Introduction

I possess only a small number of books on the Christian Church and merchant seafarers, for few have written on the subject. Most of these touch on the significance of the call of the first disciples, among them fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, calling them sea apostles; a curious description, unless also the call of Levi indicates an apostolate to the fiscal sector, or Judas Iscariot to nationalist political groups. It overlooks that those fishermen left their nets, left their boats, and were seldom seen on that freshwater lake again. The Gospels offer no evidence of a dedicated ministry to seafarers; the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles tell us only that the Gospel message was delivered, even by Paul (his intervention when shipwreck threatened no evidence of a sea apostolate but rather a requirement of the Theodosian Code of all on board when faced with danger), to all and sundry rather than specifically to those earning their living on the sea. This book will show that the concept of a mission to seamen is a relatively late one.

Containerization of the shipping industry and the consequent removal of ever larger ships from older dock areas to places allowing their speedy discharge has rendered shipping almost invisible. Many traditional buildings, seamen's clubs among them, have disappeared in consequence. The days, often weeks, once spent in port by ships unloading, have been replaced by hours in all but the smallest ports; today it is usual to be in port only for the twelve hours between tides, rendering the large residential missions redundant. Most Christian maritime activity has become as invisible as the shipping it serves, though the various churches continue to work diligently for the welfare of seafarers, with highly mobile chaplains and lay ship visitors. The Church, in its various manifestations from earliest times has been involved to a greater or lesser extent in the lives of those who travel by sea, and continues to be so.

The Structure of the book

It is difficult to write about seafarers and the Church in any general sense. Among such a vast and disparate crowd of individuals the number of those who are or were Christians cannot be known. If there is any trend for the reader to notice in this book, it is that pre Reformation the Christian seafarer (I generalise) is perceived as any other member of the Church. There was not the special provision of our own time. Any shipboard chaplaincies were provided more for the crusaders, pilgrims or sponsoring merchants on

board, while provisions in port (e.g. *maisons dieu*, churches, lights) were there largely to promote trade by those in whose interest it lay that their ports be used rather than for the benefit of the sailor. After the upheaval of the Reformation, it took three centuries, forming here a period of transition between the two sections of the book, for things to settle down sufficiently for the Church to respond to the seafarer, by the nineteenth century viewing him rather as someone for whom things are done. In every chapter the perceptive reader will want to consider whether the Gospel imperative or the economic imperative is shaping the ministry being described.

The book's emphasis on Great Britain is partly due to access to sources. The nineteenth-century societies dedicated to serving the seafarer coincided with the rise of the British Empire, with London at its heart, and the dominance of the British merchant fleet. There was a mushrooming of societies intended to spread the Gospel, a quick glance at an appropriate encyclopedia revealing for the Church of England alone the Church Missionary Society (1799), Church Mission to the Jews (1809), Intercontinental Church Society (1824), South American Missionary Society (1844), Melanesian Mission (1848), Universities' Mission to Central Africa (1857), to which may be added more for other denominations, their titles indicative of the spread of red across the globe. As the empire spread, so did the British merchant fleet. After the Napoleonic wars, an evangelical revival which had begun in the Royal Navy spilled over into the Merchant Navy. The combination of missionary fervour and revival in the Fleet will be considered for, when peace came, many officers, ashore on half pay, became involved in some of these societies. The post-war effect was felt beyond Britain. The French Church experienced a revival later in the century, not only ashore; many active religious orders were founded, and one, the Augustinians of the Assumption, developed a particular ministry among deep sea fishermen.

The number of footnotes will not be to everyone's taste, but sourcing is important; for those who find them insufficient, I indicate where more can be found. In some chapters named Minutes or contemporary newspaper reports obviate the need for them. Much of the nineteenth-century history survives only in Minutes; tedious reading occasionally spiced with major disagreements. One problem with Peter Anson's work on the sea apostolate was his vagueness about his sources. My footnotes are most abundant in chapters where earlier writers have generalised, been mistaken, or written little. In 1972 Anson asked me to shorten a version of what was intended to be his *Church Maritime*. Additionally I supplied missing material and added sources where I could trace them. He was not pleased with the result and decided to withdraw the book. A couple of decades later I saw in what must have been its final, and much longer, version an acknowledgment of my help, though it seems to have had little effect. In a very real sense, this present book, long in gestation, is a result of what I tried to do to improve his *Church Maritime*. My point about sourcing renders necessary careful thought about a bibliography. A book like this depends on a vast amount of research. I have limited the bibliography to works mentioned in the text in an attempt to preserve a small corner of a distant rain forest; fuller references can be found in the theses listed.

Inclusions and exclusions

My emphasis is on periods and societies which have received little attention; for examples, the Early Church, the beginnings of the modern Catholic sea apostolate, and Charles Hopkins.[1] Hopkins's extraordinary ministry justifies the space allotted him, compared with that given others, Anson excepted, and, when added to the other Anglican chapters, helps balance the Catholic ones. Hopkins has to be seen in the light of the legislation associated with the name of Samuel Plimsoll MP. Remembered as a philanthropist, Plimsoll, a committed member of a Congregational church, was supported in his parliamentary campaigns across the denominations, though seldom mentioned by seamen's missionary societies (SAWCM excepted). His work introduces chapter fourteen.

The name of Peter Anson appears regularly in this book. Little regarded by historians, he was nevertheless the first significant maritime missiologist, probably invented the term, and with the publication of his *Church and the Sailor* paved the way for others to follow. As most who write about the Church and the seafarer refer to Anson's work in establishing the modern Catholic sea apostolate, sometimes calling him its founder, and quarry his book for the early history of the work of the Church among seafarers generally, a serious examination of Anson is justified.[2]

Some omissions reflect an absence of source material. Information for some countries, churches or centuries is hard to find, if it exists at all. The debt to nineteenth-century Methodism needs the attention of someone familiar with Methodist Church history. Kverndal offers some information, but more, surely, remains to be found.[3] The Salvation Army's work among seamen, apart from its Salvation Navy, also deserves more attention; my research has failed to reveal more than scattered records. Even The Missions to Seamen (now The Mission to Seafarers), which occurs in several chapters here, awaits a serious study based on primary documents.

The lack of oriental-rite Christians in the text in modern times is a matter for concern. Relevant sources remain to be found. Orthodoxy reveals a denominational neglect of seafarers, except in the earliest centuries of the Church. The principle that where the ships are, there are the crews, suggests that the size of the nineteenth-century British merchant fleet militated against the presence of many Orthodox at sea, a situation which ought to have changed with the enormous investment in subsequent shipping by Greek families.[4] My only information follows a hint from Anson and can be dealt with briefly here. A room was opened as a 'Greek Church' on Patrick Street, in Cardiff, on 19 December 1873, by The Rev G. Hatterley (*sic*) 'of Wolverhampton'. The *Cardiff Times* reported the next day that the effect of his sermon and subsequent appeal had not been helped by its

1 R.W.H. Miller, *Priest in Deep Water*, 2010.
2 R.W.H. Miller, *Ship of Peter*, unpublished MPhil thesis.
3 Roald Kverndal, *George Charles Smith of Penzance*, 2012, 50ff.
4 Gelina Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-Owned Shipping*.

delivery in English 'while with two or three exceptions, the congregation consisted of Greek sailors who scarcely understood a word'. A dinner at the Windsor Hotel attended by 'a number of Greek residents and captains', followed, though the *Cardiff Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* reported a lack of Greek ships in port. He appeared again on the 5th March 1877, in the *Bristol Daily Post* as The Rev. S. G. Hatherley (correctly), 'senior priest of the Patriarchal Œcumenical Throne of Constantinople . . . a Bristolian by birth', opening a room in Bristol, furnished with the assistance of the captain and crew of the brig *Thessalia*, 'for Greek sailors frequenting the port'. The paper, reporting a ritual more elaborate than 'that of the Roman Church', was otherwise short on detail.[1]

Those who fail to notice that my subject is the merchant seafarer will point to the apparent neglect of the Royal Navy and the standing navies of other nations. Merchant fleets throughout history have outnumbered these other navies; indeed, have often been recruited in times of need to supplement their numbers. To write about the standing navies would take me far from the merchant fleets. A couple of books which deal with religion and the British Navy are those of Taylor and Blake.[2] I notice work among these navies only as it impinges directly on the ministry to mercantile fleets.

Finding the Seafarer

In 1973 Anson wrote to me that 'you never manage to convey the point of view of the average seaman, but view him from a distance and on dry land'. Anson's point was that much of my text was about what the Church was doing for the seafarer, with hardly a whiff of sea air about it. I would argue that to refer to the 'average seaman' is unhelpful, as no such a being exists. Anson, in his final book (untitled, unpublished, and held in Rome in typescript) concluded its introduction by dismissing 'well-meaning landlubbers, who have no personal experience of seafaring life or maritime psychology'. His book *Harbour Head* (145ff) tells of his own deep-sea voyages in the 1920s, his friendships with the crews of the liners on which he travelled, and his trips with the crews of fishing vessels round the British coast, winning their confidence through the medium of his paint brush; experiences qualifying him in ways which those of us who have only sat listening to seafarers in their joys or troubles have to guess. Yet repeatedly in that final typescript he refers to the 'simple sailor' with all the assumptions of those who know little about the sea. Sailors come in great variety, often with a wisdom acquired through travel and the need to work and live, voyage after voyage, in proximity to others not of their choosing; few can be described as 'simple'.

1 According to Anson, Stephen Georgeson Hatherley was ordained in Constantinople c 1870, and later appointed a Proto-Presbyter of the Patriarchal Œcumenical Throne of Constantinople. The British Library Catalogue lists him as author of a number of books, some on Orthodox subjects.

2. Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains* Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy 1775-1815*.

Finding his religion

As Professor Lewis Fischer, a distinguished maritime economic historian of our own time, has written, 'maritime history is more than the study of ships, sailors and navies but rather a central part of understanding human experience'.[1] Although religious belief is probably the most distinctive part of human experience, it is difficult to find a maritime historian who has given the religious life of the seafarer much attention. The religious life of any traveller, beyond pilgrim or crusader, remains largely unstudied; the difference between others who travel and the sailor is that the latter spends long periods as part of a total community whereas those others, medieval travellers overland or today's passengers on train or plane, do not. The passenger is a relatively free agent, while the sailor is bound to the ship and its master, obliged to work for the benefit of the cargo (passengers are 'human cargo') and lacking the free disposal of his time. Few on a modern cruise ship, apart from the members of the ship's company, know where the crew is and what it is doing. Although crew and passengers were in closer proximity in other periods, large gaps in our knowledge remain for all periods, especially about the sailor's religious beliefs and practice.

The evanescence of faith and practice makes it difficult to fill those large gaps.

> The common pairing of the words 'faith' and 'practice' shows that we find it useful to anchor the ephemeral and personal 'faith' in the more tangible and universal 'practice' when we speak of religion. Unfortunately we cannot measure anyone's religious faith, divorced from symbols and rituals, unless we have access to private thoughts expressed in visual art, in speech, or in writing.[2]

Although most of today's seafarers can write, indeed have a choice of media by which to communicate about their lives, contemporary students of maritime faith and practice find it very difficult to establish how such things are manifested. I cite Alain Cabantous's confirmation of this problem for the 17th-19th centuries in chapter six.[3] When few could write, and what was written has had many centuries in which to perish, the difficulty is compounded. This may explain why the religion of the seafarer is so often ignored.

A second explanation lies in the difficulty of writing about something essentially abstract and highly personal, at least on the experiential level. That is not to say of medieval man, for example, that his religion was the personal preference which religion has become in our own time; the experience would be personal, but the practice corporate, perhaps prescribed by the state or proscribed by the Church. It might be personal in the sense in which the *Hafgerdinga Lay* describes a crew member of a Viking ship as the sole Christian on board.[4] It would be corporate in the sense in which King Olaf required his subjects to adopt the new faith, Christianity. I shall

1 Reviewing Frank Broeze's Island Nation in MM, vol 85(3), August 1999, 355.
2 Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo*, 96.
3 *Les citoyens du large*, 12.
4 Magnus Magnusson, *Viking Expansion Westwards* 112. *Landnámabók*, 49f. Gwyn Jones (trans), *The Norse Atlantic Saga*, 189.

suggest in the text that following the Reformation it became possible to find in crews lone Christians where previously Christianity had been shared.

> Lynn White Jnr wrote:
> professional historians have been taught to read the words of the documents with critical care; yet the sociology of knowledge often involves the study of activities, and of relationships . . . that are so taken for granted, so axiomatic, that they largely elude expression in writing.[1]

That there was nothing remarkable about his religious practice may constitute a third explanation why there should be so little recorded of the religious life of the seafarer. It is seldom wise to argue from silence but here it may be telling us something. My chapter on the medieval seafarer and the saints, for example, adduces from remaining evidence that in this the seafarer was in the mainstream of popular belief.

Technical words

Most subjects have their own language. There are some technical words involved in studying Church work among seafarers. Catholics tend to refer to an *apostolate*. It is derived from the Greek word for 'send', the Latin equivalent giving the words *mission* and *missiology* (the study of mission). The Greek derivation has the more specific connotation of association with the Apostles (the first to be sent) and a church which is apostolic, that is, obedient to Jesus's command to 'go out into all the world to proclaim the Good News' (Mtt 18:19), while the word *mission* has come to have secular uses, as in space missions, or the mission statements of industry. Jesus's command is known as the dominical (of the Lord) command and is binding on all Christians. The sea apostolate is thus a convenient way of referring to those who are active as Christians among seafarers. For the Catholic Church, seafarers comprise 'all those who, by the exercise of the art of sailing or fishing . . . spend their lives continually on ships, and therefore can avail themselves but rarely and with difficulty in the normal care of the Parish Priest . . . ' (*Opus Apostolatus Maris: Leges §2,* Vatican, 1957), a definition with which others are unlikely to quibble.

Protestant and nonconformist are words often used carelessly. I think it is fair to distinguish churches of the Reformation as protestant. Nonconformists are those who do not conform to the State religion, and thus include Catholics, at least in what is now the United Kingdom. Some may object to Roman Catholics being referred to simply as Catholics. As one for much of his life a member of the Church of England I understand why many prefer to describe even users of oriental rites who are in communion with Rome along with users of the Roman Rite generally as Roman Catholics. I prefer to refer to them as Catholics without differentiation as more accurate and for economy of ink. References to members of the Church of England distinguish between Tractarians, ritualists, Anglo-Catholics and evangelicals, according to the period and the person.

1 *Mediaeval Religion and Technology*, 318.

Sailor, seaman, and mariner are used interchangeably of those working on ships; 'seafarer' may include others at sea. Apart from prostitutes servicing the needs of Crusaders *en route*, an interesting category of supernumerary but undoubtedly at sea, until the arrival in the nineteenth century of large passenger ships, their staffs including stewardesses and similar, females as crew members are difficult to find. Where oars are the driving force, I refer to oarsmen. For those on board but not bound to the ship, using it as a conveyance, the terms traveller, passenger or pilgrim are used as appropriate. The crews of more recent times include men and women, something reflected in the names of today's societies, now altered to avoid being gender-specific.

I hope this book will prompt others to correct what I have written, and add to it. Some of the figures here are inspirational, others not. I couple with the former some of the wonderful chaplains in the ministry to seamen with whom it has been my privilege to work, one having begun his ministry in 1917 as a Church Army officer visiting sailing ships in Lerwick; we are all links in the chain.

God has Spoken by His Prophets[1]

God has spoken by the prophets,
Spoken the unchanging Word;
Each from age to age proclaiming
God the One, the righteous Lord!
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
One firm anchor holding fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first and God the last.

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