ported him and others to the Italian Alps, where the remnants of the Third Reich apparently planned a last stand before being killed by partisans.

Those historians and others who continue to cling to the “Hitler’s Pope” myth despite the abundant evidence to the contrary, will have an even more difficult task as they are faced with Mark Riebling’s well-documented page-turner.

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Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel were three major figures in late twentieth-century American Catholic economic and political thought. This fact is widely recognized—so much so that the grouping of the three as a kind of “Catholic neo-conservative triumvirate” has become a commonplace in the intellectual history of religious conservatism in the period. Indeed, one might argue that the attention paid to the three, while justified with respect to their influence, has skewed our understanding of Catholic conservatism by neglecting other important figures who are not as easily categorized or lumped together into a movement.

Nonetheless, Scribner’s *Partisan Church* is another entry in this historiography, focusing closely on these three thinkers and bringing in others only by way of elucidating the protagonists’ context. Combine this focus on well-trod territory with the fact that Scribner holds a position in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—an institution often on the receiving end of neoconservative barbs—and one might reasonably expect little in the way of originality or balance.

One would be wrong. Scribner’s book excels where many other accounts have failed: fundamentally, by taking seriously the thought of these public intellectuals and by assuming their good faith. Scribner is not uncritical, but he clearly strives to be fair (Novak’s blurb on the back cover attests to the same point), and in the process he achieves what few other analysts of neoconservatism have: a thorough and lucid exposition of Novak’s, Neuhaus’s, and Weigel’s views on key topics, and real insight into the sources of those views.
Scribner’s acumen is evident in the introduction and opening chapter in at least four important ways. First, he identifies errors in earlier accounts of the Catholic neoconservatives, rightly observing that two incompatible interpretations are both wrong: one that paints the neoconservatives as proponents of a “privatized” religion that has no social impact; the other that views them as dangerous advocates of theocracy. Instead, Scribner accurately points out, the trio actively promote extensive religious influence on society, including through its public institutions, but at the same time happily embrace the “American experiment” in church-state separation and religious liberty. In fact, the neoconservatives’ argument that Catholicism and the American political structure are compatible is one significant dimension of their oeuvres.

Second, Scribner rightly identifies concern for the vitality of intermediate institutions as being at the heart of the neoconservative project. This is an important point in light of the efforts of some critics to portray the three as rigidly anti-government. Insofar as these thinkers are critical of government, that stance derives not from a libertarian anti-statism or skepticism toward the idea of the common good but instead from a concern that government overreach threatens the integrity of indispensable institutions such as the church, the family, and private voluntary associations.

Third, Scribner recognizes that the late twentieth-century discord between conservative and liberal Catholics reflected not merely a political difference of opinion but also—at least in many instances—a different ecclesiology. Fleshed out in the final chapter of the book, this difference was expressed in divergent views on matters such as the role of the bishops (especially the national bishops’ conference) in public-policy debates and the distinction between the mission of the laity and the mission of the clergy with respect to engagement of the world.

Finally—and this in qualification of all of the generalizations of the preceding three paragraphs—Scribner understands that Novak, Neuhaus, and Weigel are not a set of three interchangeable parts, all pieces of a machine with a single purpose. Each of them emerged out of a different life experience, each had different intellectual influences, and each engaged issues of public debate in different ways—not only in terms of the topics they chose to emphasize but also, sometimes, in terms of real differences of position. The appellation “neoconservative,” then, as Scribner uses it, is helpful shorthand to identify common features, not a stereotype that obscures important differences and dehumanizes the subjects. This is intellectual history as it should be done.

In a justifiable academic decision, Scribner chooses to focus on the neoconservatives’ production during the 1970s and 1980s. He examines
their views on abortion; on foreign policy, communism, war, and peace; on liberation theology; and on domestic policy—in particular the respective roles of bishops and laity in assessing and acting on economic and political matters. Scribner skillfully interweaves the views of the three thinkers while adequately maintaining distinctions between their positions.

Of particular interest for those who may be familiar with the group’s later views but unaware of their development over time, Scribner unearths the early writings of Novak and Neuhaus on abortion as well as the early engagement of Weigel with pacifism.

The book does have some weak points. Various distinctions and developments could be more carefully stated. Scribner’s characterization of the shift in papal diplomacy from Pius XII to John XXIII (chapter 5) is overly stark: John’s *ostpolitik* was arguably less a retreat from the Church’s traditional condemnation of communism than it was a recalibration of the way the Church would engage Communist regimes—that is to say, a change in strategy rather than a change in teaching.

Although, as stated above, Scribner is usually fair, he falls into more conventional mistakes on occasion. Describing the neoconservatives’ critiques of the American bishops on foreign policy and economics during the 1980s, he writes of the former’s “strategy of triangulation” by which they would “publicly stake out a position on a given issue, proceed to argue that their position was more consistent with papal teaching, and then pit the latter teaching against that of the bishops” (156). This passage comes close to accusing the bishops’ critics of bad faith, as though the neoconservatives did not actually believe that there was tension between the views of the American bishops (as expressed through the bishops’ conference) and papal social teaching but were instead cunningly employing papal quotations to buttress their own partisan views. If, however, they accurately perceived such tension—or even opposition—then what they were doing was not a “strategy of triangulation” but an honest assessment of what was a troubling phenomenon. Without making a judgment as to the accuracy of the neoconservative critique, it should be obvious that their claim was at least hypothetically possible: Catholic doctrines on collegiality and infallibility guarantee no perfect harmony between the teaching of individual bishops or groups of bishops and the teaching of the pope (whatever weight of authority such teaching carries). To the contrary, history is rife with cases of conflict between local churches and the Roman pontiff.

Scribner also neglects the nuances of the neoconservative stance on the respective roles of the clergy and laity. He concludes by pointing to a “tension” in the triumvirate’s thought: They want laypeople rather than clergy to engage political and economic questions, but they maintain a
“high regard for the clergy and the role of the bishops” (220). Although he cites it, Scribner fails to appreciate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on the Laity*. There is no tension between recognition of the irreplaceable roles of priests and bishops in the Church and promotion of active involvement of laity—as Church—in the world. Depending on the circumstances, strong statements and action concerning politics on the part of priests and bishops are called for. At other times and on other issues, political matters are best left to the laity. The neoconservatives were not, then, arguing for a quiescent episcopacy with respect to public life, but instead for better judgment about how and when to go about engaging the public sphere. Catholic social teaching offers criteria for adjudicating this question.

Scribner’s failure to understand the difference between the neoconservatives and their opponents in these terms makes for a dissatisfying conclusion to the book, but it remains an admirable effort to articulate and analyze this influential strand in American Catholic social thought.

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In the book *The Lost Mandate of Heaven*, Geoffrey Shaw, a professor of history and currently the president of the Alexandrian Defense Group, a think tank on counterinsurgency warfare, weaves a tale of personalities, bureaucratic infighting, geography, warfare, and ultimately the betrayal and death of a political leader at the behest of the United States government. From the beginning of the book, Shaw makes it clear to the reader what his perspective is with regard to the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, the first president of the Republic of Vietnam, and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu on November 2, 1963. To him it was the outright “murder” of a good, virtuous Catholic man who served his country in many different capacities: district chief, provincial governor, prime minister, founder of a political party, and finally president of South Vietnam. Diem was an ardent anti-communist, who wanted to protect his country from the onslaught of Communism coming from North Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh, and backed by the Chinese and Soviet governments. To help him achieve this,