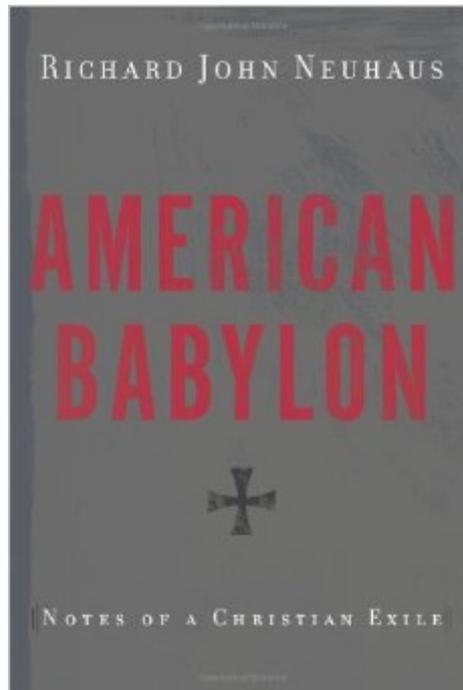


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American Babylon: Notes Of A Christian Exile



Synopsis

Christians are by their nature a people out of place. Their true home is with God; in civic life, they are alien citizens in but not of the world. • In *American Babylon*, eminent theologian Richard John Neuhaus examines the particular truth of that ambiguity for Catholics in America today. Neuhaus addresses the essential quandaries of Catholic life; assessing how Catholics can keep their heads above water in the sea of immorality that confronts them in the world, how they can be patriotic even though their true country is not in this world, and how they might reconcile their duties as citizens with their commitment to God. Deeply learned, frequently combative, and always eloquent, *American Babylon* is Neuhaus's magnum opus; and will be essential reading for all Christians.

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Customer Reviews

When Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009) died of cancer, America lost one of its most public (and conservative) Christian intellectuals. The arc of his life had the look and feel of providence. Born in Canada, he became a naturalized American. A high school drop out, he advised George W. Bush. Ordained in the conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in the sixties he joined forces with Daniel Berrigan to engage civil rights issues as a pastor to a Brooklyn congregation of blacks and Hispanics. After *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, he began to turn rightward. In 1990 he converted to Latin Rite Catholicism, was ordained a priest, and founded the Institute on Religion and Public Life, and its journal *First Things*, whose mission statement is "to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society." You don't have to agree with Neuhaus's unapologetic

neo-conservatism to appreciate the vigor with which he engaged Christian identity in the public square. Yes, he denied communion to Catholic politicians whom he considered insufficiently pro-life. He refers to Pope John Paul "The Great" (74, 209). He vigorously defended natural law theory ("those things that we cannot not know"). He warmed up to Lincoln's notion of America as the world's "last best hope" and defended democratic capitalism. But there he is engaging Peter Singer's advocacy of infanticide and eugenics, or Richard Rorty's "liberal ironism" (this chapter alone is worth the whole book). He wonders aloud about the "new atheism" and whether atheists can be good citizens. He circles back to Augustine and Aquinas, Jefferson and Madison, then forward to Alasdair MacIntyre, Derrida, Newman and the Niebuhrs.

Early in the book, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus wrote: "When I meet God, I expect to meet him as an American." When Fr. Neuhaus died in January of 2009, I expect that he did. As was evident from his writings, he was a good citizen of both the City of Man and the City of God. AMERICAN BABYLON addresses this question of how to live as a Christian in an increasingly secularized society. Fr. Neuhaus draws several parallels: the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity and the early Christians in pagan Rome--to name just a couple. Throughout the book runs the theme that we are "aliens and exiles" in this "earthly city" while on pilgrimage to our true, and heavenly, home. The author quotes the letter to Diognetus, written by a 1st century Christian to a pagan who was curious about how Christians perceived their place in the world. "Though they are residents at home in their own countries," it says, "their behavior is more that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a homeland, and any homeland is a foreign country...The soul is captive to the body, yet it holds the body together. So Christians are held captive to the world, and yet they hold the world together." Fr. Neuhaus also addresses the very real difficulties Christians face in today's American culture. He delves deeply into how certain modern philosophies have shaped a culture that is antipathetic to Christianity, yet holds out hope that--no matter what our current circumstances--the outcome has already been determined in our favor if we remain faithful. One example he gives is that of St.

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