

INTRODUCTION

The international religious networks explored in this volume range from the cults of early medieval saints to the ecumenical networks and friendships which developed in the twentieth century. The volume began life as a conference which brought together a group of British and Scandinavian church historians; this explains why a large number of the essays included here consider international religious networks centred on (or originating in) Britain or Scandinavia, or the intriguing, and often surprising, links between the two, although the essays are by no means limited to this specific focus. As will be very apparent, as editors we have not sought to impose a restrictive or tight definition of what might be meant by the term 'network'; rather we have treated this as a flexible concept that allows a large variety of different kinds of religious associations and connections which crossed international boundaries to be explored.

As these essays show, international religious networks could be networks of ideas or of people and, virtually without exception in the instances studied here, they involved both. One recurring theme of the volume is the complex interrelationship between religious ideals and ideas and the men and women who initiated and subscribed to them. In addition, international religious networks could be supported through formal organizations, institutions and bureaucracies, or through more informal personal ties, such as friendships and acquaintances, or very often through both formal and informal support systems. Another major theme of the volume is precisely the tensions that might occur between informal and formal types of network, with a number of essays flagging up the difficulties in transforming what frequently began as informal international networks based on personal connections into more formal institutionalized religious organizations. As the essays also demonstrate, international religious networks might sustain a particular interest group, sect or denomination, or they could aspire to be ecumenical and all-encompassing, reaching beyond traditional institutional and religious boundaries. They

might be created by, or around, a single individual, they could span an entire institutionally organized church, or potentially they could hope to include the whole of Christendom, and even aim to connect a range of different world religions. Furthermore, international religious networks might be made up of largely like-minded individuals sharing largely similar perspectives, or they could bring diverse individuals and groups together to focus on a specific religious issue, concern or personality.

Although the main finding of the volume might be the sheer variety of the ways in which international religious networks have operated in the past, there are, nevertheless, some further overarching themes and general points made by a number of the essays which are worth highlighting in this introduction. Christine Walsh, in the opening essay, draws attention to a broad conceptual distinction between what she refers to as ‘metaphorical’ networks – which connected individuals to one another over time and space but who were largely unknown to each other – and ‘actual’ networks formed of men and women who knew (or at least knew of) each other. Her case study of the cult of St Katherine of Alexandria shows how powerful the former could be and this distinction is a useful one to bear in mind in the essays that follow, although, from the general perspective of this volume, what is perhaps most important to recognize is that both ‘metaphorical’ and ‘actual’ networks have been highly successful in linking their adherents together.

The rest of the essays on the medieval period bring out a number of features which are useful in thinking about some of the more general characteristics of international religious networks. In his exploration of the network associated with the Orthodox monastery of St Sabas, Andrew Jotischky observes it working in two distinct ways – drawing all parts of the Orthodox world to the monastery but at the same time also encouraging the monastery at the centre of the network to reach outwards to the world beyond it. In so doing, the network might be said to have operated simultaneously in both a centripetal and a centrifugal manner, a point which has more general applicability than simply to this specific instance. Anne Duggan’s wide-ranging case study of the formation of the cult of St Thomas examines the ways in which Becket became an international icon as a result of four overlapping

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but distinct networks – friendship, clerical, curial and monastic. She argues that the Becket cult could not have developed as it did without these networked connections. As she also neatly brings out, given the original context of the volume, a number of institutional networks bound elements of the English and Scandinavian churches together in this period, so that Becket's significance was noted in thirteenth-century Icelandic tales. Damian Smith, in his study of what might be regarded as a 'failed network' – that of Durán of Huesca and the Catholic Poor – highlights the necessity, at least in his examples, for networks to cultivate both local and international connections in order to succeed. Whereas the Dominicans and the Franciscans in the thirteenth century were adept at doing both, thereby forming networks with staying power, Durán was, according to Smith, something of an international star but he failed to build a local power base and support for him and his followers withered once the international context changed. Keiko Nowacka takes up the issue of the dynamic of the relationship between theological ideas and human action in assessing the genesis of the European-wide movement to reform prostitutes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and emphasizes the ways in which the formulation of a theology of reform largely came after the reality of pastoral activity on the ground. Brenda Bolton's study of Innocent III's attempts to use the international Cistercian network to foster his own ambitions points to the structural elements of the Cistercian constitution and to the institution of the General Chapter as keys to the order's strength. As she argues, a great part of their success as an international network was the fact that the Cistercians knew each other well: they are very much an instance of an 'actual' rather than a 'metaphorical' network. In the final essay on a medieval topic, Barbara Bombi examines the ways in which the Teutonic Knights organized their archive to help link the central administration of the order and the provincial houses into a working connection, and in doing so she indicates the role that administration and bureaucracy could play in creating a successful network.

Essays on the early modern period develop these themes in a number of ways. Alec Ryrie's case study of John Knox demonstrates that not only did Knox depend on an international godly network for support, for instance during his periods in exile, but

more importantly that Knox saw the Reformation as a whole as being disseminated through an interpersonal network. Ryrie also makes the more general suggestion that international religious networks could do some things extremely well – such as spreading ideas, building contacts, giving shelter to refugees, defending and encouraging the persecuted, supporting preachers, spreading propaganda, creating orthodoxies and disciplining dissidents. What religious networks were less successful at, he argues from his case study, was transforming themselves into a church establishment.

Whether all contributors to this volume would agree with Ryrie's emphasis on networks only really being successful when they were in large part minority and oppositional, even counter-cultural, groupings, might be debated; nevertheless Clotilde Prunier explores the international epistolary networks which helped maintain Scottish Catholicism during the period of the penal laws. While most of the contributors in the volume highlight the similarities between individuals within any given religious network, Jeremy Gregory in his study of the Church of England in New England emphasizes the enormous gulf within the Anglican transatlantic network: in Old England members of the Church of England were part of the religious establishment but in New England they were part of a small dissenting minority, a gulf which created profound structural differences and different experiences within the network. David Hempton in his analysis of early Methodism as an international movement maintains that only by studying Methodism on an international or even global scale can historians fully understand what in fact was distinctive about its place in the history of early modern Christianity. By exploring Methodism as an international phenomenon, he argues, historians will not only have a better grasp of what was uniquely 'Methodist' about Methodism, but they will also acquire a wider range of analytical skills for investigating the effects of Methodism in a particular region or country.

A number of essays cover the period after 1800. In his essay on revivalist networks in nineteenth-century Norway, Dag Thorkildsen explores the role of the lay preaching networks associated with Hans Nielsen Hauge, which later spread to other parts of Scandinavia and through emigration to the United States of America. John Wolffe's study of early nineteenth-century transatlantic Evan-

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gical networks emphasizes not only the strength of the personal links between individual Evangelicals from both Britain and North America, but also the differences in Evangelicalism on either side of the Atlantic highlighted by those personal connections and interactions. In particular, he shows how the tensions engendered by the American Civil War put severe strains on the transatlantic Evangelical network, forcing individual to retreat to more nationally based concerns. Ian Shaw uses the career of the Congregationalist Andrew Reed to demonstrate the wider significance of both personal and institutional networks in the same period. By examining Reed's involvement in international collaborations in philanthropy, efforts at Evangelical unity, revivalist connections and organizations promoting conversion overseas, Shaw indicates some of the difficulties in transforming networks based on personal ties into those based on institutions, arguing that those individuals who were responsible for initiating networks were not always the best people to maintain them in the long run.

Two papers, those by Torstein Jørgensen and Cecilia Wejryd, explores the function and nature of women's international mission networks since the mid nineteenth century. Jørgensen argues that in Norway the network of women's mission groups was at the forefront of the women's movement more generally, leading the push for women to gain the right to vote. Wejryd, playing on the pun of global networks and 'glocal knitworks', examines sewing circles as a particular manifestation of women's mission movements in which the participants raised money for foreign missions. As part of the international reach of the sewing circles, she points to the sometimes close relationships between members of the sewing circles and the recipients of their fundraising, but also suggests that the objects of support were over time increasingly viewed as 'the other'.

The overarching focus of the remaining essays is ecumenical networks. Shin Ahn examines the efforts of Yun Chi-ho to participate in international networks and contrasts his experience at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 with the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, asking how far attempts at dialogue between different religious traditions should better be seen as attempts to convert other religious groups. Stuart Mews explores the relationship between the American John Mott

and the Swedish archbishop, Nathan Söderblom, who, when war broke out in 1914, belonged to neutral countries, and he shows how war forced a crisis, and an eventual parting of the ways, between these two proponents of ecumenism. David Thompson's analysis of efforts at ecumenism after the First World War brings out the contrast between the informal networks of people who already knew each other and the formal structures created by official church representatives, in which misunderstandings could arise between those who did, and those who did not, speak the same language. In similar fashion to Mews, Thompson argues for the crucial role of war (in this case World War II) in causing a crisis for both informal and formal types of network. Tine Reeh is interested – in a case study of Hal Koch's wide-ranging international ecumenical and intellectual links – in the ways that international networks and frames of reference in the 1930s could play out in a Danish national context as Fascism rose to power in Europe. Björn Ryman emphasizes – in common with many previous contributors – the vital role of personal friendships in sustaining ecumenical networks and examines these in the context of the strains of the Second World War. In the final essay, Mika K. T. Pajunen describes some of the ways in which an individual such as A. Cotter attempted to rebuild Nordic ecumenical relations in the immediate aftermath of the war and at the moment when the Cold War began to take shape. He also stresses the significance of personal relationships in creating networks such as these, but also the complex tensions between local and international ties.

Taken together, the essays in this volume open up a number of questions rather than providing definitive answers to the nature of international religious networks. As such, we hope they will stimulate future research on the theme. However, what is clear is that international religious networks are a varied and complex category for historical analysis. Given this rich variety, both in the nature and the types of international religious networks covered in this volume, we might ask: how far has religion, both in terms of the ideas it creates and in terms of its practitioners and adherents, been especially good at forming international networks? If so, what is it about religion that gives it such leverage and such an ability to transcend national and regional boundaries and divides? These are questions which may have some relevance for our under-

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standing of the international, and global, networks sustained, for good or ill, by different religious faiths at the present time, as well as for understanding the strains in keeping international religious networks intact when different national and regional experiences threaten to tear them apart.¹

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¹ The national, rather than the international, functions of both religion and the churches have been explored in an earlier *Studies in Church History* volume: Stuart Mews, ed., *Religion and National Identity*, SCH 18 (Oxford, 1982).