

Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996), intro and chapter 1:

Constantinianism is an eschatology that legislates the millennial kingdom of Christ through civil authorities. It envisions the faith as a politically unifying force and the Church as state sponsor (23-24).

The Church took a fundamentally wrong turn with its embrace of Constantinianism between 200 and 400 (23). *This section relies on the work of Mennonite John Howard Yoder's The Original Revolution*

The alliance blurs the distinction between Church and world. The weight of maintaining the Church's transcendence must now be borne ethically by the categories of clergy, monastery, and laity, and theologically by Augustine's categories of visible and invisible Church (25-27).

By abolishing monasticism and international Church hierarchy, by undermining clericalism, and by relying on the power of regional German princes and Swiss cantons as protectors against Rome, Protestants find themselves even less able to distinguish between Church and world (27-28). Abolishing monasticism aimed to restore the holiness of common life, but John Milbank claims it ironically fueled secularism instead. *Clapp chooses an interesting source here. Milbank advocates the primacy of Christian faith over all realms: intellectual, political, and social. Milbank, like Clapp, is an Anglican, but thoroughly Constantinian!*

Though sponsorship might connote superiority, in fact the state now takes center stage in salvation-history (25). The priesthood becomes a chaplaincy and ethics float semi-autonomously, rather than being determined by Jesus' teaching and example (26). *Q: Is it that simple? High noon between medieval Church and state was Henry IV's capitulation to Gregory VII at Canossa in 1077.*

The Church's dissenters and rivals now become civil threats (30). "Mission to the nations" now becomes national security, defense, and conquest. Theological issues gain direct political significance. *Think here of the Council of Nicea, called by Constantine himself.*

Even when disestablished, Constantinian churches are expected to support civil "crusades" that protect and advance their states' political-religious ideology (30-31).

Fortunately, in Clapp's view, Constantinianism is no longer a viable arrangement.

The growing religious pluralism of modern American (and more recently European) societies has put increasing pressure on the Constantinian synthesis.

The state looks for a 'lowest common denominator' spiritual resource: from abstract Protestantism to abstract Christianity to the fictive American construction of "Judeo-Christianity" to abstract and impotent deism (28-30). *Think here of the September 11 memorial service in National Cathedral (!), in which Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims assembled under the banner of America.*

The growth of American Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, secularists, etc. makes even the illusion of a lowest common denominator untenable (31). *Q: What made the idea of a lowest common denominator appealing in the first place? Is there such a thing?*

Furthermore, modern states have established their own popular legitimacy. Christianity no longer enjoys social consensus in the West. The Church's 'sponsorship' is no longer worth the trouble of the strings that come attached. So even in religiously homogenous realms (e.g., Ireland), civil authorities are no longer interested in Christian 'interference' (16-18).

Christians are reacting with two primary strategies, against which Clapp wants to offer a third. *Here Clapp's argument follows Stanley Hauerwas' and Will Willimon's Resident Aliens.*

1. *Neo-constantinianism.* 'Sentimental capitulation' accepts the Church's growing uselessness and looks for useful things that might still need to be done for the wider society. Clapp appeals to Liberal Protestants as exemplars (18-19). *However, conservatives embrace it too, in letting state interests set their agenda (evangelical patriotism).*

2a. *Paleo-constantinianism.* 'Retrenchment' tries to reclaim the Church's past civil power and authority. Clapp appeals to the Christian Right's campaign 'to restore Christian America' by fighting for school prayer and creation science and against abortion and gay rights (19-21). *Nineteenth century evangelicalism had paleo-constantinian dimensions (abolition, temperance).*

2b. *Hypo-constantinianism.* Another strategy for retrenchment retreats into spiritualism, withdrawing from the public sphere, 'under the radar,' to pursue private spirituality away from public view (21). *Twentieth century evangelicalism is often understood as counter-constantinian, unworldly.*

Clapp pleads that this strategy still draws too much on post-Constantinianism, for it ends up affirming rather than challenging the dominant political order (21) and accepting the hegemony of other discourses outside the private sphere in which the state has forced Christian practice.

3. *Anti-constantinianism.* 'Radicalism' returns to the root (*radix*) of Christian community before it allowed the state to determine its self-understanding. "There is a place for the church in the postmodern world, not as a sponsorial prop for nation-states but as a community called by the God explicitly named Father, Son and Holy Spirit," Clapp says. "The radical option is nothing more or less than for the church to be a way of life" (32).

Q: Am I being unfair in labeling this strategy in terms of Constantinianism when it rejects such a dependence? I do so out of the fear that Yoder, Hauerwas, Clapp, and their school are still so energized by fighting Constantinianism that the battle too well defines their cause and their visions of Church and world. To them a tradition like twentieth century evangelicalism looks hypo-constantinian; but maybe it is the more proper claimant of Clapp's title 'radical.' Perhaps we shall see.

Clapp's own history and identity as a 'plebeian postmodern Christian' (11-15) sets him historically in the first camp. *I think this is important. Like him, his sources – Yoder, Hauerwas and Willimon, Alasdair MacIntyre, Milbank, etc. – have denominational histories more of capitulation than of retrenchment. Evangelicals like those at APU come out of a different history. We can still appreciate their insights, but we should not uncritically embrace their histories as ours.*