

The *Société Œuvres de Mer*: Welfare Work among French Fishermen off Newfoundland and Iceland

R.W.H. Miller

Volume 20, Number 2, Fall 2005

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds20_2art03

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Miller, R. (2005). The *Société Œuvres de Mer*: Welfare Work among French Fishermen off Newfoundland and Iceland. *Newfoundland Studies*, 20(2), 265–280.

The *Société Œuvres de Mer*: Welfare Work among French Fishermen off Newfoundland and Iceland¹

R.W.H. MILLER

FOUNDED IN 1894, the *Société Œuvres de Mer* [SOM] was an agency of the Augustinians of the Assumption [AA], intended to minister to the thousands of French fishers off Newfoundland and Iceland. In 1930 it became one of the constituent parts of the Apostleship of the Sea [AoS], the modern Catholic organization serving seafarers. The SOM was part of a larger movement among the churches to serve mariners, itself a product of the peculiar political situation in France.

In 1893 Eugène Grosjean, a French Jesuit novice in England, accompanied an English Jesuit, Fr. Goldie, to hear the Anglican Fr. Charles Hopkins speak in Hastings about the work of his Order of St. Paul [OSP]² among sailors in India. Goldie had investigated non-Catholic work among seafarers, in the hope of stimulating the Roman Catholic Church to do something similar. He shared his findings with Grosjean, who published an article in *Études*, a French Jesuit journal,³ which dealt at length with the non-Catholic sea apostolate, and challenged Catholic France to match it. In a subsequent article,⁴ Grosjean gave details of French Catholic work, mentioning the *Initiative chrétienne et française* of Admirals Mathieu and Gicquel des Touches. The latter had opened a *maison de famille* for seamen in Le Havre in 1884, the ephemeral Hôtel Saint-Martin. There were predecessors, for which details are scarce, apparently as early as 1868 in Marseilles, Nantes, and Toulon, each case an attempt to combat a *problème social*. The religious nature of these attempts is at best ambiguous, since in the contemporary French political climate a work of welfare got along better if apparently social and secular, rather than religious. Grosjean also noted the work of zealous parish priests among fishers at Croisie and Brest. In 1894, perhaps prompted by Grosjean's first article, a library

for Newfoundland fishers was started at Concale, and a *hôtel de marins* at Marseilles by an organization called *l'Œuvre du Fourneau de famille*. It is fairly certain that these ventures were the only provision for seafarers made by the French Church, beyond the normal contacts between parish clergy and their people in ports and fishing villages.

Prior to the 1890s, fishermen in Iceland seem to have fared better. Two names survive: the abbé Bernard Bernard, who ministered in Iceland from 1857 to 1862, and the abbé Jean-Baptiste Baudoin from 1858 to 1874. The liberalization which permitted Catholic worship in Iceland after 1874 was thought by Dalbard, a chronicler of French maritime missions, to be largely due to Baudoin's ministry.⁵ The French navy maintained an Iceland Station for the purpose of fishery protection, but was able to offer only very limited medical aid.

FRENCH POLITICS AND THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS

The ambiguous nature of the French Church's involvement in social work derived from the French political situation, and this dictated the relationship between the SOM and the AA. Many in the Third Republic viewed the Church with suspicion, since it was seen as being closely associated with conservatism, and with the possibility of a royalist revival. Church-state relations were governed by the 1801 Concordat between Pope Pius VII and Napoleon.⁶ Later governments sought to define and control this uneasy relationship, and a series of education bills provided that religious orders must be recognized by the state. Jules Ferry, the education minister in the early 1880s, admitted that this was a battle between lay government and theocracy, extreme terms which illustrate the tension of the period. The Jesuits were the first in his sights, but others were also targeted. Religious superiors succumbed to papal pressure for a compromise, fearing that the Church might lose its state subsidy, but the Jesuits could not be saved. Their Paris novitiate moved to England, and as a result the novice Grosjean met Fr. Goldie. New legislation provided that the affairs of religious congregations had to be placed in the hands of committees of Catholic laymen to avoid confiscation, which explains the process by which the SOM was founded and managed.

Some religious orders were not prepared to accept this situation. A policy of *ralliement* developed, especially among newer orders which were mostly, like the Assumptionists,⁷ ultramontanist. Founded to combat irreligion in Europe, the AA established schools, hospitals and orphanages, and exercised considerable influence through its publications, especially its newspapers. Its right-wing, aggressive defense of the Church attracted the hostility of many government figures. It lost its schools in 1886, and was suppressed in France in 1900 for its alleged role in a royalist movement.⁸

FRENCH FISHERMEN

By the end of the nineteenth century, the French merchant fleet was second in size to that of Britain. Together with the French navy, it maintained links with the French colonies; but the largest component of French maritime strength was the fishing fleet, also second to the British. According to one source, of 90,000 French sailors, 65,000 were fishermen. In 1866, 448 ships with 10,000 to 12,000 men were involved in the Atlantic cod fishery.⁹ The harsh conditions and technological developments in the industry are well documented. Most French fishermen came from the still strongly Catholic areas of France, such as Normandy and Brittany. They fished mainly for cod, off Iceland and on the Newfoundland Banks. Those sailing to Iceland came mainly from around Dunkirk, Gravelines, and Paimpol, while those for Newfoundland came from Fécamp, Granville, St-Malo, and Concale. Some fishermen resident at St-Pierre et Miquelon also participated.

The fishery started in March and closed in September, depending upon the ice. Fogs and storms were continual. As with North Sea fishermen, who also worked in harsh conditions, though nearer home, the hard work and sense of isolation led many fishers to a dependence upon alcohol, leading to high injury and mortality rates. Away from home for many months of the year, they returned from severe conditions in the fishery to the French winter.¹⁰

There were various ways of fishing. Schooners used nets, but line fishing was practiced increasingly. The lines, each with perhaps a thousand hooks, would be looked after by a couple of men in a dory, which could very easily drift in the fog and get lost, never to return. There were also the *graviers*, shore workers, who came out to the fishery in large numbers. In 1897, for example, the Assumptionist *Notre-Dame de Salut* which had been chartered for the purpose, carried between 1,200 and 1,500 men bound for Newfoundland.¹¹ Along the Newfoundland Treaty Shore, where the French had fishing rights, fishermen lived on land in barracks, *chaffauds*, simple wooden huts. The men rowed or sailed out to the fishing grounds each day, returning in the evening to a monotonous diet in an isolated spot, where the sole occupation was the salting down and drying of the cod.¹² These were ancient technologies, and cod by-products would feature in the universal soup of the evening, a simply prepared stew which could be cooked by anyone, and with the advantage of being warm.

Vessels on the Banks tended to gather in fleets, salting down cod in their holds, a system which meant they did not return to port until they were fully loaded, or fresh water was in short supply. This differed from the British fleeting system in the North Sea, where sailing vessels caught the fish, packed it in ice, and rowed it to the mother ship, a steamer, to be rushed to port and thence to market. This method was not adopted by French fleets until after World War I. The peak period for the French fishery was much the same as that of the British, roughly between 1885 and 1910.

THE BEGINNING OF FRENCH CHURCH WORK AMONG FISHERS

This was the context into which Grosjean's *Études* article brought news of British work among seamen and fishermen, especially that of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishers [MDSF] in the North Sea.¹³ In 1892 the MDSF had sent Wilfred Grenfell to Newfoundland and Labrador, to make a survey of what was required, and to see if its successful ministry afloat might be extended there.¹⁴ A doctor, Grenfell had pioneered medical work in the North Sea. His enthusiasm for modern, scientific medicine, with the acceptance of early anesthetics, suggests that the stage through which medicine was then passing may have had much to do with the development of this ministry to fishermen. Ambitious doctors of the period promoted the new medicine with an evangelical zeal which coincided with missionary enthusiasm, and a pervasive spirit of philanthropy. Grenfell's mission to Labrador received wide publicity, and the MDSF inspired others than the French. In 1898, for example, an Anglican priest in Holland was instrumental in setting up the hospital ship *De Hoop* to serve the Dutch herring fishery.¹⁵

Grosjean wrote his first article in late 1893, and it was published in February 1894. It is possible that the creation of the SOM was prompted by this article,¹⁶ but it is clear that its most important founder, Bernard Bailly, a former naval officer, was already aware of the work of the MDSF and had started thinking about work off Iceland and Newfoundland.¹⁷ It took time for Bailly's vision to develop. In the meantime Grosjean's article, with its emphasis on the work of MDSF, was reprinted as a tract, *Et nos marins?*. Bailly's name is occasionally coupled with that of a Dr. Bonnafy who had served on the Newfoundland naval station and also knew about the MDSF. Bailly probably needed Bonnafy's medical expertise, and may have known him through the navy. Various sources link the founding of the SOM specifically with MDSF, or with "Les Protestants anglaises [qui] construit les bateaux-missions ..."¹⁸ The probability is that Bailly and Bonnafy had prior knowledge of the MDSF, but were prompted to action by Grosjean, who in turn had been inspired by Fr. Goldie.¹⁹ An alternative possibility is that Fr. Goldie had contacted Bailly, who as editor of *Cosmos* (an AA publication) was part of the French literary and maritime world, and had visited the United Kingdom. That Goldie had been in touch with influential people in France was reported by Mrs. Fraser, secretary of the (English) Catholic Truth Society's recently founded Seamen's Sub-Committee.²⁰

Two other developments in this period indicate a general concern to do something for French seamen. In 1893, the abbé Theodore Garnier and his Confraternity of Notre Dame de la Mer opened *foyers*, or clubs, at various points along the French coast. He was inspired by the old Confrérie du Saint-Sacrement at Le Havre, founded in 1662, which consisted of fishermen operating off Newfoundland, who accepted a simple rule and committed themselves to catechizing *les mousses*, the boys working on their vessels.²¹ At roughly the same time the AA launched a modest journal for seafarers, *Le Croix des Marins*. The AA had a number of specialist publi-

cations: the weekly naval journal *Cosmos*, which Bailly edited, has already been mentioned; another related to the pilgrimage business. *Croix des Marins*, dedicated to Our Lady, Star of the Sea, first appeared in 1894, for the benefit of all who travelled on the sea, and their friends and families.²² Its conception coincided with the *Études* articles and the gestation period of the SOM, suggesting that the first meeting of the SOM in December 1894 was a culmination rather than a point of departure.

Bernard Bailly's father had been a devout Catholic, in the early part of the century associated (like the AA's founder, Emmanuel d'Alzon) with Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam and the foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Bailly resigned his naval commission to look after the family estate, as both his brothers were members of the AA. The elder, Père Vincent de Paul, founder and director of La Bonne Presse, appointed him editor of *Cosmos* in 1885. The younger, Père Emmanuel, was to be the third Superior of the congregation. A sister became Superior of the Dames de Ste-Clotilde.²³

In 1893 the AA purchased the British ship *Dunrobin Castle* to convey pilgrims to the Jerusalem Eucharistic Conference. Bailly was present on 24 September 1893 when members of the AA were considering a suitable new name for the ship. His intervention on the name is of no great importance, but he added, according to the AA's *Lettre à la Dispersion*:²⁴

Il faut prévoir, dit-il, la flotille de l'Assomption. Avec vos missions de terre, il foudrait que vous eussiez vos missions de mer. Il y a, par exemple, en Islande, en Terre Neuve, 16,000 pêcheurs qui passent une grande partie de l'année sur l'eau, et qui meurent dans leur barque sans le moindre secours religieux. Les protestants ont commencé à les abreuver de leurs Bibles. Pas un missionnaire catholique ne s'occupe de ces braves gens. Deux religieux de l'Assomption consacré à combler cette lacune feraient le plus grand bien.

This speech, proposing that the AA should undertake a maritime ministry to French fishers, met with general approval. It preceded the *Études* article by four months.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOM

Bailly's idea took hold during 1894. There was a meeting on 3 December 1894 of several admirals, various dignitaries, Bailly, and the editors of other AA papers, in the office of the AA Superior, Père Picard. It was agreed that an urgent need existed and that it should be tackled. The next day a central council was formed under the presidency of Vice-Admiral Lafont, with M. Augustin Normand and M. Le Maréchal as vice-presidents, together with Raoul Ancel, the abbé Belin, and Mm. de la Bigne, de Cuverville, Fournier, Admiral Lauge, Admiral Mathieu, Père

Picard, and Commandant Riondel. Bernard Bailly became secretary. His office was at the Maison de la Bonne Presse, 5 Rue Bayard, Paris, an AA address.

The council's first act was to contact all who might be interested, in order to raise the money necessary to buy and support a hospital ship. The drive was successful, and the *Saint-Pierre* was ordered for the 1896 season. The 1895 season was used to establish a land-based ministry. Père Yves Hamon and the abbé Belin (parish priest of the fishing port of Saint-Servan) went to St-Pierre et Miquelon, to investigate the possibilities. This speedy response may reflect the freedom enjoyed by religious orders in the deployment of personnel. Equally, Belin's availability may indicate the reduction in the amount of parish work at Saint-Servan after the fleet's departure. The pair left St-Malo with 2,500 fishermen bound for St-Pierre, one on each steamer, ministering as they went. Their peculiar canonical position (a seasonal chaplaincy in a diocese not their own to men drawn from other dioceses) had necessitated the acquisition of special faculties from Rome.²⁵

At St-Pierre, with the approval of the apostolic prefect, Mgr. Tiberi, the pair rented a former boarding school from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny to serve as a shelter — *abri des marins* — for fishermen. The term *abri* seems to denote a club without chapel and sleeping accommodation. The building was later referred to as a *maison de famille*. This became the usual designation, particularly after the SOM bought the school and, from 1898, began to develop it. The *maison* provided a welcome alternative to other local attractions, most of which were alcohol related. Over the next 25 years, a battle was waged against strong drink with cider, cordials, cocoa, and eucalyptus tea, reducing the number of alcohol suppliers in St-Pierre from 36 to five. The resulting drop in income to local people can only have caused bad feeling.²⁶ It is a story paralleled in the annals of almost every agency working amongst seafarers at this time.

The *maison* served fishers based ashore (*graviers*), those ashore while their vessels were unloading, replenishing or undertaking repairs, and the many who were convalescent. That it met a need is clear. In its second year, for example, the *maison* received 28,000 visits, an average of 122 men per day throughout the season. The record was to be a seasonal figure of 122,000 visits. In time a 30-bed dormitory was added for convalescents, the shipwrecked, or others obliged to be ashore; a chapel, which could be enlarged by the removal of a partition; a library with lecture and writing rooms; a printing works producing the monthly newsletter *Terre-Nueva*; a room for billiards and quiet games; a large covered court with space for more active games and a gymnastic beam; a bar serving cider and cordials; and a shop. The *maison* was well within the pattern of homes and institutes for the period, if on the ambitious side.

As to the chaplains' ministry, considerable detail survives about Père Yves Hamon's work. Apart from its sacramental emphasis, it differed little from that of his Protestant contemporaries. Afternoons were spent visiting, listening, comforting, encouraging, and reminding men that the *maison* would be open (7-10 p.m.). In

the evenings he would be about the *maison*, often hearing confessions, perhaps helping men with their letters, or arranging some entertainment. Evenings closed with an act of worship and a short address and, if numbers justified, with a magic lantern show, usually on the Catechism. An advantage of the magic lantern was that it required no electricity.²⁷

Père Yves spent five years at St-Pierre as principal chaplain, sometimes at sea on the hospital ship, sometimes visiting isolated places on the French Shore with the help of the navy. Second and third chaplains were as often Assumptionists as secular clergy. His assistant at St-Pierre from 1896 was Frère Eugène, whose 26-year ministry was later recognized by the award of the Légion d'Honneur. In 1901 Père Yves opened a *maison* at Faskrudsfjord, Iceland, on similar lines to that at St-Pierre. Here there was a nearby seasonal hospital run by Danish sisters, operated by the SOM but not replicated elsewhere.²⁸

A MINISTRY AFLOAT

In its early days the primary emphasis of the SOM, like the MDSF, was on the ministry afloat. This was its principal attraction to the public, and to the support committees, composed mostly of hard-working ladies who ran fêtes, concerts, flag days, and all kinds of fund-raising ventures. It also attracted press interest. Hospital ships were opened to the public before departure for the fishing season among *les braves marins*. It was this activity which the French government recognized as a public utility on 7 December 1898, and this allowed the SOM to receive government subventions, directly or indirectly, even at the height of the anti-clericalist movement.²⁹

The first hospital ship, the *Saint-Pierre*, was a sailing vessel,³⁰ sail being cheaper to build and cheaper to run. It was ordered in 1895, launched on 16 March 1896, blessed on 6 April, and sailed from St-Malo on 20 April. A contemporary described it as a graceful three-masted schooner, with a chapel (complete with reserved sacrament), wards for the sick, and an operating room. The *Saint-Pierre* sailed for the Banks, the abbé Belin on board, and made a successful first cruise, during which it communicated with eleven fishing boats, distributed provisions and coal (for stoves), gave news, consultations, and first aid, picked up ten men from a shipwreck, comforted and encouraged everyone, and returned on 19 May to St-Pierre to take on water. This pattern of activity was typical of a hospital ship cruise, and the importance of its visits in a pre-radio age may be imagined. So, too, in the days of the "paper doctor"³¹ in the medicine chest, were its medical facilities appreciated. The *Saint-Pierre* was welcomed back into port by Mgr. Tiberi, who said Mass on board.

Père Yves was chaplain on the second cruise — when there were two clergy on station, *maison* and *bateau* were taken by turn. On this occasion, after an eight-day

tour, the vessel was returning in thick fog, with a strong and unusual current. A sharp jolt at 1 a.m. awoke the crew. Instantly, all hands were on deck, except Père Yves who went below to consume the Host. Daylight revealed them aground at the foot of a 150-metre cliff, Cape St. Mary's. Distress signals went unanswered until, when they were about to abandon ship, an American vessel appeared. The captain agreed to rescue them, but demanded a large sum of money; he gave way, however, to the French captain's gun. In due course all 21 men were landed safely at Placentia. By chance an English artist was on board. He was painting scenes from the voyage, as he had done in the previous year on board a ship of the MDSF. He left a vivid written account of these events, but his pictures appear to have been lost in the wreck.³² The *Saint-Pierre* was a total loss.

In Paris, the Superior, Père Picard, rallied Bailly and proposed that the lost ship be replaced, not with one, but with two new vessels. *Croix des Marins* opened an appeal, which Picard led with a donation of 1,000 francs. The new ships, *Saint-Pierre II* and *Saint-Paul*, were ready for the 1897 season. The latter was lost off Iceland in 1899 and was not replaced. In 1900 the SOM decided to use an anonymous gift of 75,000 francs³³ to build the *Saint François d'Assise*, with sail and an auxiliary engine. Expensive to run, it was altered in 1901, and became the sole mission vessel for eleven years.

The rest of the history of the SOM's vessels is swiftly told. The *Saint François d'Assise* was joined in 1914 by the *Notre-Dame de la Mer*, and was itself replaced by the *Saint-Jehanne*. Both vessels spent the war in the service of the French Ministry of Marine. At the end of the war, only the *Saint-Jehanne* was worth patching and returning to its former duties, surviving until 1933. A subsequent ship, the *Saint-Yves*, served from 1935 to 1939, when changes in the industry led the SOM, like the MDSF, to switch to a shore-based ministry.

How did the SOM perceive the role of the hospital ships? A summary, printed in 1925 by the AA,³⁴ naturally put the first purpose as the bringing to the fishing fleets the encouragement and comfort of a priest. The other purposes were to give medicine, advice, and dressings; to take the seriously ill to St-Pierre for treatment; and finally, to take care of shipwrecked mariners, the convalescent, and the crews of dories which had drifted and became lost. The delivery and collection of mail, and the general transmission of news, small in themselves, encouraged men far from home and family.

The SOM's primary function was to raise sufficient money to maintain its ships and the *maisons*.³⁵ Even at times of extreme political difficulty, the public utility of the work ensured state assistance in some form, and the decoration of Frère Eugène demonstrated that this approval continued. The SOM itself seems to have escaped criticism, by and large, but the AA encountered difficulties. Opposition came from some Church authorities, particularly at St-Pierre, surprisingly, where it was perhaps fanned by anti-clerical pressure, and tensions which had taken time to build.

OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN THE CHURCH

The problem of Church authority was to occupy the AA for some years. The AA applied to Rome for faculties for the chaplains at St-Pierre, necessary because the priests were working outside their own diocese and in the administrative areas of others. Permission was granted by Rome initially for the 1895 season,³⁶ and at St-Pierre, Mgr. Tiberi authorized the renting of the former boarding school.³⁷ However, a week after his arrival in St-Pierre, Père Yves told Picard that Tiberi was not being totally helpful, that “Il n’aime pas les religieux, c’est un fait”³⁸ — a curious comment when three-quarters of his resident population was served by the Holy Ghost Fathers. Nevertheless, Rome extended its approval for the calendar year 1896, and when Picard petitioned for a chapel (as part of the *maison*) in 1898, Rome on 21 February 1899 granted faculties for five years. These permitted a variety of services in the chapel for seamen, and authorized the director of the *maison* to allow designated priests to hear confessions and to preach.³⁹ In addition, the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs had in April 1898 generalized the permissions already given to relate to all existing situations, and those yet to be founded.⁴⁰ Père Yves had every reason to believe that he could proceed with his work in peace.

The chapel was designed to meet the needs of fishermen who could not attend the parish church, either because of working hours, or because of its formality — their access to clean clothes and washing facilities was limited. However, Tiberi regarded the opening of the chapel as uncanonical, contrary to the spirit of the Concordat, and a challenge to his authority.⁴¹ The opening of the chapel for the 1899 season was too much for him — he was in France, apparently for his health. As the *Lettre à la Dispersion* delicately put it:

Mal instruit, sans doute, et mal conseillé, il prit la brusque décision de supprimer la chapelle, d’interdire le P. Yves et de lui ordonner de quitter Saint-Pierre.⁴²

Père Yves, armed with the correct authority, wondered what he should do in the face of such hostility. Picard ordered him to stay at his post, and considerable activity followed. Rome was so displeased with Tiberi that it was suggested that the AA should take over the prefecture. This proposal had implications for the Concordat and, although supported by the French ambassador to the Holy See, was opposed by the French colonial minister. The AA detected the hand of freemasonry, perhaps shorthand for anti-clericalism, but this was not necessarily so. The matter was resolved at the end of the season. Père Yves, on his return to France, was sent on a voyage to China before starting the 1901 season in Iceland. There he opened a *maison* on the lines of the one at St-Pierre. Tiberi resigned in 1899 and was replaced by Mgr. Legasse. The chapel remained closed until 1908, well after the end of the Concordat (1905).

The whole episode may have been a reflection of the pressure being brought by anti-clericals on the AA in France.⁴³ However, another view is suggested by a letter from the abbé d'Auvigny to Picard in 1902.⁴⁴ A secular priest, d'Auvigny reported that Legasse was going round the SOM's suppliers and staff in St-Pierre to ascertain their grievances. This suggests that a reasonable explanation for the continuing troubles may lie in the hostility of local businesses, whose incomes had diminished substantially as a result of the AA's successful battle against alcohol.⁴⁵

AUTHORIZATION BY ROME

Rome's support for SOM was consistent. Its position on the confessions issue was reinforced in April 1900 in the document *DECRETUM quoad facultatem excipiendi confessiones fidelium navigantium*.⁴⁶ In addition, the faculty to allow priests to hear confessions was extended to the director general of the SOM, *ex officio*. It was probably for this reason that Picard from 1902 served on the SOM's council in two capacities — as Superior of the AA, and as SOM's spiritual director, responsible for the choice of chaplains “et de toutes les questions qui peuvent se rattacher à leur ministère.”⁴⁷

On 21 December 1905, Rome issued the Instruction *Jam Inde* to the AA. This document regularized the position of SOM with some precision, and remained in force until 1929.⁴⁸ Peter Anson, a marine artist and an influential amateur historian of maritime missiology, wrote that *Jam Inde* “[i]n effect ... gave the Assumptionists spiritual jurisdiction over seafarers of every nation in any part of the world.... Never before had such privileges and faculties been granted ... to any organisation devoting itself to the spiritual welfare of sailors.”⁴⁹ However, Anson had little understanding of the situation which had created the need for *Jam Inde*, of the position of the French Church, or of the relationship of the AA and the SOM. The former were the promoters of the latter, not its directors, and their responsibility was solely for the spiritual side of the SOM's work.

Jam Inde's four sections dealt with (i) SOM's *maisons* and chapels; (ii) faculties and privileges; (iii) their use; and (iv) duties and laws. Chaplains afloat had a free hand (and how could it be otherwise before radio?) if approved by the Spiritual Director of the SOM.⁵⁰ In other words, the priest at sea had a clearly defined link with someone in an hierarchy, or, as might now be said, a line manager. Peculiar hours of work might affect the hours at which Mass needed to be said, or the fulfillment of Easter duties. If a chaplain was ashore, or a ship was in harbour for any length of time, the authority of the Ordinary (the local bishop, eparch, prefect apostolic, etc.) was to be obtained, or at least acknowledged, by showing him the necessary permissions (III: 11, 14, 15). Similarly, *maisons* might be set up with chapels, two being approved in Newfoundland, with the agreement of the Ordinary and the approval of Propaganda (I: 1). Within the *maisons*, priests of the SOM were to be

free to direct matters (IV: 20). Their ministry was to be confined to fishermen, seamen and passengers, and not extended to local residents other than SOM staff (I: 5; III: 11, 15; IV: 19). They were to behave in a reverent and compliant manner towards the Ordinary (IV: 17), to keep the laws and customs of the local parish (IV: 16), and to allow the Ordinary to inspect the chapel (IV: 18). In the event of the Ordinary being dissatisfied, his usual recourse would be to the SOM's Spiritual Director, unless matters of immediate and great importance arose, in which case the Ordinary was to act first but then justify his action to Propaganda (IV: 21). The priests of the SOM were to live "in the bond of peace" with the local clergy (IV: 17). In short, this document recognized that problems could be created by either side and offered a remedy for both. It excluded no other agency from the ministry to seamen, but regulated the actions of the clergy attached to the SOM, who did not have to be members of the AA, or, indeed, religious of any other Congregation.

Jam Inde contains a few clues which may shed light upon the problems at St-Pierre — for example, the reference to providing a ministry to seafarers only, and not to local people. It may be that Mgr. Tiberi was trying to tread a delicate path to avoid trouble with anti-clericals, or even nodding gently in their direction in an attempt to further his own career. He may have received complaints from local businesses. It is even possible that his action was no more than a product of the ill-health which had taken him to France. Whatever the reason, it was primarily his action which lay behind the need for *Jam Inde*, although it would have been entirely appropriate for such a document to have been sought at any time. The Superior of the AA would not have wanted to apply repeatedly for faculties, when one application of the right kind could secure a permanent document.

Jam Inde was intended to cover all situations which might arise, and its immediate purpose was to avoid the kind of unpleasantness outlined above. It was not immediately successful. A document from 1908 suggests a clash between secular and regular clergy.⁵¹ Another, from 1910,⁵² indicates that Legasse accused Père Benoit of giving scandal by his language; of speaking to illiterates in "familiar and popular" language (which seems to have meant speaking to fishermen in language they could understand); of accepting dinner invitations (if he was guilty of that, Benoit said, he was not alone, for he had dined six times in the company of the ship's captain and doctor); and of dancing (which he denied, though happily admitting that he had organized dances). A letter of 1911⁵³ from Legasse to Père Emmanuel Bailly (now Superior of the AA) suggests that the resident clergy might have had valid complaints against those who came and went with the fishing season. A resident population of 4,000 would surely resent an annual invasion of 10,000 visitors, every one of them male. The AA was associated with those visitors. Such a letter shows, however, that *Jam Inde* could be made to work, and over time it did. It lasted until 1929, by which time the ministry of the SOM had changed considerably. It joined the federation of Catholic maritime welfare organizations in the Apostolatus

Maris International Concilium [AMIC], and did not ask for a renewal of *Jam Inde*. Instead, the SOM took its place in the ordinary life of the Church.⁵⁴

In 1925, in the context of a review of the life of Père Yves Hamon, a series about the work of the SOM was printed in the AA's internal publication, *Lettre à la Dispersion*, and an attempt made to assess the achievement of 25 years of work.⁵⁵ The conclusion was that it had been impressive, in spite of the war years:

414 rescued from shipwreck
 1,582 hospitalized
 23,626 hospital-days
 7,587 consultations at sea
 4,333 gifts of medicine
 620,218 letters received or sent

The anonymous author, finding it harder to assess the spiritual achievements, pointed to the continuing ministry of the clergy, to the large numbers of men at acts of worship, making their confessions, spending time in good company instead of getting drunk, and returning safely to their wives and families.

Each year the SOM sent out a number of clergy to Iceland and Newfoundland, with the exception of 1915-18 when Frère Eugène ran the *maison* at St-Pierre alone. The full list reveals⁵⁶ that out of just under 100 chaplain-seasons (often the same people each year), just under half were secular clergy, the remainder being AA priests, illustrating the relationship of AA and the SOM — united yet independent of each other. French politics ensured that that independence remained a reality.

POST-WAR CHANGES

By 1919, recruiting chaplains was becoming a problem. Religious orders were often seriously depleted in membership, and were called upon to undertake new tasks.⁵⁷ Fishermen's numbers and the fishery generally were also much reduced. Needs afloat were changing, and change was not confined to the sea. It had been Père Yves' custom to continue his ministry in the winter months by getting to know the fishers and their families back in France. The hospital ship doctors used the same period to give instruction in first aid. There was thus a precedent for a shore-based home ministry. Improved conditions at sea and reduced numbers of fishers meant that the SOM's ministry had to change, as did that of its Protestant equivalent, the MDSF. Increasing costs reinforced the point. The fact that it survived to become a member of AMIC and beyond, is testimony to the hard work and devotion of SOM members.

Two other endeavours need to be mentioned in connection with the SOM, both of which also joined the AMIC. As early as 1897 it had become apparent that the fishing community contained many children lacking one or both parents, prompting Admiral Gicquel de Touches (of the Le Havre *maison* of 1894), with the help of Père Picard,⁵⁸ to found an orphanage, *Les Orphelins de la Mer*.⁵⁹ In its first year 19 orphans were admitted, rising to 271 in 1905. By 1927 a total of 3,294 children had been aided. The steady increase in numbers in the early years is unlikely to have been due to an increasing number of orphans. It is better explained by an increasing awareness within the fishing community of the orphanage's existence.⁶⁰

The other AA-derived work was *L'Œuvre du Livre du Marin*, founded in 1910 by Frère Eugène Bergé, to circulate appropriate reading material in the navy and among fishers, the idea being that books could go where people could not. It is surprising that it was not founded earlier. English Catholics had started literature distribution in the 1890s, and Protestant distribution had begun much earlier. The delay is even more surprising when the AA's heavy involvement in publishing is considered. The number of *Livre du Marin* beneficiaries increased steadily:

... par l'envoi de petites brochures et d'almanachs à des pêcheurs de Terre-Neuve, alors en service des navires de guerre ... Finalement, en 1916, se constitua officiellement la nouvelle organisation: *Le Livre du Marin*.⁶¹

The new name was the original writ small. Its origin in Newfoundland echoed a need underlined by Wilfred Grenfell of the MDSF, whose ambitious scheme for the distribution of boxes of books along that inhospitable coast⁶² showed that his work was primarily with the lonely settlements ashore, and not fishermen. *Le Livre du Marin* published a *journal marin* called *Au Large*, and an annual, *Le Livre du Marin*. Books were issued free to fee-paying members. The fee was set at a minimum of Fr 1.00 a year; benefactors underwrote the rest of the cost.

The influence of the SOM and the AA on Catholic maritime missions cannot be over-estimated. Together with a number of independently organized *abris* in Brittany,⁶³ they provided the bulk of the French Catholic work amongst mariners which culminated in the AMIC. These organizations also inspired Peter Anson, usually but wrongly credited with the foundation of the Apostleship of the Sea in the early 1920s, and showed him what a sea apostolate might be. Yet the SOM developed from two English ministries to mariners, the MDSF and the OSP. But did Fr Goldie prompt the work of the SOM, as implied by Mrs. Fraser? Or was it solely ascribable to the French, as Anson, and to a lesser extent Dalbard, imply? A case has been made for Bernard Bailly independently envisaging a French equivalent to the MDSF, rather than through direct communication with Goldie. No direct evidence connects the two at present, though the Grosjean link is suggestive. However, the involvement of the AA is likely to have come about, not just because of Bailly's close links with them, nor because of the AA's status as shipowners, but because of

his reading of the Grosjean article in *Études*, which brought to his attention both the MDSF and Charles Hopkins's OSP and its Seamen's Friendly Society, a fortunate juxtaposition. Concerned to do something for French fishermen, Bailly understood how something could be done, given the very peculiar relations between the Church and the French state. The SOM was precisely the kind of hybrid which might be expected to result from such a cross-breeding — work among fishermen afloat (= MDSF) staffed by a religious order (= OSP). The similarity extends to the choice of a neutral name, *Œuvres* on the one hand, OSP's Seamen's Friendly Society on the other, allowing the work to appear distanced from the religious order with which it was closely associated. The credit for the idea of French work among fishermen, as well as much of its achievement, must go to Bailly.

Notes

¹This paper abbreviates material first used in R. W. H. Miller, "Ship of Peter" (M.Phil. thesis, University of Plymouth 1995). Details of other missions to fishers can be found in Stephen Friend, "The Rise and Development of Christian Missions Amongst British Fishing Communities during the 19th Century" (M.Phil. thesis, University of Leeds 1994). I am grateful to the Augustinians of the Assumption for access to their archives in Rome. Reference numbers in brackets (e.g., SF 70) refer to material from these archives.

²*Hastings and St. Leonards News*, 1 September 1893. For information on Charles Hopkins and the OSP, see Robert Miller, "Charles Plomer Hopkins and the Seamen's Union, with particular reference to the 1911 Strike" (MA thesis, University of Warwick 1992).

³*Études* (Paris) February 1894.

⁴*Études*, February 1895.

⁵J. Dalbard, "La Société Œuvres de Mer de 1894 à 1939," *Annales* (Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie, St-Malo 1991), 215 and n. 7. Jacky Messaien, *Mission de la Mer* (Dunkirk 1981), 45ff.

⁶Guy Chapman, *The Third Republic* (London 1962), 148.

⁷*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1907. The AA originated in 1847 at the College of the Assumption, Nîmes, in 1843, founded by the Rev. Emmanuel d'Alzon, Vicar General of Nîmes. Its first brethren were professed in 1850.

⁸See, for example, D. W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France* (London 1943), 359ff.

⁹Fisheries Exhibition Literature, 14 vols (1884). Handbooks issued in connection with the Great International Fisheries Exhibition, 6 vols (1883).

¹⁰Dalbard, "Société Œuvres de Mer," 212f. Ronald Rompkey, ed., *Terre-Neuve: Anthologie des Voyageurs français, 1814-1914* (Rennes 2004), 148ff.

¹¹The AA's shipowning activities came about through its organization of pilgrimages.

¹²AA, *Lettres à la Dispersion*, passim.

¹³Friend, "Christian Missions Amongst British Fishing Communities," passim.

¹⁴W. T. Grenfell, *A Labrador Doctor* (London 1931), 79f, 136ff.

¹⁵G.G. Allen, "Hospital Church Ship *De Hoop*," *Anglican Sphere* (St. Mary's Church, Rotterdam), May 1974. Ronald Rompkey, *Grenfell of Labrador* (Toronto 1991), 77ff, 60ff. Neither Rompkey nor Grenfell mention the AA.

¹⁶Dalbard, "Société Œuvres de Mer," 218.

¹⁷*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 129, 1925, 421.

¹⁸Anon, "Les Œuvres de Mer," *Questions Actuelles* 27.5 (Paris 1895), 130ff. *Rapport Anonyme s.d. sur les Œuvres de Mer* (1899?) (SE 294). Société des Œuvres de Mer, 1906, (SF 199), 8: "Ils adoptèrent les plans proposés par M. Bernard Bailly ... après une étude approfondie des sociétés missionnaires anglaises ..."

¹⁹For an obituary of Bailly, see "Nos Amis Defunts," in *L'Assomption et ses Œuvres* (Paris 1921), 14.

²⁰R.W.H. Miller, "Ship of Peter," 65ff.

²¹G. Zananiri OP, "Mer (Apostolat de la)," in *Catholicism*, VIII (Paris 1979). S. Friend, "Social and Spiritual Work amongst Fishing Communities," in David J. Starkey et al., *England's Sea Fisheries* (London 2000), 138 ff.

²²AA Archive, *Écrits Divers du Père Vincent de Paul Bailly*, VI, 213f (B 142).

²³*L'Assomption et ses Œuvres* (Paris 1921), 14.

²⁴*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 129, 1925, 421.

²⁵*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 31 March 1925, 454. "Pouvoirs concédés par Rome aux aumôniers," April 1895 (SF 1); *L'Assomption et ses Œuvres* (Paris 1914), 743, 753 (D 27).

²⁶*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 129, 1925, 423; no. 132, 1925, 445ff. Société des Œuvres de Mer, 1906, 22 (SF 199).

²⁷*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 129, 1925, 423.

²⁸*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 1925, 449f.

²⁹AA Archive, Société des Œuvres de Mer, 1906 (SF 199).

³⁰AA Archive; see for example Dr. Valence, *Les Pêcheurs de la mer Nord* (Paris 1892) (SG 1); M. le Dr. Bonaffy, *Secours aux marins des Grandes Pêches* (Toulouse 1898) (SG 2).

³¹The "paper doctor" was the list of numbered medicines for correspondingly numbered ailments to enable rudimentary treatment in the absence of a doctor.

³²*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 130, 1925, 429ff.

³³*Ibid.*, 432ff.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 433f.

³⁵AA Archive, Bernard Bailly to Père Yves Hamon, 13 August 1896 (FK 404); Père Picard to the Pope, 8 May 1895 (SF 1).

³⁶AA Archive, Picard to the Pope, 8 May 1895 (SF 1).

³⁷"Les Œuvres de Mer: Origines," in *L'Assomption et ses Œuvres* (Paris 1914) (D 27), 743-53. *Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 127, 1925, 408 n. 1.

³⁸AA Archive, Hamon to Picard, 15 April 1895 (SD 268).

³⁹AA Archive, Picard to Pope, 8 April 1895, and attached reply (SF 1). Propaganda to Tiberi, 16 September 1896 (SF 5).

⁴⁰*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 1925, 453.

⁴¹*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 127, 1925, 408.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 454.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 455.

⁴⁴AA Archive, D'Auvigny to Picard, 15 July 1902 (SE 21).

⁴⁵Dalbard, "Société Œuvres de Mer," 229.

⁴⁶*Acta Sancta Sedis*, Rome, 1899-1900, XXXII, 760.

⁴⁷AA Archive, Bailly to Picard, 16 January 1902 (SE 31).

⁴⁸*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 1925, 455.

⁴⁹*Harbour Head* (London 1945), 126, and *Church and the Sailor* (London 1949), 80-1. Anson was an early chronicler of maritime missiology. Succeeding authors have depended heavily upon his work, which is not always reliable and usually unsourced. See, for example, Kevin Sinclair Oubré, "The Apostolatus Maris: Its Structural Development Including its 1997 Reorganization" (LCL thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 1998).

⁵⁰For an example of the exercise of the Spiritual Director's authority (1906?), see AA Archive, Père Bernard to Père Emmanuel Bailly (SF 33).

⁵¹AA Archive, Legasse to Adm. de la Jaille, 31 July 1908 (SF 70).

⁵²AA Archive, Bailly to Propaganda, 30 January 1910 (SF 35).

⁵³AA Archive, Legasse to Emmanuel Bailly, 15 April 1911 (SF 71).

⁵⁴Dalbard, "Société Œuvres de Mer," 230.

⁵⁵*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 1925, 456.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 457-8. Dalbard, "Société Œuvres de Mer," 238ff.

⁵⁷*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 132, 457.

⁵⁸*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 16, 1922, 115. Compare details of the Sailors' Children's Society and Sailors' Orphan Girls Episcopal School, in Robert Miller, *From Shore to Shore* (privately published, Nailsworth, Glos 1989), chapter 5, Appendix ii.

⁵⁹AA Archive, *Bulletins de l'Œuvres des Orphelins de la Mer*, Paris 1901 and 1906 (SG 7, SG 8).

⁶⁰Apostleship of the Sea Report 1926-7 (a copy is filed as RI 18, Archives of the Archdiocese of Glasgow).

⁶¹*Lettre à la Dispersion*, no. 116, 1922, 115.

⁶²Grenfell, *Labrador Doctor*, 79ff, 136ff.

⁶³The English Apostleship of the Sea archive has a leaflet in English, *The Breton Fishermen's Homes*, which illustrates ten *abris* round a central text. It says that the organization started in 1898, and in 1918 (?) had eleven *abris* receiving 400,000 visits a year. In the intervening 20 years it had distributed or supplied 31,000 kilograms of eucalyptus tea, 122,000 sheets of notepaper with temperance headings, 13,000 nights' accommodation, and 56,000 instances of medical aid. The source of this leaflet is not known.