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Rodney Clapp. *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000. Pp. 224. \$16.99 (Paper).

[1] According to Rodney Clapp, "All the essays in this book are about taking baptism seriously." For him, baptism is about taking engagement seriously - not just in spiritual matters - but in politics, the market, and popular culture as well. Clapp is uncomfortable with the tendency of many Christians to react to a hostile secular world by walling themselves off. This, he argues, only weakens Christianity. But Clapp devotes far less space to promoting engagement (or explaining why it is necessary) than he does to agreeing with conservative Christians that society is a mess. The only difference is that Clapp's criticism comes from the left instead of the right.

[2] The book is loosely divided into four parts. The essays in Part 1, "The Inevitability of Borders," suggest that Christians can be forgiven for seeing the world differently. They resist foundationalism (or at least they should), they package Christianity as narrative, and they recognize that classical liberalism inhibits the practice of their religion. Part 2 - especially the essays "Tacit Holiness," "Shame Crucified," and "At the Intersection of Eucharist and Capital" - argues that given a hostile secular world, there are ways that Christians must think and behave to maintain their sense of self as Christians. Among other things, they should reinforce their faith through group worship, they should admit to their failings so as to encourage shame and hence repentance, and they should subsume their individuality to the group identity of the church. If they take that advice to heart, they can turn to the third and fourth sections, which suggest how Christians can straddle the divide between Christianity and politics and economics, and Christianity and popular culture. He wants Christians to peacefully reconcile with contemporary religious pluralism, and live lives of Christians first, and political and economic actors second. Christians should conceive of their families not as private refuges, but more as components of a larger family - the Church. And they should confront the perpetual dissatisfaction essential to capitalism with the discipline of fidelity to the Church. With respect to popular culture, he even suggests (perhaps tongue in cheek), that Christians could learn something from jazz. Like jazz musicians, Christians should draw in and involve their audience (non-Christians), involve both their bodies and their minds in

their performance (to redeem the "whole" person), and focus on the here and now, rather than on some separate utopia still to come.

[3] As a social scientist and an agnostic, I cannot speak to Clapp's theological arguments. But I am struck by the vehemence - as well as the leftist tinge - of Clapp's critique of capitalism. For Clapp, modern consumerism promotes fickleness, impatience, and the need for instant gratification. Christians, on the other hand, need to practice contentedness and self-denial. Clapp argues adamantly that capitalist values are at odds with Christian virtues, and that among Christians, only one unsatiated desire is acceptable - the need for a closer relationship with God.

[4] The political left will applaud this assault on capitalism, though for different reasons. Clapp says capitalism promotes values that, if practiced, get in the way of a fulfilling relationship with God; leftists argue that those same values drive a system that eventually exploits the poor and disadvantaged. Yet neither argument is likely to appeal to the likes of Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson. Not only has capitalism served them well, but it has been eagerly embraced by their followers. But for outsiders used to thinking that Christianity and the Christian right are synonymous, Clapp's dissent is refreshing and worth a read.

[5] Interestingly, Clapp's recommendations for how Christians should react to secular society also seem grounded in the political left. To the extent that they recommend making individuality secondary to the needs of the community, they have an almost Marxist flavor. The family, for example, should not be a private haven from the stresses of secular society, but instead a unit interwoven with the fabric of the larger church. In that position, the family is a public good, existing not for the private benefit of its members, but instead to promote the good of the collective; in this case, to enhance Christian worship among members of a church. Furthermore Clapp worries that individual autonomy discourages trusting others and being vulnerable - all necessary to Christian repentance. He argues that Christians cannot fully realize a relationship with God without the community of fellow Christians. Christianity will only flourish if its adherents band together in the community of the church. Put differently, individualism is at odds with holiness, and baptism, as an expression of engagement with the Church, has to be a group activity, not an individual one. A Marxist might see individualism as a threat to the communal achievement of economic equality; Clapp sees it as a threat to the communal practice of Christianity. But the fact that he even sees it as a threat is yet another revelation to an outsider used to pigeonholing Christians as enthusiastic proponents of Lockean individualism.

[6] In the end, Clapp's argument that society is a mess is so convincing, that were I a Christian, I would be less inclined to engage it, not more. But even if I wanted to engage, Clapp still does not show me the way. Part of the problem is that Clapp's suggestions are more about Christian self-control than Christian engagement of society. Essentially, Christians should discipline themselves to resist the vices of capitalism, and subsume their individuality to the needs of the church. But then what? Presumably at this point, Christians should be ready to turn outwards, and begin "taking baptism seriously." Clapp still needs to tell them how.

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