The distinguished medieval historian and editor of this first-rate handbook begins his introduction by helpfully indicating what its purpose is not: “The purpose of this Handbook is not to trace, step by step, the history of medieval Christianity or the development of religious ideals and theological reflections, nor to forge any other kind of collective narrative” (p. 2). As Arnold rightly observes, such narratives all-too-often succumb naturally to a kind of narrative teleology that results in a simplification and sometime distortion of how Christianity was made and remade, embodied and lived over time and space. The handbook, therefore, is “not a book with a story to tell” (p. 2). The approach then is not narrative or chronological but thematic and analytical. In this sense, the volume fruitfully complicates the traditional narrative history of Christianity. Most of the 30 essays that encompass the volume concentrate some or much attention on ‘material conditions’ and how fundamental changes in these conditions necessarily alter how religion, in this case western Christianity, changes. Many even cause us to ponder what ‘counts’ as religion at particular points, temporal and geographical, in the medieval West. The focus of the essays, then, is on what changed in different contexts in western Christendom, what ‘Christendom’ even meant, what the ‘church’ was in different chronological, social, and political contexts. Many of the essays, written by an impressively distinguished cast of medievalists from America, England, and continental Europe, take stands on current debates within the field. A unitive theme is the concentration given by most on the worldly and material conditions of medieval Christianity in preference to the common focus on the sacred and ‘spiritual.’

After the introduction, the Handbook is divided up into six large subject matters under the following heading: Methods, Spaces, Practices, Ideas, Identities, and Power. In “Methods,” the editor supplies an important survey and interpretive essay on approaches, or varying historiographies from Orosius and Orderic Vitalis, through Henry Charles Lea, to twentieth-century studies rooted in theology and institutions and then to historiographies that integrated economic, cultural, and social factors. Simon Yarow writes a fascinating essay on how anthropological approaches, which have not always existed in comity with traditional historical methods, have informed our understanding of medieval religion. Beth Williamson’s fine essay on the role of material culture in medieval Christendom, and her plea that historians take it more seriously, hits close to the center of the implicit and explicit themes of the collection. The great British medievalist R.I. Moore, rather than showing how the world might be
seen from a medieval perspective, intriguingly and successfully attempts to view medieval Christianity from the perspective of world history.

The second major part of the *Handbook* contains essays on how space encompassed and shaped medieval Christianity, with Amy G. Remensnyder reflecting helpfully on the frontier, border regions of Christendom and Islam; Sverre Bagge on the spaces, motives, and means (including crusade) of Christianization; Wendy Davies on the relationship of monastic ‘landscapes’ and society; and, in an extremely informative essay by Nicholas Terpstra, on ‘civic religion’ in medieval society. It seems natural that the fine historian of late-medieval parishes should write on parochial and domestic spaces, and Katherine French writes with her usual verve on parochial sources, administration, churches, and non-parochial institutions (like the ubiquitous guilds of late-medieval Europe).

Ian Forrest begins the strong section on practice with an intelligent analysis of continuity and change in institutions: the papacy, the episcopate, the clerical caste, and how they changed according to time and place (a theme nowhere better analyzed than in Robert Brentano’s study *Two Churches: England and Italy in the Thirteenth Century* [Berkeley, 1968]). Marcus Bull is to be commended for his insightful essay on pilgrimage, ‘the medieval Church’s most enduring and socially resonant point of devotional interaction and cultural exchange with the faithful’ (p. 201). The emphasis on conditions leads Bull to remind us that, before the industrial age of mechanized transport, the world felt at least fifteen times larger than it does today. Gábor Klaniczay deftly manages the massive topic of saintly intercession, healing, and sanctity. Eric Palazzo contributes a rich essay on the extremely important topic of Eucharistic rituals in the Middle Ages, again concentrating on ‘conditions,’ in this case the five senses and the Eucharist. Rob Meens’s essay on penance is brilliantly constructed, focusing on ten different loci, times, and aspects of penance and confession, illustrating continuity, change, and (again, a major theme of the volume) the unique and the local. Robert Clark contributes an invaluable essay on a topic that should be taught more regularly in medieval Christianity courses at all levels: spiritual exercises (manuals for princes, devotional treatises for the laity, devotional guides, and, of course, *The Imitation of Christ*).

Arnold Angenendt opens the section on Ideas with an essay on ‘Fear, Hope, Death, and Salvation,’ which includes interesting discussions on intercession and visions of the hereafter. Maureen Miller’s essay on clerical culture, reform, and politics infuses a familiar theme with original insight. Surely one of the most stimulating of the essays in this volume is Peter Biller’s on the division of the church into two *blocs*, intellectuals and the masses in the medieval church. Laura Smoller courageously takes up the issue of ‘popular’ religious cultures,