This volume represents a significant contribution to the exploration by church historians of church history. In particular, the essays collected here by the editors, Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan, offer a strong reminder that the political and national histories which were emerging in Renaissance Europe generally had a strong theological or religious element. Confessional and national interests intertwined in establishing the origins and telling the stories of both churches and states. As Katherine Van Liere remarks in her preface, "Renaissance Christians turned to the Christian past for spiritual and moral guidance, aid in prayer and pilgrimage, insight into the religious history of newly discovered lands and peoples, and support for various kinds of corporate identity—whether national, provincial, dynastic or confessional" (p. vii). The essays in this volume illustrate all these different ways in which the history of the church was used, and more.

The four essays of Part I, "Church History in the Renaissance and the Reformation," present the broader historiographical background. Anthony Grafton considers the extent to which church history drew on previous work—particularly the model offered by Eusebius’s church history, but also that found in Josephus’s Jewish histories—or was innovative, for instance in its use of sources, its study of other religions, and especially of Judaism, or its definition of historical periods. Euan Cameron’s exploration of Protestant church histories and their use of patristics, compares—and to some extent contrasts—the work of Swiss and German church historians. He concludes that although the historiographies generated were “separated and often mutually hostile,” they also cross-fertilized (p. 51). Giuseppe Antonio Guazzelli investigates how Cesare Baronio portrayed the early church in his celebrated Annales Ecclesiastici (printed in Rome 1588–1607), which offered Catholic reply to the Protestant Magdeburg Centuries (printed in Basel, 1559–1574). Simon Ditchfield presents Catholic uses of the past after Trent, focusing on Roman writers, their appeal to medieval predecessors, and their interest—shared with the Protestants—in using church history to offer a justification for present practice. Ditchfield’s observations on the relationship between hagiography and historiography (p. 92) are particularly important for understanding terminology used elsewhere in the volume.

Part II considers the relationship between national history and sacred history. David J. Collins shows how patriotic histories of the German lands drew on and re-evaluated accounts of Christian mission and countered the frequent denigration of the Germanic in classical writings to offer a positive image of German virtues, largely independent either of Rome or of the arrival of Christianity. That
the Roman historian Tacitus was more positive about the Germans, and thus positively received by some of these historians, makes the use of Tacitus in German school and university curricula of the time particularly interesting. Katherine Elliot Van Liere explores how assertions of the apostolic nature of Spanish Christianity, and in particular the humanist historical “proofs” offered for the legends attributing the foundation of the Spanish church both to James the Great (in Spanish, Santiago) and to seven other early apostles, encouraged some late sixteenth-century historians to manufacture evidence to buttress these claims. Returning to central Europe, Howard P. Louthan compares accounts of the history of Cologne, Bavaria, and Bohemia: Cologne’s roots in Roman Christianity emphasised its ancient Christian history; Bavaria was said to originate from the Galatians of New Testament times, in an area which matched the aspirations of Bavaria’s Duke Maximilian; accounts of Bohemia, which had never been part of the Roman empire, traced its Christian roots to the Byzantine missionary saints, Cyril and Methodius. These histories were intended to counteract the accusations of novelty and corruption levelled by the Protestants. Louthan might, however, have dealt more critically with some of the heroes presented in these histories: Duke Maximilian in particular, was a more problematic figure than his depiction would suggest. Rosamund Oates offers some fascinating insights into the significance of church history for the English Reformation. Gregory of Monmouth’s account of the request for two missionaries sent to Pope Eleutherius by the second-century British king Lucius, and the pope’s response that the king “had no need of Roman law because the king was already ‘God’s vicar in his Kingdom’” (p. 165) was used to buttress Henry VIII’s rejection of papal authority. Under Elizabethan, appeals to the primitive Christianity continued, with arguments that Christianity had been brought to the British Isles in apostolic times, followed by the missionaries of the Celtic church, and finally by the Roman missionaries. Even amongst Protestants, tensions emerged between different interpretations of the Anglo-Saxon church and its relation to Rome. Similarly, Salvador Ryan considers the historiographical complexities of constructing a post-Reformation Catholic identity in Ireland which could present twelfth-century “old English” (Anglo-Norman) settlers as Irish Catholics.

The final section is more diverse. Jean-Marie Le Gall explores the use of the saints in the French Renaissance, and in particular the changing emphases of French hagiographic literature. Le Gall makes much of what he identifies as “rift between monks and humanists,” ignoring the complexity of this relationship, but he does show convincingly that in France, as elsewhere, the seventeenth century brought with it increased interest in establishing the beginnings of Christianity (in this case in Gaul), together with a growing concern with historical accuracy in presenting the lives of the saints. Liam Matthew Brockey examines the Portuguese excavations of the Santa Casa, the church associated with the Apostle