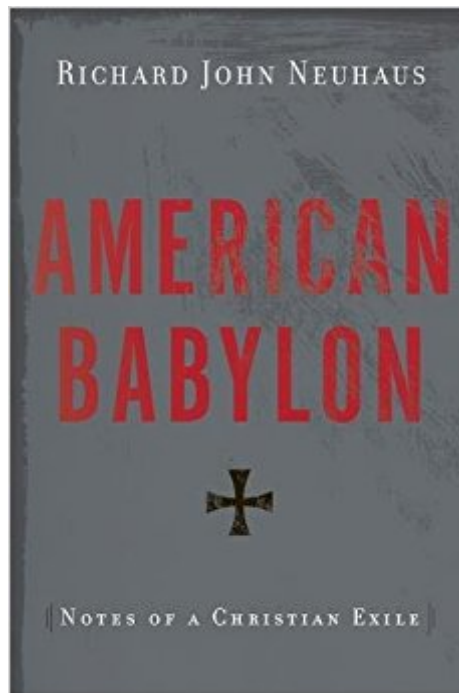




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# American Babylon: Notes Of A Christian Exile



## Synopsis

Christians are by their nature a people out of place. Their true home is with God; in civic life, they are alien citizens &#147;in but not of the world.â • 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&#151; 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&#39;s magnum opus&#151; and will be essential reading for all Christians.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Neuhaus, who died in early 2009, moved along the theological continuum during his life from liberal Protestant to conservative Catholic. Along the way, the Catholic priest who was editor-in-chief of the journal *First Things* never shied from controversy and continually offered provocative theological insights on the nature of American religion and politics. In some ways, his last book picks up where his early book, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, left off. In this sometimes repetitious but always challenging look at American Christianity, Neuhaus argues that Christians live in exile in a foreign land, for they always live with the hope of returning to the Kingdom of God. Neuhaus maps out the territory in which Christians find themselves, shaped by the liberal ironyâ and its shortcomingsâ of the late philosopher Richard Rorty as well as by the many

shallow spiritualities of the self proffered by New Age religions. The final pages of this book poignantly afford a glimpse of Neuhaus's own embrace of hope as he made his final journey toward the New Jerusalem. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

New York Times Book Review &#147;American Babylon displays Neuhaus in all his virtues &#150; elegantly argued and written, fair-minded and with a formidable range of reference &#150; making the important point that politics without an anchor in a public morality can quickly slip away in dark directions.â •National Review &#147;In word and deed alike, Neuhaus provided as much &#145;spiritual energy for existing goals of change&#39; as any figure of his era. But it&#39;s a testament to his own capaciousness that we will be able to turn to him for guidance and inspiration even in eras vastly different from his own.â •The Weekly Standard &#147;A final, uniquely Christian reflection on making one&#39;s way in America.... American Babylon remains an important book at a critical moment in history.â •The American Spectator &#147;[A] short, dense meditation on what it means to live &#145;our awkward duality of citizenship,&#39; as both Christians and Americans, with integrity.... American Babylon can be read as a kind of valedictory or summation of many of the intellectual arguments that have preoccupied Father Neuhaus in his previous writings.â •

As we approach another annual commemoration of Independence Day, Christians may be asking "How do we relate to our country?" And if they're not asking this, they ought to be. In 2008 Richard John Neuhaus, Lutheran pastor turned Roman Catholic priest, prolific writer, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, and founder/editor of First Things, pushed forward a work meant to help Christians think through their relationship and role in this country. This 270 page hardback, "American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile," was published two months after his decease (January 8, 2009). In many ways it reads like the final words of a dying father to his children. "American Babylon" is shaped by Jeremiah's letter to the Babylonian exiles in Jeremiah 29, and Neuhaus takes this as the story of our present situation. Christians are pilgrims, exiles, strangers in a strange land, who "because of Christ incarnate, crucified and resurrected" live in the present while being bonded with the future; "The present is, so to speak, pregnant with the promised future" (15). And so, recognizing that "Babylon" will continue until finally and fully displaced with the New Jerusalem, Christians are to develop an "Augustinian sensibility," "the sensibility of the pilgrim through time who resolutely resists the temptation to despair in the face of

history's disappointments and tragedies, and just as resolutely declines the delusion of having arrived at history's end. (23). One of the concerns Neuhaus voices is the melding and wedding of America and the Church, which eventually has turned America into a church-substitute; "American theology has suffered from an ecclesiological deficit, leading to an ecclesiological substitution of America for the Church in time" (41). As he notes a little further on, we see "again and again that, without a Church that is not notional but real, without a Church that bears a promise and a purpose that transcend the American experience, the American experience itself, in ways both subtle and vulgar, offers itself as a substitute church" (50). It's only when we come to recognize that we live in the ruins of Babel, where the politics of the City of Man is "marked by rival claims to truth in conflict" (185) that we can be freed up to develop "Augustinian sensibilities." "American Babylon" tackles several poignant issues, like atheism and citizenship, Rorty and postmodernism, to name a few. But in the end, Neuhaus left us with a way to have a "disciplined skepticism about politics" that doesn't breed cynicism, but wisdom (185); tools to help us appreciate that our Christian faith "does not relieve but intensifies our dissatisfaction with things as they are" (247) because we live with a dual citizenship. What Neuhaus wanted most of all was to guide his readers to have a properly placed hope that will dispel hopelessness; "This is the heroic hope of the saints, grounded not in self-confidence but in identification with a narrative other than our own" "the narrative of Christ crucified, risen, and returning in glory" (239). There is no doubt that Christian readers from the various streams that flow within Christianity will take issue with this conclusion or that assertion. As a Protestant minister I am cognizant of the Roman Catholic sense that colors some of the suppositions and sentiments Neuhaus proposed. Nevertheless there is a weighty sagacity and sanity between the covers of this book that will benefit all of Christ's people who live in America. I highly recommend this volume. And in honor of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, I leave the reader with some of the author's concluding statements: "We are moving toward our destination, and our destination is moving toward us|As Christians and as Americans, in this our awkward duality of citizenship, we seek to be faithful in a time not of our choosing but of our testing. We resist the hubris of presuming that it is a definitive time and place of historical promise or tragedy, but it is our time and place" (250).

I just finished reading this book yesterday. So, it's fresh on my mind. . . The topic of this book is easily accessible to everyone prior to acquiring it and is quite straightforward: Christians (with

Catholic emphasis) living now in the United States of America can be compared to the Jews when they were exiled in Babylon from 586 - 539BC. They were living away from their homeland just as Christians in America (in the entire world, for that matter) have been and are now living away from their homeland in Heaven, with Jesus their Savior, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, the saints, and the angels. Fr. Neuhaus admirably presents this topic from a very realistic and spiritualistic viewpoint leaving the reader with a clear sense of understanding their living circumstances and all that entails, but most importantly he instills a very joyful sense of hope for all us Christians having to live as such. I highly recommend this book to all Christians. NOTE: I would have rated this 4.5 stars (had that been available) because of the totally unnecessary roughly 20 page tangent Fr. Neuhaus runs off on regarding a man named Richard Rorty's philosophical viewpoints. It threw my train-of-thought completely off track. Most likely, though, those philosophically educated will enjoy this portion.

An excellent exposition on the relationship Christians hold as citizens of our modern secular state and of the Kingdom of God.

The Catholic theologians last book is a great one. He explains the difficulty of Christians living between two worlds--the kingdom of God and the Babylon that is America. He describes us as having our passports in heaven, but a visa for our temporary sojourn on earth. We need to remember where our true home is, but not write off or check out of our current "digs." A thought provoking and challenge to anyone who feels the tension between living out the Gospel in the modern Babylon that is America'

Excellent.

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