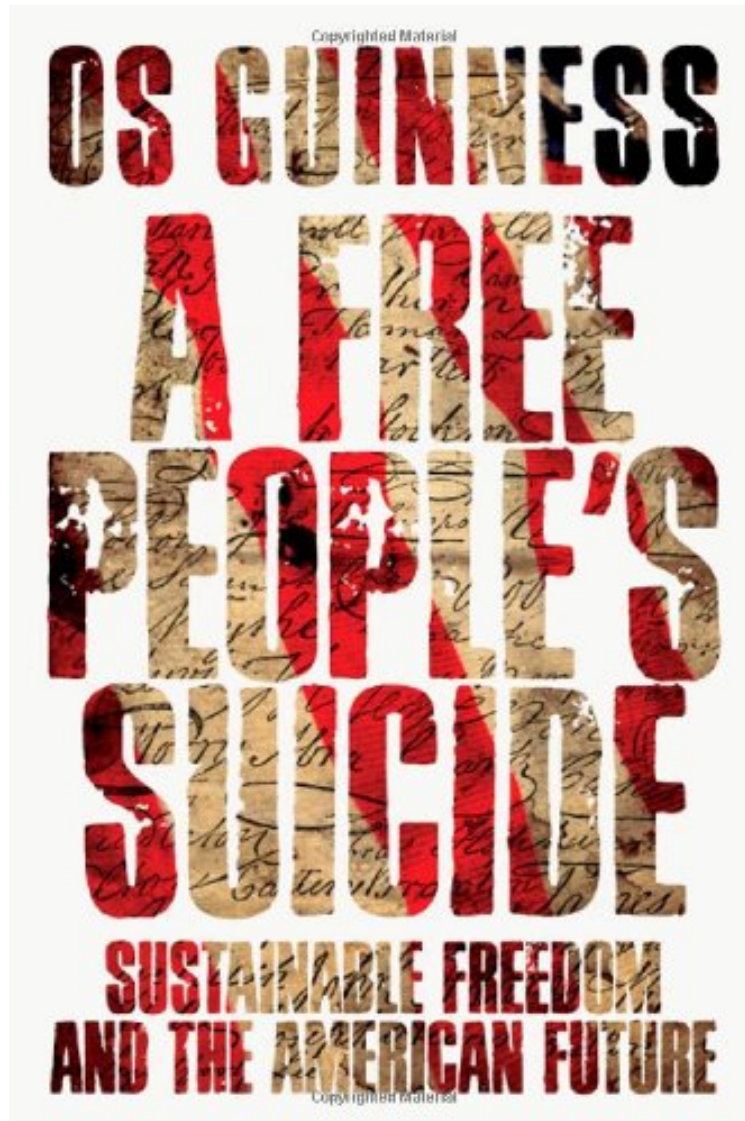


(Ebook free) A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future

# A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future

*Os Guinness*

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**Os Guinness : A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future:

123 of 127 people found the following review helpful. "The problem is not wolves at the door but termites in the

floor." By George P. Wood At the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin, "Well, Doctor, what have we got--a Republic or a Monarchy?" To which Franklin replied: "A Republic, if you can keep it." That question and Franklin's reply cut to the heart of Os Guinness's new book, *A Free People's Suicide*. According to Guinness, any society that wishes to be free must accomplish three tasks: win its freedom, order is freedom, and sustain its freedom. Americans commemorate the winning of our freedom on July 4, 1776, even though peace with Britain was not formalized until 1783. We commemorate the ordering of our freedom with the adoption (1787) and ratification (1789) of the Constitution. But sustaining our freedom is an unfinished and ongoing task. Unfortunately, Guinness argues, "freedom has a chronic habit of undermining and destroying itself." He notes three instances: \* "When freedom runs to excess and breeds permissiveness and license." \* "When freedom so longs for its own security that its love of security undermines freedom." \* "When freedom becomes so caught up in its own glory that it justifies anything and everything done in its name, even such things as torture that contradict freedom." He then notes that "the last decade has displayed clear examples of each of these corruptions writ large in American culture and in American foreign policy." Now, Guinness is a Brit, so it's easy--too easy--for freedom-loving patriots to dismiss his analysis as so much anti-American twaddle. But Guinness is an America-loving Brit. He doesn't critique America in order to defame it but to improve it. Indeed, he argues that the sustainability of our freedom depends on our ability to appropriate the wisdom of the Founders for the present day. A crucial component of that wisdom is what Guinness calls "the Golden Triangle of Freedom": "Freedom requires virtue, which in turn requires faith of some sort, which in turn requires freedom." The Constitution cannot secure American freedom in the absence of the character of its citizens. A government for free people requires self-government. But the source of self-government transcends the self and cannot be appropriated by means of coercion. Freedom requires virtue requires faith requires freedom. These qualities are symbiotic and mutually reinforcing. Like Abraham Lincoln, Guinness doubts that America can be conquered by external foes. In Lincoln's words, "As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide." Rather, the real threat to the American experiment in ordered liberty is internal. In Guinness's pithy words, "The problem is not wolves at the door but termites in the floor." Sustainable freedom begins with renewal at the level of our nation's moral foundation. If I have any criticism of this otherwise excellent book, it is that Guinness, like the American Founders before him, is vague about the faith that virtue requires. Freedom requires virtue which requires faith of some sort. Those last three words should remind Christian readers--Guinness himself is an evangelical, and IVP Books is an evangelical publishing house--that Americans have always viewed religion in terms of social utility and been hesitant in the face of exclusive truth claims or spiritual practices. Christians in America, then, can contribute to the sustenance of their nation's freedom, but must beware lest their Kingdom agenda be sacrificed upon a national altar. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Would be a good group-read book By Educated Consumer This was an OK read, and it probably would be better if I had read it with a group. Too much to ponder on my own. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A book for our times. By David A. Griffith This book is an intelligent and readable argument based on the paradox that the greatest enemy of a free society is the unfettered exploitation of the freedoms that are available within the society. Guinness takes a difficult position well, arguing that the greater good in a free society is for the society to balance order with liberty. Generally, the book is a good read, well-written and challenging. (His observation regarding the similarities between Occupy Wall Street's critique of the one-percent and the TEA Party's critique of fiscal policy was definitely something that makes one consider the validity of his argument.) I feel I can recommend this book to almost any intelligent reader, from left to right.

2013 Logos Book of the Year in Christianity/Culture "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide." Abraham Lincoln Nothing is more daring in the American experiment than the founders' belief that the American republic could remain free forever. But how was this to be done, and are Americans doing it today? It is not enough for freedom to be won. It must also be sustained. Cultural observer Os Guinness argues that the American experiment in freedom is at risk. Summoning historical evidence on how democracies evolve, Guinness shows that contemporary views of freedom--most typically, a negative freedom from constraint-- are unsustainable because they undermine the conditions necessary for freedom to thrive. He calls us to reconsider the audacity of sustainable freedom and what it would take to restore it. "In the end," Guinness writes, "the ultimate threat to the American republic will be Americans. The problem is not wolves at the door but termites in the floor." The future of the republic depends on whether Americans will rise to the challenge of living up to America's unfulfilled potential for freedom, both for itself and for the world.

"A Free People's Suicide challenges each and every citizen concerned about America's diminishing role as a beacon of liberty not only to comprehend the urgency, but also to participate comprehensively in freedom's preservation." (Albin Sadar, *The Washington Times*, [washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com)) "Dr. Guinness' book is rich in its explorations of Lincoln's words and their import for us today. As an expatriate friend of America, Guinness, like de Tocqueville, has a rare gift for helping us see our better selves. He casts a discerning eye at our modern institutions, and habits of the heart as reflected in the broader culture. He freely concedes that there are worrying signs on the horizon, but then, having

thoughtfully set out the challenges we face in our historical moment, he brings us back to the best things the founders gave us. On the whole, it's a fascinating perspective from a British citizen." (Kevin Belmonte, Huffington Post Religion Blog, September 1, 2012)"Os Guinness enlightens, cheers, chastises and informs with this latest contribution to our civic discourse. Guinness here solidifies his reputation as one of the most nimble voices from the Christian community as he surveys our history and our present with appreciation as well as deep concern. Highly recommended for all interested citizens, whatever their political or faith commitments." (Jean Bethke Elshtain, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago, author of *Sovereignty: God, State and Self*)"A Free People's Suicide is an inside view from the outside. Os Guinness has a clear eye, a quick mind, a profound grasp of political philosophy and an eloquent pen. His analysis of American freedom, what it has been, now is and is likely to become, is a clarion call for renewal of the founders' vision for a free people." (James W. Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* and *Vclav Havel: The Intellectual Conscience of International Politics*)"Sometimes a book is so important and so timely that not to have read it is to embarrass oneself. This is such a book. Its message is so crucial and so clear that all Americans are obligated to read it and have a national conversation on its themes. No cultural commentator or politician who has not read this book should ever be taken seriously again. Let this book be the new litmus test. If you are serious about America, be familiar with its themes and expect to discuss them and to be tested on them. Rest assured that you will be, because America is now herself being tested on them. Alas, we will not be graded on a curve. This book's clarion call is both piercing and full of hope. May God help us to hear it and to take action." (Eric Metaxas, author of *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* and *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*)"With passion and urgency Os Guinness gives a sweeping historical account of America's past and her prospects for the future. He urges us to pay serious attention to a deeper understanding of freedom and makes a compelling case for why freedom requires virtue. Weaving together a wide-ranging knowledge of classical, constitutional and contemporary history, Guinness warns of America's decline but charts a course for America's renewal. It is a straight-shooting and sober volume, yet in the end it is a hopeful book." (Michael Cromartie, vice president, Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, DC)"In a passionate work that blends historical-cultural analysis with moral exhortation, Os Guinness finds at the heart of America's culture wars something different than what many observers have seen. He identifies a 'freedom war,' a struggle over the very concept of freedom itself. As the Founders well understood, it is not enough for Americans to invoke endlessly the name of 'freedom' when they no longer agree as to what it means or what ends freedom is meant to serve. Guinness warns that freedom cannot long endure unless it is consecrated to purposes beyond itself. It is a warning worth heeding." (Wilfred M. McClay, SunTrust Chair of Excellence in Humanities, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and author of *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America*)About the AuthorOs Guinness (DPhil, Oxford) is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including *Fool's Talk*, *Renaissance*, *The Global Public Square*, *A Free People's Suicide*, *Unspeakable*, *The Call*, *Time for Truth* and *The Case for Civility*. A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he has addressed audiences worldwide from the British House of Commons to the U.S. Congress to the St. Petersburg Parliament. He founded the Trinity Forum and served as senior fellow there for fifteen years. Born in China to missionary parents, he is the great-great-great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer. After witnessing the climax of the Chinese revolution in 1949, he was expelled with many other foreigners in 1951 and returned to England where he was educated and served as a freelance reporter with the BBC. Since coming to the U.S. in 1984, he has been a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter, celebrating the First Amendment, and has also been senior fellow at the EastWest Institute in New York, where he drafted the Charter for Religious Freedom. He also co-authored the public school curriculum *Living With Our Deepest Differences*. Guinness has had a lifelong passion to make sense of our extraordinary modern world and to stand between the worlds of scholarship and ordinary life, helping each to understand the other - particularly when advanced modern life touches on the profound issues of faith. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in McLean, Virginia, near Washington, D.C.