

YOUNG CHRISTIAN SEAFARERS

THE *Jeunesse Maritime Chrétienne* is a mass movement to reconquer the maritime world for Christ. It was at the Sea Apostolate Congress at Boulogne-sur-Mer, held in September 1929, that the first suggestion of forming a maritime section of the *Jocistes* was made by Père Lebret, O.P. This Dominican, who must be given the credit for launching the J.M.C., was formerly a lieutenant in the French navy. In collaboration with the Abbé G. Havard of Saint-Malo he drew up provisional rules. Cardinal Charost, Archbishop of Rennes, gave them a cordial blessing, and the new *oeuvre* was established in his diocese. The first group of Young Christian Seafarers to be formed was on the Ile-de-Sein, a small island off Finisterre, mostly inhabited by fisher folk. In January 1930 the first issue of *Jeunesse Maritime* was published. For the past seventeen years this monthly magazine has been the official mouthpiece of the J.M.C. During the next few months other groups were set up in many maritime parishes of Brittany, Normandy, the Côtes-de-Nord, and elsewhere in France. The movement spread rapidly. A large body of members of the J.M.C. took part in the French National Pilgrimage at Lourdes in August 1930. In November more than three hundred young seamen made a pilgrimage to Sainte-Anne-d'Auray. Père Lebret, having visited practically every seaport and fishing centre in France, reported on the investigations at the *Apostolat Maritime* Congress held at Saint-Brieux in September, 1931.

He maintained that ignorance—general and religious—was the root cause of the material, moral, and spiritual troubles among seafarers. They were ignorant of their Faith, and almost equally ignorant of their profession. To deal with this situation the only remedy was to form an elite capable of directing the mass and to give them a security in their material, moral and religious life. In an article which he published in *La Nouvelle Revue des Jeunes* (October 15, 1932) Père Lebret made clear that it is no easy matter to evangelise the maritime world, for it includes many classes of seafarers. All that they have in common is that they spend the greater part of their lives outside the influence of home or parochial life. He stated that there were about 20,000 fisher lads, 10,000 to 15,000 young seamen in the mercantile marine, and about 35,000 to 40,000 *cols bleus* in the navy. This made a total of approximately 75,000 youths from coastal parishes and from the inland parts of France who were growing up without any organised effort to make them practising Catholics or to train them in their moral and pro-

fessional duties. In 1931 there were only seven chaplains in the French *marine militaire*, and no more than five priests working (exclusively for seamen) in seaports. This meant that there was one priest for every 5,000 young seafarers.

Many of the French bishops and clergy felt that nothing could be done to deal with this state of affairs. But the Abbé Havard and Père Lebret were undaunted. They found their inspiration in Catholic Action as defined by Rome—lay activity directed by priests. They visualised the J.M.C. as Catholic Action adapted to the maritime world, in particular the maritime world of France.

The objects of the J.M.C. are: the religious education of young seafarers; Catholic Action in the maritime world; propaganda for Christian social organisation among seamen of all types. Its membership consists of boys who intend to earn their living by the sea; students in nautical schools and colleges, and all seamen up to the age of twenty-five. The motto is: *Joyeux, loyal, pur, conquérant*. The spirit of the organisation is summed up as follows: 'The young Christian seafarer (1) loves his job; (2) does his duty; (3) serves his mates; (4) brings them to Christ'.

The J.M.C. functions by means of groups, formed in parishes, nautical schools, and on board larger ships. There are diocesan federations of such groups, the whole organisation being directed from the Secretariate-Generale (12 rue Duguay-Trouin, Paris, VIe). This is the headquarters of the Chaplain-General, Père Butel, S.J., who succeeded Père Lebret a few years ago.

The formation of young seafarers embraces religious, social and professional subjects. The means adopted are study-circles, retreats, recollection-days, pilgrimages, and the publication of books, pamphlets, and periodicals. Three magazines are issued monthly: *Jeunesse Maritime* is intended for all types of readers. It contains bright and breezy articles on religion, hygiene, sport, nautical matters, and the cinema. The illustrations are always a special feature. The sections dealing with economic problems of the fishing industry or the mercantile marine are written by specialists and are most informative. *En Route* is a more serious publication intended for *militants*, i.e. the inner circle of the J.M.C. *Pousse au Large* is another type of monthly, edited for boys.

Mention should be made of several of the books issued by the J.M.C., above all the *Livre de Prières du Marin*, rightly described by Cardinal Roques, Archbishop of Rennes, who contributes a preface, as *le véritable 'paroissien' des gens de mer*. In these 270 pages are to be found comprehensive instructions on prayer. There are methods of carrying out a dialogue Mass and a special form of Sung

Mass for seafarers—this latter with musical notation. A dramatic touch is given by the rubrics that a model ship, a net, a basket of fish, and an anchor should be carried up to the altar at the Offertory! This prayer-book is compiled on definite liturgical lines, and includes both Vespers and Compline, also the Epistles and Gospels for all Sundays and chief feasts. There are liturgical blessings of the sea and ships, likewise a very complete collection of popular *cantiques*, familiar to almost every French sailor or fisherman. The music for most of these is given.

Le Christ et les Marins consists of devotional studies on our Lord's dealings with his fishermen apostles, with other chapters devoted to the references to the sea and ships in the *Acts of the Apostles*. As in most J.M.C. publications questions on each section are given. *Sois fier de ton Métier!* as the title indicates, is a booklet which aims at making every seafarer proud of his job. *La Sainte Eglise Notre Mère* deals with not only the Catholic Church but also with schismatic and heretical Christian bodies. Thus the 'three branches' of Anglicanism are explained, and the seaman is warned that *une messe anglicane n'est pas une vraie messe*. Two small booklets cover the J.M.C. organisation among young seafarers in the mercantile marine and the fishing fleets.

Guidance for the training of *militants* and *entraîneurs* can be found in another pamphlet entitled, *Pour bâtir la J.M.C.* These young seamen are given lists of books on every sort of subject, including theology, liturgy, venereal diseases, navigation, maritime economics, and the co-operative movement. If they manage to find time to read such serious literature they must be fully equipped to argue with the most intelligent of their Communist or ante-clerical shipmates.

Month by month one can follow the advance of the J.M.C. movement in its various periodicals. One realises that France, more than any other nation, has got down to the roots—or should one not say the keel—of the Sea Apostolate by concentrating on the training of seamen to be apostles of seamen, rather than by providing them with clubs and institutes, however necessary these may be as centres. Conditions in this country are utterly different, and it would be impossible to build up a vast organisation on the lines of the J.M.C. because Catholics are only a small minority both in the mercantile marine and the Royal Navy, even less among the crews of our fishing fleet. On the other hand there is plenty of scope for forming groups of Young Christian Seafarers in Ireland, indeed a crying need for them, because so many Irish lads, with the sea in their blood, are unable to answer this call except by joining the British mer-

cantile marine or the Royal Navy. Again, similar groups could be created in connection with the Apostleship of the Sea Clubs in English and Welsh ports. In some ports, notably Liverpool, the chaplains have already started training groups of 'ship's leaders', i.e., seafaring promoters of *Apostolatus Maris*.

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O B I T E R

THE ACCUMULATION of Catholic papers that awaits one after only a fortnight's absence from home makes one sympathise with the aims of the *Centre d'Informations Catholiques* (163 Boulevard Malesherbes, Paris 17e), 'an information agency for the Catholic press' started last year 'to put at the disposal of French and foreign journals full information on the life and Catholic activity of the whole world'. C.I.C. publishes excellent press summaries, provides all the facilities of an up-to-date agency, and issues each week *La Vie Catholique Illustrée* (7 francs), a brilliantly-edited paper which need fear no technical comparison with *Time* or *Picture Post*.

From time to time suggestions are made as to the possibility of starting a Catholic newspaper in this country. Apart from the present newsprint difficulties, such a proposal would probably need not much less than a million pounds to start it. A more practicable—and probably more useful—plan would be the establishment of a Catholic news-agency on the lines of C.I.C. The diversity and apparent independence of Catholic activities in this country continually baffle the foreign enquirer, and we mumble an explanation in terms of 'the English genius for improvisation'. If the existing English Catholic papers and the more important organisations could agree to back a central agency, the aims of a newspaper might be secured at a fraction of the cost of a mammoth daily. But it is a highly professional business, and demands a serious recognition of the need of an accurate and prompt commentary on the action of the Church in the world. In the meantime Catholic journalists may find in C.I.C. a hope for the future.

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TWICE IN A GENERATION has the University of Louvain suffered the loss of its Library. A recently-published account of the University during the the Second World War by Professor Lousse (English translation by Fr T. Crowley, O.F.M.) gives a moving account of the fire of 1940, and leaves little room for doubt that the destruction of