Why Christians are useless and irrelevant in today’s society

Student group presentation for Ministry, Church and Society course
Based on chapters 1-2 of Rodney Clapp’s “Peculiar People”
“We seem no longer to be where the action is, where the plans are made, and where the strategies are discussed.”

--Father Henri Nouwen
Sentimental capitulation

- The church has nothing distinctive to offer or to be, yet sentimentally hangs on to its Christian language and practice anyway.

Retrenchment

- Television evangelist/Presidential candidate Pat Robertson: Christian voters are the nation’s moral strength
- Pastor D. James Kennedy: “Our responsibility in the church is to insist that the laws of this Christian nation be consistent with God’s word.”
Society vs. Church

- The more secular our society becomes, the church is seen as useless.
- Christians feel useless because the church feels useless. And the church feels useless because it keeps on trying to perform Constantinian duties in a world that is not longer Constantinian.
What is Constantinianism?

- Constantine was the first emperor to declare Christianity as a national religion.
- He was the first of a long line of leaders to see Christianity as the unifying force that might bring together the empire’s diverse population.
- With this shift, the church derived its importance with the purpose and identity of the state.
“Christians had known as a fact of experience that the Church existed, but had to believe against appearances that Christ ruled over the world. After Constantine one knew as a fact of experience that Christ was ruling over the world, but had to believe against the evidence that there existed a believing Church.” -- Clapp
Progression of Church and State

- Those behind the Reformation wanted to renew the visible, faithful bodies of believers.
- Deism began to emerge as a prominent worldview.
Umbrella-ism

- Christians have become misled through a Constantinian belief that the church is still plays a dominant role in today’s society.
- Host of new religions are rapidly growing in our country.
The Three Rs

- Retrenchment
- Relinquishment
- Radicalization
The Church as Private Club

- One strategy of retrenchment is the migration of faith from social and cultural and placing itself in the individual.
- Gnosticism
  - Individualized faith
  - Attempt to escape from everything but self
  - Faith is solitary affair between God and self
Our Culture’s View...

- Jesus in history
- Jesus in community
Gnosticism’s impact on the Church

- Church adapted by shifting its focus
  - Psychologizers/Self-Help
  - From social change to how the individual can adjust to the status quo
- By definition, the Constantinian church is reactive and reflexive to the surrounding culture.
Pressures for church leaders to focus only on individual faith.

People leave churches because their “needs aren’t being met.”

- This attitude causes a doctor-patient relationship with God.
- We have made Him a God who only *meets* our needs.
Dead End of Privatizing Faith

- Constantinianism has always be a “dead end theologically and sociologically.”
- Cultural developments have rendered the Church ineffective.