

FROM ASCESIS TO KENOSIS: THE EVOLUTION IN MARIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE "UNKNOWN AND HIDDEN"

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“When God speaks to a soul He says much in few words. For instance, that phrase: *Unknown and hidden in the world.*”¹

There is a wealth of meaning in that phrase, a richness for each Marist to tap. We have all reflected on these words, puzzled over them, because in a sense our very identity as Marists depends on our grasp of them. Our whole mission –and our way of carrying it out– are summed up in these few words. Our whole spirituality is hidden in them too. As the 1987 Constitutions say: “Marists seek inspiration in the traditional phrase, ‘hidden and unknown in the world.’ For Jean-Claude Colin it best captured, in the light of his spiritual and pastoral experience, Mary’s presence in the Church.” (n.22)

There has been quite an evolution in our understanding of the *ignoti et occulti*. For nearly a hundred years after the generalate of Fr Colin it was understood as espousing the hidden life. It was linked primarily with the Marist spirit as expressed in nn.49 and 50 of the 1872 Constitutions, but it was interpreted as essentially something private and personal, guiding each Marist in the way he should live his religious life. Nazareth was the model: Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the hidden years of Nazareth were the ideal. The hidden life was an ascetical life –an *ascesis*– marked by the virtues of humility, simplicity, poverty and obedience which were seen as the virtues most characteristic of Mary. Many Marists alive today probably remember being formed according to this understanding of the *unknown and hidden*.

Then in 1958 Jean Coste published in the *Acta Societatis Mariae*² his important study of the *ignoti et occulti*. This opened up a whole new vista for us by showing that in the mind of Fr Colin in his prime the *ignoti et occulti* was essentially about our mission. Rather than limiting us in our ministry to quiet hidden apostolates, it showed that our mission was universal in scope and it gave us a powerful key to open the door to any apostolate. The *unknown and hidden* indicated an effective way of ministering peculiarly suited to the temper of our times.

The General Chapter of 1985 went a step further. In the Constitutions which the Chapter wrote and approved, we find not only Fr Colin’s legacy giving us Mary as our inspiration through her hidden apostolate in the newborn Church, but we also see that the *unknown and hidden* has profound christological implications as well.

Most recently, in a further reflection by Coste,³ we see that the *unknown and hidden* is related to the presence of the hidden God in our world. Moreover Coste shows that in Colin’s most mature thought it encapsulates our whole spirit and mission. It unifies all the elements listed in the classic exposition of our spirit in nn.49 & 50 of the 1872 Constitutions. It sums up all of Fr Colin’s spiritual teaching. It is his final word of wisdom to us.

The Early Tradition: the Dominance of Nazareth

Psychologically and spiritually the nine years following his resignation as superior general seem to have been a difficult time for Fr Colin. The man of action who had led and guided the infant Society through 18 years of growth and expansion was suddenly reduced to inactivity. Even though he himself had sought to retire, and had insisted on it, nevertheless his letting go of the reins required a bigger readjustment than he may have anticipated. He felt hurt that not even his opinion was sought on matters vital for the well-being of the Society, such as the drafting of the Rule. Moreover, he disapproved of some of the decisions made by Fr Favre, but not being privy to the discussions that led to those decisions, and thus not being aware of all the facts, he felt frustrated and powerless to intervene.⁴

But despite the negative feelings he undoubtedly experienced, a more positive resolve became firm in his mind. Already while he was still superior general, he had become deeply concerned that the Society should remain true to the original inspiration. He feared that the spirit that had animated the pioneer Marists in their earliest endeavours was being lost, and he saw himself as the one who could call it back to the primitive spirit.⁵

It was in these years that the theme of Nazareth became more and more important to him. In the first year after his retirement when his mind was preoccupied with thoughts of a eucharistic foundation at La Neyliere, Nazareth naturally came to mind. But even after he had had to abandon the idea of the eucharistic house of prayer in 1855,⁶ Nazareth still remained important as the symbol of the primitive spirit of the Society.

These years of withdrawal from the mainstream of the Society gradually came to an end in 1863. In August of that year Fr Dupont had a (now) famous interview with Fr Colin, in which the Founder let forth some of the anger and hurt that had been building up inside him in a violent tirade against Fr Favre's Rule.⁷ Some Marists were concerned at what appeared to be a discrepancy between the Founder's ideas on the Rule and those of the second superior general. Eventually they brought the issue to the notice of Fr Favre and the whole matter was aired at the general chapter of 1866. At that chapter Fr Colin was again commissioned to write the definitive Rule for the Society. However, since he was now a man well into his 70's with fading eyesight and indifferent health, he was promised the help of several able young Marists to act as secretaries and assistants in the task.

The most notable of these assistants were Jean Jeantin and Georges David. They were loyal and devoted to Fr Colin and were the ones who did most to ensure that his final spiritual legacy was passed on to later generations of Marists. Fr Jeantin's six volume biography of Fr Colin was the principal written source of information on the thought and spirit of the Founder for Marists till the middle of the twentieth century. But these men were more than mere secretaries, faithfully taking dictation from the Founder. They exercised a great influence on the Constitutions which were eventually approved in 1872. Paragraphs were drafted by them in Latin, then amended or approved by the Founder. They worked closely with Fr Colin in the formulation of his ideas, often debating with him the suitability of including this or that primitive idea. He trusted and valued their judgement and he appreciated their opinions, realising that they were in touch with the younger generation of Marists, many of whom he did not even know.⁸

However, while generously acknowledging the goodness and intelligence of Jeantin and the tremendous debt the Society owes to him for his part in faithfully handing on the traditions received from the Founder, Coste has a word of criticism for the way he interpreted Fr Colin's thought on the *ignoti et occulti* – an interpretation which was not in fact well founded but which nevertheless has had great influence on the way subsequent generations of Marists have understood this precious phrase.

When Fr Colin said: "When God speaks to a soul He says much in few words. For instance, that phrase: Unknown and hidden in the world," he was replying to a question from David concerning whether or not he had received a special inspiration when writing the early (Cerdon) rule. Coste explains what then happened.

Later, quoting this sentence in his biography of Fr Colin, Fr Jeantin thought he could make it more explicit by adding: "The whole Society appeared to me in those words" (vol. I, p.70), and even: "The whole Society and its Constitutions appeared to me in these words" (vol. V, p.315). Actually, none of the three passages in the Contemporary Notes contains these additions... Besides, at the same time that he was commenting on Fr Colin's phrase by lengthening it, Fr Jeantin connected it in his work with another statement of Fr Colin, given a year later in a completely different context: "I put myself in the center of the house of Nazareth, and from there I see all that I have to do." Despite the ellipsis that he put between the two expressions, Fr Jeantin clearly left the reader to understand that both had been spoken under the same circumstances (vol.V, p.315). The result was a composite text which has had considerable success in the Society, and which has strongly contributed to the belief that the idea of Nazareth and the formula *Ignoti et Occulti* were practically interchangeable.⁹

Jeantin's juxtaposition of the *ignoti et occulti* and the image of Nazareth is misleading, even though it was probably done with the best will in the world. It has the effect of rendering equivalent two important ideas which did not necessarily go together in Fr Colin's mind in the crucial years of his generalate when he gave us the best explanation of what he understood by the *ignoti et occulti* in terms of Marist apostolate and mission.

Through a careful study of all the available texts Coste has shown that the theme of Nazareth was not dominant in the mind of Fr Colin during the years when he was superior general.¹⁰ Although it did occur occasionally in his talks and conversation, it was usually in the rather limited context of the humble beginnings of the Society or when talking of the brothers or formation. Never (as far as we know) was it explicitly linked to the Marist mission as such or to the various ministries, apart from

formation. On the other hand, the *ignoti et occulti* was often referred to in the context of how to conduct the various apostolates and ministries.

However, it is quite understandable why Jeantin should have linked the two. He knew Fr Colin in his senior years. One could quite legitimately presume that he knew the man when his thought had matured and the ideals had been tempered by experience. Moreover, he had the trust and confidence of Fr Colin who would talk to him quite freely about matters close to his heart. In their work together on the Constitutions, Jeantin knew that Fr Colin wanted to preserve the primitive spirit of the Society and ensure that it was enshrined in the definitive Rule. And so he probably felt he understood Fr Colin well enough to be justified in bringing together two different sayings spoken on different occasions, confident that they were related in the mind of the Founder and that they expressed the same deep conviction. And thus he linked the *unknown and hidden* with the theme of Nazareth. He knew that in his old age Fr Colin spoke frequently of both. It was not unreasonable to think that that was always the case.

But what he didn't realise –and couldn't realise, because he didn't know the Founder in his heyday– was that in those all-important “founding years” Fr Colin often talked of the *ignoti et occulti*, but rarely of Nazareth, and never in the same context. For him they were two quite distinct ideas, to be used to make quite different points. In his mind at that time the *ignoti et occulti* was not so much expressive of a hidden and unknown spirituality, but rather of a way of exercising the apostolate. It was not descriptive of apostolates as such, but rather of the way they should be exercised. This subtle distinction did not seem to have occurred to Jeantin. And so for many years after him Marist spirituality was seen as consisting simply in the hidden virtues of Nazareth, pithily expressed in the phrase *ignoti et occulti*. The unfortunate result of this was that the ideal of Marist mission was narrowed down and limited to apostolates that were in fact hidden and humble in the eyes of the world.

But this narrow understanding of what is appropriately Marist cannot be traced back exclusively to Jeantin –despite Coste's argument on the unfortunate results on how he conflated important texts of Fr Colin. In fact it predates Jeantin– and remains an enduring temptation for Marists of all ages who have not fully grasped the grand vision of the pioneers. In a remarkable passage in the *Mémoires* written in 1867 by Mayet himself, we find:

May we be permitted to remark that Father did say unceasingly: *Ignoti et occulti*, but not *mortui* (dead). It is the hidden life that he praised, not a useless, sterile life; it is the nothingness of humility, of self-contempt, of modesty, not the nothingness of the tomb. While he repeated without ceasing *ignoti et occulti*, he also repeated without ceasing that we are called, that we must offer ourselves, to do great things for God. More, he even made his *ignoti et occulti* the true basis for great deeds. How wrong would be those who, being of a temperament that is soft and peaceful, or fearful and pessimistic, or cowardly and lazy, would want to shut themselves up in their shell under the pretext that we must lead a hidden life, and who would do nothing, or next to nothing, under that pretext that we must act *ignoti et occulti*. That mistake would be even more prejudicial to good, and to souls, if it were made by a local Superior. Nature is clever at self-justification. Corpses are also *ignoti et occulti*; good-for-nothings are *ignoti et occulti*, too. Yes, it is the hidden life that Father extols, and to which we are called with Mary's example, but it is *Life...* We will make this remark only once; the thing is so obvious. But we do feel that we should make it at least once, because, on very rare occasions, we have seen some subjects, and even a superior, make a false application, at least in part, of this vital, productive principle *ignoti et occulti*, which they made a principle of death, of sterility, and even of sheer idleness.¹¹

However –*pace* Jean Coste¹²– we should note that this text says quite clearly that in the mind of Fr Founder the *ignoti et occulti* was indeed associated with the hidden life.¹³ And the hidden life can be symbolized by Nazareth. In 1867 Fr Colin said: “The Society's first intention was to imitate the life of Nazareth, the life of the apostles.”¹⁴ But whereas Fr Colin saw a creative tension between the practice of the hidden virtues and a fruitful apostolate, later generations of Marists tended to see the hidden life of Nazareth as the ideal of Marist life, rather than as a necessary predisposition for the fruitful carrying out of Marist mission.

Thus, although the early Marist tradition may not have grasped the fulness of Fr Colin's insight concerning the *unknown and hidden*, and indeed may have unduly restricted its application in the choice of apostolates that Marists may undertake, nevertheless for a hundred years there was a valid

Marist tradition that interpreted the *ignoti et occulti* in terms of the hidden life of Nazareth. This remains a valuable part of our Marist heritage. It may have been unduly restrictive and it may not have been the full story, but Nazareth is certainly a necessary reference point for understanding what the *ignoti et occulti* means for Marists today.

1958: the Re-appropriation of Fr Colin's Understanding of the Ignoti et Occulti

In 1958 Jean Coste published his important study on the *ignoti et occulti*, showing that in the mind of Fr Colin it was very much linked to Marist apostolate and the way Marists should exercise their ministry.

The classic text containing Fr Colin's mature reflection on the *ignoti et occulti* is n.50 of his 1872 Constitutions. Numbers 49 & 50 are treasured in the Society as the rich distillation of Fr Colin's understanding of our spirit at the end of his long life. Coste calls them his "spiritual testament" on the subject.¹⁵ In number 50 Fr Colin reminds Marists of what following in Mary's footsteps means. In one long sentence he gives a comprehensive list of marian virtues, ending with:

".. and moreover so combining a love of solitude and silence and the practice of the hidden virtues with works of zeal, that, even though they must undertake the various ministries helpful to the salvation of souls, they seem to be unknown and indeed even hidden in this world."

The first thing to notice about this text is that the *ignoti et occulti* is neither the starting point nor the end of our endeavours as Marists. We don't begin by saying: "We are hidden and unknown people; therefore, we should do only such and such a work or act only in an unknown way." Nor do we have as our end or purpose that we become hidden and unknown in the world.¹⁶ There is no special value or virtue in that.

The key to understanding the meaning of the *ignoti et occulti* in n.50 lies in the little Latin word "ut." This is not a purposive "ut", meaning "in order that". Fr Colin is not saying that Marists should practise all the virtues listed in n.50 in order that they might seem to be unknown and even hidden in this world. Obscurity was never one of the goals or aims of the Society in the mind of the Founder. Rather the "ut" indicates a consequential clause. It means "that (as a consequence)." And so if n.50 is read with the consequential "ut", it will mean that if Marists practise all the virtues listed earlier in the paragraph, they will (as a consequence) seem to disappear and be unknown in the world.

The difference in meaning is vitally important for Marists. If the "ut" is read purposively, n.50 becomes a recipe for pusillanimity and narrow vision - an excuse to avoid doing great things for the Lord and a justification for laziness. But if it is read consequentially, then it becomes a result, a "byproduct" as it were, of living the spirit of Mary to its fulness and engaging wholeheartedly in her work.

Two of the strongest recurring themes in the talks of Fr Colin during his generalate as recorded by Mayet are the universality of the Marist mission (we can undertake any apostolate) and the need always to be and act *ignoti et occulti*. At first sight these two themes may appear to us to be incompatible, but not so for Fr Colin. He saw no incongruity in insisting in the one breath that we should be available for any type of apostolate and that we should always be *ignoti et occulti*.

We must do good in a hidden way, take on all sorts of works, but always remaining *ignoti et occulti*.¹⁷

Fr Colin refused to see the *ignoti et occulti* as implying that we should undertake only hidden works. He admitted that we might prefer them, but that preference was in no way to limit what Marists were called to do.

Let us go everywhere, let us do all the good that we can, all the while remaining unassuming and hidden... There are those who think the Marists must devote themselves only to works that are hidden, unknown, neglected... Messieurs, the Society does not refuse them, it greatly prefers them, and those who feel attracted to such works may engage in them if obedience permits. But the Society will not shrink from any ministry, from any task. It is called to do anything, it is like a soldier who goes wherever there is danger, wherever there is need of his services.¹⁸

Thus, Fr Colin didn't seem to see the *ignoti et occulti* as something attached to the apostolates themselves, as descriptive of the type of apostolate that Marists undertake. Rather he saw it as indicating the spirit with which the apostolates are to be carried out. It is Marists who are to be

unknown, not the apostolates. It is the apostle, not the apostolate, that should be hidden.

Since the *ignoti et occulti* is as it were a natural consequence of living in the spirit of Mary, it was also natural that Fr Colin should hold up Mary as our inspiration for the *ignoti et occulti*. He was impressed by the contrast he saw (through his reading of *Mary of Agreda*) between her status as Queen of heaven and earth, and her practice in choosing to disappear into the Church. He marvelled at the way she eschewed the glory and privilege that one might expect as mother of the Redeemer, and instead remained hidden and virtually unknown throughout all her life.¹⁹

Let us be small, Messieurs. *Nolite altum sapere*, let us be small. The blessed Virgin was so small, although in reality she was the Queen of Heaven and the first of all creatures. She is our model. Let us do a great deal of good, but like her let us do it *tanquam ignoti et occulti*.²⁰

But in calling on Marists to be inspired by the example of Mary, Fr Colin had in mind Mary precisely as she was in the early Church. For it was there that he believed she did the most good – more than all the apostles– and she did it without being noticed or causing a stir.

Let us imitate our mother: she did not have people speak of her, the Gospel only named her four times, and yet what good she did! The time has come when she must make her power burst forth. As for us, let us have her spirit, let us do good *tanquam ignoti et occulti in hoc mundo*.²¹

In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the new-born Church; she is Queen of the apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers.²²

Our Constitutions remind us that we learn from Fr Colin and like him from Mary how to carry out our mission in such a way that the word of God is heard in all its purity and power.²³ And indeed Fr Colin can teach us a lot about our approach to the work of evangelization. It all falls under the umbrella of the *ignoti et occulti*. But he himself learned it from God through prolonged meditation and prayer during the Cerdon years - and from the example of Mary.

According to the Founder, in the early years of the Church Mary was totally devoted to the development and extension of the Incarnation, i.e. to the growth and spread of the (mystical) body of Christ, which is the Church.²⁴ She worked tirelessly for the spread of the Gospel, for evangelization. This was the continuation of her Son's mission, and it had now become the mission of the Church. For Fr Colin then, Mary in the early Church –Mary with the Apostles–²⁵ was thus our model and inspiration in the apostolate. But how did Mary manage to be so effective? By disappearing into the Church, by being hidden and unknown. Fr Colin's most basic insight into the way in which Marists should carry out their mission was founded on the connection he saw between the great effectiveness of Mary's mission and the invisibility with which she carried it out. As far as he was concerned, she did more to develop and extend the Incarnation in the growth of the Church than did Peter or Paul or all the apostles together. But no one noticed. Her enormous contribution is not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. She did it quietly and without fuss²⁶

During the years of his generalate Fr Colin frequently spoke of the link he saw between the *ignoti et occulti* and the Marist apostolate.²⁷ Not only does it not inhibit Marists in the variety of apostolates they undertake, but moreover and more importantly, it describes the attitude they must bring to the apostolate in order that it be effective and bear great fruit. Coste calls it a “means for the apostolate”,²⁸ and even an “apostolic technique.”²⁹

However, I am not very comfortable with calling the *ignoti et occulti* a “means” or “technique” (or even “tactic” or “strategy”) - at least in English. For these words suggest that the *ignoti et occulti* is some special recipe that Marists have for carrying out their apostolates. Words such as “means”, “technique” or “tactic” seem to suggest that if Marists go about their apostolates in a hidden and unknown way, they will be successful in their ministry. It puts all the emphasis on being hidden and unknown as a means to achieving the goal. But the unknown and hidden does not guarantee success in ministry – nor is that what Fr Colin really meant.

It is important to remember that for Fr Colin the *ignoti et occulti* was a sort of shorthand formula for a whole spiritual attitude –the spirit of Mary characterised by the exercise of specific virtues– which he wanted Marists to bring to the exercise of their apostolates. He took it for granted that those listening to him understood the full spiritual investment implicit in the formula. Thus, the

ignoti et occulti was not really a technique or a means. The only “technique” or “means” for Marists was the spirit of Mary, the virtues particularly characteristic of Mary. Mary’s way of acting in the early Church was to be their way of carrying out the apostolate.

Fr Colin thought that the spiritual attitude embodied in the ignoti et occulti was particularly appropriate in the Church of his times. In the Epitome of 1836, when introducing the ignoti et occulti he wrote significantly, “...in order to remove all obstacles to greater fruitfulness in the vineyard of the Lord,” and “...giving no one any cause for reproach.”³⁰ These words were expressive for him of an early insight born of his own experience in ministry.

When Fr Colin started out as a priest, the Church in France was recovering from the trauma of the Revolution and its immediate aftermath. Understandably – though misguided – the reaction on the part of the clergy was to try to win back the ground lost in the Revolution and the Napoleonic era. But there was no going back to the “glory years.” The people had moved on. There was a new spirit in the air. The Church was in a new situation, but unfortunately some of its leaders were slow to recognise this fact and acted as though the Revolution had never happened.³¹

Fr Colin was a priest of his times. He was very conscious of the dignity of his priesthood, even though he was reluctant to claim its privileges. He was always scrupulously loyal to the hierarchy,³² and practised and taught great respect for the diocesan clergy.³³ But at the same time he experienced a great tension between the clericalism of his day and the genuine needs of the people. He was caught between carrying out his ministry in the approved ways he learned in the seminary and what his sensitive nature perceived to be the real concerns of the people he was sent to serve. He sensed a gap between the concrete church as it existed in the France of his day and the Church as he believed it should be in reaching out to people.³⁴ Eventually he resolved this tension for himself (and for Marists) through the ignoti et occulti.

Through his ministry as a curate in Cerdon, and even more so through his experience in the missions of the Bugey, he came to realise that the pastoral methods common among the clergy of his time, which he had uncritically accepted as being the “right” way to go about preaching and administering the sacraments, were not being effective. Although both in Cerdon, and in the early missions, he began in the strict clerical fashion common among his peers, he soon realised that his efforts were not having the effects his zeal wanted. He found that by preaching thundering sermons and by following the rules over-zealously in the confessional, he was turning people away, rather than bringing them closer to God. They resented his ministry, and this resentment deafened their ears to the message of God. He had the humility, and the insight, to see that he and his style of ministry were the obstacles – not their hard hearts or habits of sin.³⁵

This perception was a turning point for Fr Colin. It was clear to him that something had to be done to ensure that his ministry was more fruitful. His solution was relatively simple – remove the obstacle. But this did not mean withdrawing from ministry, or retreating back into his shell as he had done in his youth. The driving force in his priestly life, his “zeal for souls”, would no longer allow that.

Through pondering on his own pastoral experience, seeing what “worked” and what didn’t, he came to realise that often the biggest obstacle to effective ministry was the minister himself. In order to overcome this obstacle, the minister should strive to make himself small - to disappear, as it were - so as to be unnoticed by those to whom he is ministering. And he should do this by living and preaching so modestly, humbly and simply that only the word of God is heard.

But this was more than a new pastoral strategy. Through intense prayer, he saw that a whole new spiritual attitude was called for – a radical emptying of self, so that nothing in him would hinder the clear hearing of God’s word or prevent the mercy of God getting through to those who needed it most. This entailed acting in such an unobtrusive way that he would not be noticed – disappearing as it were, even in the midst of a very active ministry. He also saw that this was the way Mary and the apostles worked in the early Church - and their ministry was wondrously fruitful. In other words, he came to realise that like them he too must become hidden and unknown in the world.³⁶

However, although it may have been born of his own prayer and experience,³⁷ Fr Colin quickly realised that the ignoti et occulti was of universal application to any kind of ministry undertaken by Marists. It was an approach peculiarly suited to the temper of the times.

Let us remain small. I say that so that no one will ever think of changing our way of doing things. This is the only way to do good, being small. The Society is called to do an enormous amount of

good. It must be faithful to its vocation. To be small, ignoti et occulti. The times call for that, we must accommodate ourselves to our times.³⁸

He saw it as especially appropriate to the ministry of preaching.³⁹ He used it to justify his prohibition on Marists mixing politics and religion.⁴⁰ In fact he saw it applying to the Society as a whole, and even to its spirituality.

I want us to pass unnoticed in the Church: quasi ignoti; unnoticed from every point of view. I should not even like us to be conspicuous by our piety. Let us have a simple, ordinary piety, with nothing remarkable about it. As for modesty, too, nothing out of the ordinary... (The Jesuits) had rules of modesty traced out for them which were very singular. Nowadays there are some who are attracted by that, but there are some who are repelled by it. And so I should not like our modesty to be other than well ordered and ordinary. Let us be no more conspicuous in that than in anything else: quasi ignoti.⁴¹

There can be no doubt of its universal applicability to the life, spirit and mission of the Society according the mind of the Founder. In several pithy but pregnant phrases the 1987 Constitutions have captured the essentials of Fr Colin's legacy to us and expressed it in language that is fresh and clear.

The spirit of "hidden and unknown" leads Marists to embrace a life of simplicity, modesty and humility. Nothing in their personal life or behaviour, neither pride nor personal ambition, must cause people to resist the salvation offered them by God. Like Mary they are to be gentle with others, respectful of their freedom, and sensitive to their point of view. In this spirit they are able to hear the longings of the people of God and discern the signs of hope present in today's world. (n.24)

1985: The Example of Jesus Christ

The General Chapter of 1985 gave great prominence to the ignoti et occulti. In its new Constitutions it reproduced verbatim number 50 of the 1872 Constitutions of Fr Colin. In chapter one it also listed the ignoti et occulti as the first of the distinguishing characteristics of the Society and devoted four paragraphs there to explaining it (nn. 22-25). Then in chapter three in the introduction to the section on apostolic life, the formula appears again as indicative of "the manner in which Marists engage in the apostolate and it does not hinder them from doing great things for God" (n.136). Moreover, the Chapter made a significant advance in our understanding and appreciation of the ignoti et occulti when it wrote in the new Constitutions:

Fired with apostolic zeal for the Kingdom, they follow the Lord in emptying themselves of all self-seeking so that nothing will prevent the word of God from being heard. It was by coming into the world in obscurity and poverty that Jesus drew men and women to His Father. (n.23)

Here the Constitutions are pointing to the example of Jesus Christ who was "hidden and unknown" in carrying out his mission. They are inviting Marists to contemplate the profound christological implications of their ignoti et occulti, for we can now see that it is rooted in the very mystery of the Incarnation itself.⁴² The phrase, "they follow the Lord in emptying themselves of all self-seeking" immediately calls to mind the kenosis (selfemptying) of the Word in the glorious hymn about Christ in Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians, 2:5-11:

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God,

did not count equality with God something to be grasped.

But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,

Becoming as human beings are;

and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet,

even to accepting death, death on a cross.

And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names;
so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus
and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Here we are told that although Jesus Christ was divine, he was not jealously protective of his position and status in the Godhead, but instead willingly emptied himself of all signs of divinity and took on the condition of a slave.⁴³ That was really opting for obscurity and nothingness. Yet this is the essence of the Incarnation. But that was not all. The hymn goes on to say that even after he had descended into the depths of slavery, he went even lower yet and was annihilated in death - the cruel and shameful death of a lowly criminal in an obscure corner of the Roman world.

The second part of the hymn goes on to proclaim that God then raised Christ to glory and every knee bent to his name. Here for us the significant thing is not so much the personal glorification of Jesus, but rather the fact that everyone was saved – “all beings in the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld” – in other words, the whole of creation. Jesus' mission conducted in obscurity and poverty was crowned with the most extraordinary success and has opened the gates of the Kingdom to peoples of every age and nation.

It is not surprising to find that Fr Colin was familiar with the Philippians hymn and quoted it often.⁴⁴ However, I have not been able to find an instance where he cited it explicitly in the context of the *ignoti et occulti*. Nevertheless he did quote it or implicitly allude to it when dealing with virtues of religious life, which were closely related to the *ignoti et occulti* as he understood it. For example, when dealing with religious obedience he explicitly quotes verse 8 (“made obedient unto death...”) in his 1872 Constitutions (n.431) and twice in the Constitutions he wrote for the Marist Sisters (1856, p.198; 1867, p.43). And in a letter to Marcellin Champagnat he wrote: “It is essential for us to strip ourselves of ourselves, and avoid with prudence anything which could weaken the spirit of unity so necessary in an enterprise, especially in one such as we are working for.”⁴⁵

Now with greater maturity of insight the Society has come to see that the *ignoti et occulti* is really an invitation to imitate Christ in his very essence as the Incarnate Word and in his mission as the one sent by God. It draws us inevitably into the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection whereby Christ saved the world. We now know that the *ignoti et occulti* is not just a Marian thing – it is certainly that; but more profoundly it is a radically Christian thing - imitation of Christ in his deepest essence.⁴⁶

And because obscurity and self-emptying were of the essence of the Incarnation, Jesus the Word made flesh followed it through in his earthly life. His very birth in darkness and poverty was a salvific event for the shepherds (Lk 2:8-20) and the Magi (Mt 2:1-12). It drew them to him, as it did also Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:25-38).

Similarly in his public life, the very approach to ministry that Jesus adopted showed that he was not concerned for himself or prestige, but solely that the work of the Father be accomplished as fully as possible.⁴⁷ He himself is the model of the Beatitudes and the best example of the perfection he teaches in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt cc.5-7),⁴⁸ where disciples are urged to pray in secret and act virtuously in such a way that no one will notice (Mt 6:1-18). Jesus is poor in spirit, gentle, pure in heart, merciful, meek, etc. – all the virtues that Fr Colin told us make up the *ignoti et occulti*.

And then in his passion and death we see the fulfillment of the self-emptying of the Incarnation that Jesus consistently showed in his ministry.

His death was the ultimate expression of self-emptying for the sake of others. “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24) The death of Jesus shows clearly that it is through total powerlessness and weakness that strength and success come – the paradox of Christianity.

It is also a clear affirmation that Jesus' meekness and humanness were not play-acting on his part. He not only stood with the weak in life, but in the end he was completely weak and powerless himself. It was through his real powerlessness that the power of God acted and manifested itself.⁴⁹

The kenosis of the Word in Jesus Christ also reveals another central paradox of Christianity. By

emptying himself of his divinity Jesus paradoxically reveals the nature of God. God the Son hides himself by becoming a man, but it is precisely through being a man that the Son reveals the face of his Father. The very humanity that hid his divinity was also the means whereby he revealed the Godhead.⁵⁰ There's a mystery here for Marists to ponder.

1988: The Hidden God

In recent years there has been a further development in our understanding of the *ignoti et occulti*. Once again it was spear-headed by Jean Coste in a talk he gave to a group of confreres on retreat at Valpre in 1988.⁵¹ Not only do we find that Mary and Jesus lived lives that were hidden and unknown, but we have also come to realise that our God is a hidden God too. The theme has also been taken up by Fritz Arnold⁵² and Jan Hulshof.⁵³ We find it also in the pages of *Intercom-S.M.*⁵⁴

Of course the theme of the hidden God is no stranger to Jewish and Christian tradition. We find it in the Old Testament when Isaiah proclaims in one of his canticles: "Truly God of Israel, the Saviour, you are a God who lies hidden" (45:15).⁵⁵ And St Paul makes it a major theme in the canticle he includes in his Letter to the Colossians: "He (Christ) is the image of the unseen God..." (1:15f) Later it is taken up and developed by the Fathers and medieval scholastics in their theology of the transcendent God.

Although the transcendence of God, and thus the hiddenness of God in creation, is now part of mainstream Christian theology, and as such is nothing new, nevertheless a new note in the theme is being sounded today. Not only is God hidden in our world, but there is also a sense that our world has lost God - our "missing" God. Although modern secularised culture has robustly declared that it does not need God, and indeed that there is no God, nevertheless deep in the "collective unconscious" of society there is an uneasy sense that the modern world has lost something important.

Over and above the transcendence of God which renders him inaccessible to human gaze - the invisible, "unseen God" of Col. 1:15 - there is now a sense that God is also hidden, both in the sense that God hides himself in our world, and in the sense that our world hides all traces of God. Both these senses of the "hidden God" invite us to discover the God hidden in our midst - both by finding where God chooses to hide himself and also by lifting or removing the "covers" which hide the presence of God in our world.

The secularized culture of the modern western world is probably unique in world history in that there now seems to be a deep split between culture and religion. Most cultures are rooted in religious consciousness, and this is still true of many African and Asian cultures today. But it does not seem to be true any longer with regard to contemporary western culture.⁵⁶ The split between culture and religion over the last two hundred years or so has brought about the "marginalization" of God to such an extent that the divine has almost disappeared in the life of the modern secularized person. God has disappeared because the modern consciousness feels no need of the divine. Modern scientific mentality has banned God from having any part in the explanation of the universe. The practice of religion has been relegated to being an optional extra in life, a leisure activity, essentially private - like a hobby which one may choose to indulge in or not. The hiddenness of God in our world is not so much because of his inherent transcendence, but rather because our world has no place for God; all available space in our psyche is taken up with secular pursuits. Our world feels no need of God, and so God has disappeared.

But deep in our cultural subconscious there are traces of a memory of God. And now there is a sense of loss - a sense of something missing, a cultural impoverishment. This manifests itself in surprising ways - rather as psychologists tell us that repressed memories have a habit of manifesting themselves in "impulsive" behaviour that does not seem to have a rational (conscious) explanation and which may surprise and even shock when it occurs. We see this in the sudden popularity of "New Age" philosophies with "yuppies", or in the dabbling in witchcraft among the bored citizens of suburbia.

But it is not only in the quest for "alternative" spiritual experience that the absence of God can be felt. Most surprising of all the transcendent can break through in the most grim and desperate of human conditions. Where all seems hopeless, trapped in misery, and desperately lacking in human value, there the transcendence of God can flash out - suddenly "like shining from shook foil" as Hopkins once put it so memorably.⁵⁷ But for the reflective Christian this should not be so surprising - even though the sudden presence of God may take him by surprise. For as St. Paul reminds us,

God has chosen the weak to confound the wise (cf. 1 Cor 1:27). In the obscurity and obscenity of the cross the power of God was made manifest. The drama of Calvary provides the paradigm of God's presence in our world.

Coste gave another example of the modern day quest for the “missing” God in his story of the young people asking him to teach them how to know God.⁵⁸ And in fact it is through the questions of young people that the presence of the hidden God often makes itself felt. For the young are not wedded to the values so ardently desired and pursued by their elders. They can look upon the world into which they were born with fresh eyes sometimes disrespectful, often rebellious - but that is the privilege of their age. And it is often through their rejection of the received, that God breaks through with the hint of other values, forgotten values.

This hiddenness of God calls Marists to further reflection on what their *ignoti et occulti* means for them today – on their vocation in this world, in *hoc mundo*. It is an invitation for them to be where the hidden God is appearing. The world of young people is an obvious place, for God does seem to be making his presence felt in the often inarticulate, but strongly felt, aspirations of young people today. Perhaps this is why all branches of Marists have always almost instinctively seen ministry to young people as something particularly relevant to the Marist vocation.

But Marists are called not only to the world of youth. They should also be in other places where God's presence is most obscure. And this entails two things: (a) Marists must be able to recognise the presence of the hidden God; and (b) they must also be able to work to make God present - that is, make his presence felt, his mercy and his power.

In order to recognise the presence of God in our world, Marists must know God personally. The call is to a profound personal relationship with God, whereby the Marist knows God person-to-person. This is a relationship which can be gained only through a deep and sustained prayer life. And in this prayer he comes to know the hidden God, who paradoxically seems more remote the more he draws near. This is the hidden God of the mystics, but it is also the God who becomes known in the ordinary life of the prayerful Christian. This is also the God whom the young people want to know today. And they look to the priests and religious to teach them how to know this God. How can we teach them if we do not know him ourselves? and know him from our own prayer experience?⁵⁹

Marists can also learn from contemplation of the hidden God how they should be and work in the world. God is always the creator. He hides in his effects. We see what God has made but often fail to see the creator behind it all. It is only when a sudden beauty flashes out in the midst of squalor or something unexpected emerges when all around is death and decay that we can catch a glimpse of the God behind it all. God reveals himself through the unexpected goodness in things.

Marists can learn from God to seek the beauty in things or to allow their God-given beauty shine forth. They may even learn from God how to render them beautiful. Marists should seek to bring life where there is seemingly only death and decay. They should cherish the hidden nature of things and help them grow to their natural fulfillment, rather than twist them to selfish ends. They should respect the hidden potential of each person, and encourage them to grow in true freedom to the fulfillment they choose for themselves.⁶⁰

Other signs of God's presence in the world are the peace that occasionally comes amidst turmoil, hope when all around leads to despair, and the flashes of human goodness when all else seems ugly and dirty. Marists should learn to recognise these signs, and work to make them grow strong and take root in the barren soil of so many seemingly hopeless lives. Thus they facilitate the presence of God in today's world. Perhaps this is today's way of being “instruments of the divine mercies.”⁶¹

Reflection of the mystery of God's hidden presence in today's world can take another direction. There is a sense in which the world itself obscures the presence of God. Obstacles are placed in the way of believing in God. The modern person craves personal autonomy, highly prizes individual freedom, and jealously guards his independence. In such a world the need for God diminishes, and indeed vanishes. God is eclipsed. The modern world has lost God and has placed obstacles in the way of finding him again.

Many of these obstacles are false gods, the idols of our age, which distract us from recognising the true God – such idols as the satisfactions of consumerism, the subliminal messages of advertising, the fantasy worlds of Hollywood, and the cult of the young and the beautiful – to name but a few. There is much work to be done here in identifying the reasons why God does not seem relevant to the life

of the modern person - but to do so now would carry us well beyond the scope of this paper.

The *ignoti et occulti* as handed down to us by Fr Colin teaches us to act in such a way that nothing in our person or behaviour will place obstacles in the way of allowing the word of God to be heard in all its purity and clarity.⁶² Contemplating the mystery of God's hidden presence in today's world should lead Marists to identify the ways in which the presence of God is obscured. And their response should be twofold: firstly, to make sure that in their own person and life they don't actually contribute to the obscuring of God's presence in the world; and secondly, to work actively to remove the obstacles so that the mercy and grace of God may burst through more readily into the lives of the men and women of our time.

It is too soon to know whether the theme of the "hidden God" will become an enduring enrichment of the Marist tradition concerning the "hidden and unknown." Although the hiddenness of God in our world – the eclipse of God – is certainly a theme relevant to understanding the religious tenor of our age, it is still not very clear how it ties in with the particular understanding that Marists have of the *ignoti et occulti*. Further reflection is needed before we can be clear about whether the *ignoti et occulti* does indeed shed light on the mystery of God's presence/absence in today's world, and whether the hiddenness of God does in fact enrich the understanding Marists have of their peculiar charism and spirit. The ideas introduced here in this section are merely pointers suggesting directions which further reflection may take. Much more work needs to be done before we can be certain whether this is a true development in the evolution of our appreciation of the *ignoti et occulti*, or merely a blind alley which seemed promising for a time but which eventually led nowhere. Time will tell.

Conclusion: a Spirituality for Our Time

For Marists the unknown and hidden has always been a precious gift. Coste called it "truly the final word of... wisdom" that Fr Colin passed on to his children.⁶³ In these few words we find our whole Marist spirituality and our whole mode of mission.

It may have taken succeeding generations of Marists a century or more to appreciate the full richness of the formula and unravel for themselves the treasures it contains. The work is not yet complete, but it is well begun. I hope in this paper to have shown how our evolving understanding of the *ignoti et occulti* has enriched the Society in its life and mission, and at the same time given us a unique spirituality which while being profoundly Christian, is also distinctively Marist.

All the marks of a great spirituality are there. Centered on God, it takes its cue from God's own way of being present in the world. Deeply Christian, it is a way of imitating Christ, who chose to be born in poverty and obscurity in order to redeem the world. And it takes its inspiration from the mystery of Mary in the early Church, where she was supremely effective while being deeply hidden.

But the core of this spirituality is the mystery of the Incarnation. For the key to understanding the *ignoti et occulti* in all its richness is the kenosis, the self-emptying of Christ in the Incarnation, as expressed in the Philippians Hymn, 2:6-11. There the Word hid himself by emptying himself of his divinity and taking on the form of a slave, a creature – a form which eventually led to his humiliating death, and through that death to eternal life and salvation for all the world. Every Christian by his baptism is called to follow Christ in this formidable path of kenosis – a radical emptying of self, so as to take on the form of Christ crucified and risen again.

And now, having said this, we are left with a lingering doubt. What precisely does the *ignoti et occulti* mean for us as Marists over and above our being Christians? How does it sum up our lives and ministry as Marists so that it expresses something distinctively Marist?

First of all, let us note that it is no bad thing to have the touchstone of our spirituality rooted in the central Christian mystery of the Incarnation. It is reassuring to know that Marist spirituality is not something esoteric on the fringes of the Christian life. Rather it is a current in the mainstream of Christian life – like all the other great spiritualities in the Church. A Marist is first of all a Christian, and his way of life is one of the authentic expressions of Christian living – a way of following Christ as Mary did.

Although the *ignoti et occulti* plunges us into the heart of the Christian mystery, nevertheless there is still something distinctive about a Marist's way of doing this. The *ignoti et occulti* contains within itself the spirit of Mary, her distinctive way of discipleship, of following her Son. The spiritual wisdom of Fr Colin has spelled out for us what this means in practice in nn.49 and 50 of his

Constitutions. There we have something which is uniquely and distinctively Marist, but at the same time something profoundly Christian and rooted deep in the mystery of Christ.

However, although all this is true and reassuring, it doesn't completely dispel the lingering doubt expressed earlier. How in practice is the *ignoti et occulti* something distinctively Marist?

The secret to putting the *ignoti et occulti* into practice, I believe, lies in Christ himself – in the self-emptying of the Philippians hymn. There Jesus emptied himself in order to take on the condition of a slave. There is the clue for us.

The Marist is called to empty himself of himself, so that he can identify himself with the other. He is to put himself in the shoes of the other, to get inside his skin, as it were, so that he can see things with the eyes of the other. And then he will disappear – for the eye does not see itself.

The distinctive stance of the Marist is thus to stand alongside the other, so that together they may look out on the world. This is making himself a co-subject with the other. Instead of standing in front of him as an object for him to see - the bringer of help and relief – the Marist seeks to stand in the place of the other and see things as he or she sees them.

So often the minister approaches a needy person like Father Christmas, with arms full of gifts and ready answers to all life's problems. He (metaphorically) stands in front of the person and gives out the good things. He can't help but be noticed. Moreover, such a stance makes the needy person aware of his own poverty, while at the same time emphasizing the richness of his benefactor. No wonder such an attitude these days breeds resentment.

But if the Marist in his ministry (metaphorically) stands alongside the other, he will not be noticed, for when two people stand alongside each other and together look out at something, they do not see each other. Their attention is fixed on the object of their vision, not on themselves. The seer does not see himself. The eye does not enter into the field of vision. Something similar happens when one identifies with the condition of the other and together with him/her seeks to resolve a problem, answer a need, or simply share an emotion.

This calls for empathy on the part of the Marist apostle - an identification with the other. And this is why compassion, suffering with, is such a Marian virtue. It is the virtue Mary showed pre-eminently on Calvary, where she did much more than sympathize with her Son. Rather she empathized with him, suffered with him, to such an extent that his sufferings became vicariously hers too. Compassion thus understood is more a Marist virtue than even mercy. Mercy is principally a divine quality, a gratuitous love, freely given, to those who haven't earned it. In human hands it can so easily degenerate into paternalism, tainted by the "Father Christmas" syndrome.

Compassion, on the other hand, is a properly human virtue. It too is a love freely given, and it is triggered by the misery of the other. But it is rooted in one's own capacity to suffer. It thus enables one to empathize and identify with the other in his misery. One may not be able to take away the misery, or solve the problem, but one can at least be with the other and sustain them in sympathy and companionship.

This view of the *ignoti et occulti* demands renunciation of self. Nothing of self must be allowed to get in the way of bringing the mercy of God to others. This is why self-denial is one of the four special Marist virtues that Fr Colin lists in n.49 of his Constitutions. At first sight it comes as a surprise to see "propria abnegatio" (self-denial) listed together with intimate union with God, most ardent love of neighbor, and humility as the essential Marist virtues. And it is also striking the number of times (as recorded by Mayet) Fr Colin linked self-denial with the *ignoti et occulti*.

The "propria abnegatio" of the Marist is not simply a penitential practice, a doing of penance to keep himself virtuous. Rather it is something much more radical. It means quite literally self-denial – not merely a denying oneself this or that pleasure or practice, but rather a radical emptying of self so that one can identify with the other. Nothing of self, no personal agenda, can be allowed to get in the way of God's action. Only in this way can Marists be truly "instruments of the divine mercies."

Thus the *ignoti et occulti* properly understood implies a rigorous asceticism. As well as self-denial Fr Colin also insisted on humility and self-forgetfulness, simplicity and modesty as essential virtues for the Marist.⁶⁴ These virtues are not there primarily for the sake of asceticism, as if that were the object of Marist spiritual life. Nor is the discipline implied in these virtues in the Marist spirit for its own sake.

Rather this whole package of virtues is constitutive of the Marist spirit. It entails an emptying of self so that there is room for the other. These virtues enable the Marist to “adopt” the self of the other and share his viewpoint, so that together they can face the world. They entail a displacement of self so that nothing of self will be an obstacle to an encounter with Christ and an experience of the mercy of God. This is the ascetical spirit that will enable Marists to put aside their own interests and wishes –and indeed their own personality– in order that only the interests of the weak and the poor (with whom Christ identifies himself) may be served. Our Constitutions say it well:

The spirit of “hidden and unknown” leads Marists to embrace a life of simplicity, modesty and humility. Nothing in their personal life or behaviour, neither pride nor personal ambition, must cause people to resist the salvation offered them by God. Like Mary they are to be gentle with others, respectful of their freedom, and sensitive to their point of view. (n.24)

Finally we can note that this spirituality of the “unknown and hidden” finds its concrete expression in the example of Mary, the first disciple, who imitated her Son in everything, following him even “to Calvary itself, standing at the foot of the cross when he gave his life for man’s salvation.”⁶⁵

And Fr Colin has left us with two powerful symbols to animate and unify the diverse elements of this spirituality: Mary in the early Church, and Mary in the hidden life of Nazareth. These symbols engage our imagination and provide the horizon against which we live our Marist life and exercise our apostolate. Although she was the most effective disciple in the early Church, she was also its most hidden member – and the two are not unconnected. And Nazareth was the most natural habitat for Mary, the place where she tasted God and pondered on what he was asking of her– the place from which she saw what she had to do. Marists are invited to do the same.

Once when talking about beginnings of the Society, Fr Colin likened it to a little tree growing in the shadows.⁶⁶ That image still speaks to us today. The whole spirit of the *ignoti et occulti* is summed up in that simple metaphor. We stand in the shadows, unnoticed and hidden. But the shadow is cast by something else. We stand in its shadow. It does not see us, for it is looking at the bright blue yonder. But we are there – to help and sustain.

End Notes:

1. Fr Jeantin reported that Colin said this in 1869; OM 3, doc. 819,122; cf. doc. 839,47.

2. J. Coste, 'N.8 - The Marist Way in the Apostolate: *Ignoti et Quasi Occulti*', in *Acta Societatis Mariae*, vol.5, n.24, 1958, pp.45-91. [Henceforth referred to as *Ignoti*.]

3. J. Coste, *A Marian Vision of the Church: Jean-Claude Colin*. "Valpre Lectures: 4.Unknown and Hidden", (Maristica, 8), edited by G. Lessard, Rome, 1998, pp.438-477. [Henceforth referred to as *Marian Vision*.]

4. Coste has given a good account of these difficult years, the disappointments and the preoccupations of Fr Colin, in *Marian Vision*, pp.392-420.

5. *Ibid.* p. 402.

6. In July 1855 Fr Favre gave his definitive "no" to the eucharistic project at La Neyliere.

7. cf. OM 3, doc.803.

8. Jeantin & David ended up playing a very positive role as aides. Both were very faithful to Colin and had a better feel for the Society in the 1860's than he did. When Jeantin & David would say to him: "No, that point won't go; you are right, but.." Colin would answer: "Okay, from you, I'll accept that, because I know you are true Marists, full of the Marist tradition, but if it were Vitte saying it, no, never!"; J. Coste, *Marian Vision*, p.410.

9. J. Coste, *Ignoti*, p.47-49.

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10. J. Coste, 'Nazareth in the Thought of Fr Colin', in *Acta Societatis Mariae*, vol.6. n.31, 1961, pp.299-400.
11. Mayet, *Memoires*, B16, 121-123; quoted in Coste, *Ignoti*, p.63, and in E. Keel, *A Book of Texts for the Study of Marist Spirituality*, Rome, 1993, doc. 365.
12. I am referring here to the Jean Coste of 1958, to the strong argument for separating the *ignoti et occulti* from Nazareth in the mind of Fr Colin, which he made in his article *Ignoti* published that year. He modified this somewhat in his later years, admitting that Fr Colin linked the two in his address to the General Chapter of 1854 - cf. *Marian Vision*, p.450.
13. Although Mayet wrote this remark in 1867 - about the time when Jeantin was beginning to know the already elderly Fr Colin - nevertheless he is almost certainly basing his assertions on what he heard Fr Colin say over many years previously. He first started taking notes on what Fr Colin said in 1837 and continued diligently throughout Fr Colin's general ate till 1854. Thus his witness covers the crucial years, which Coste (using also evidence provided by Mayet) has argued do not show Fr Colin linking the *ignoti et occulti* with the hidden life of Nazareth.
14. J. Coste, *Marian Vision*, p.426. I do not understand why Coste has reacted so strongly against the accuracy of Fr Colin's memory in saying this. "Here, the historian has to say: no. It is out of the question that Nazareth was an explicit model at the beginning" (*Ibid*). On the evidence of Coste's own researches, it seems that Fr Colin had "the house of the Blessed Virgin" in mind when he was writing the first rule at Cerdon - and this image does not seem to be far removed from the idea of "Nazareth". Cf. J. Coste, *Studies on the Early Ideas of Jean-Claude Colin - I* (Maristica, 2), Rome, 1989, p.228.
15. J. Coste, 'Historical Commentary on the Constitutions of the Society of Mary: De Societatis Spiritu (art. X, nn.49-50)', in *Acta Societatis Mariae*, vol.6, n.32, 1963, p.487.
16. J. Coste, *Ignoti*, p.89.
17. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 167. See also: "Let us keep within the limits of our vocation. Although we should not exclude any work of zeal in our ministry, we must always remain *ignoti et quasi occulti*." (*Ibid*. doc. 152, 1). "How greatly we need the help of the blessed Virgin. Let us imitate her, following the spirit of our vocation, let us hide ourselves so as to do good. The Rule says we should devote ourselves to all kinds of ministry, to all works of zeal. Nevertheless, we should behave so as to be *ignoti et occulti*." (*Ibid*. doc. 154,3). '
18. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 141, 18-19.
19. See also Jean Coste's perspicacious remark: "Fr Colin's most basic Marian intuition, we believe, consists in the manner in which his profound sense of her grandeur, which he inherited from tradition, met with his concern to remain as close as possible to the human existence of the Blessed Virgin." Cf. J. Coste, 'The Role of Mary at the Birth of the Church and at the End of Time', in *Acta Societatis Mariae*. vol.6, n.28, 1960, p.61.
20. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 120,2; also doc. 85, 2.
21. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 116, 8. Also: "We should remember our maxim: *ignoti et quasi occulti*. Today this is the only way to do good, we should bear that in mind. Let us imitate our holy Mother who did so much good during her life and the apostolic life of her divine Son, but without anyone talking about it. Let us not be like those who are intent *onfucum* and on having people talk about them." (*Ibid*. doc. 157).
22. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 190, 2.
23. *Constitutions SM* (1987), n.23.
24. "Look at the blessed Virgin! See how she hastened the coming of God by her burning desire. When she learnt that she had been chosen to be his mother, what an effort she made to co-operate. When Jesus Christ was born, he was the object of all her thoughts and affections. After his death, her sole thought was the extension and development of the mystery of the Incarnation. That is the sign by which precisely you can recognise a . Marist." (*A Founder Speaks*, doc. 60,1) According to Coste, Fr Colin gained these ideas from his reading of Mary of Agreda. Cf. *Marian Vision*, pp.306ff.

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25. "Fr Colin did not concentrate on Mary as distinct from the apostles. With a much larger vision he made his model the early Church as such, wherein Mary and the apostles, alive with the same spirit, did an immense amount of good, using humble and entirely supernatural means... The early Church, then, as a whole, was both hidden and efficient." J. Coste, *Lectures on Society of Mary History (Marist Fathers) 1786-1854*, Rome, 1965, p.156. [Henceforth referred to as *Lectures*.]
26. "In all things let us look to Mary, let us imitate her life at Nazareth. She did more than the apostles for the new-born Church; she is Queen of the apostles, but she did it without any stir, she did it above all by her prayers." *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 190,2; also doc. 140,4; doc. 182,60.
27. J.Coste, *Ignoti*, p.67.
28. *Ibid.* p.66.
29. *Ibid.* p.79. The word Fr Coste actually uses is "tactique", which may be better translated as "tactic", or even "strategy".
30. "...ad removenda omnia majoris fructus in vinea Domini impedimenta..." and "...nemini occasionem vituperii dantes," - *Epitome* in AT, Fasc.2, e,21, p.19; the latter phrase occurs in a different context in *Constitutions SM(1872)*, n.14.
31. Donal Kerr has described the situation well in chapter 12 of his biography of Fr Colin. Fr Coste has also given space to it in his *Lectures*, pp.69-71.
32. Cf. *Constitutions SM (1872)*, nn.11-13
33. Cf. *Constitutions SM(1872)*, n.14.
34. Fr Coste describes this tension (or a similar tension) well in terms of the "defensive theology" he was taught in the seminary and the utopian dream of a "new Church" he nourished in his "imaginary". See *Marian Vision*, pp.316-318.
35. Cf. J.Coste, *Ignoti*, pp.71-73.
36. It is perhaps significant that the earliest known uses of the phrase by Fr Colin suggest that he used it in the singular - *ignotus et occultus* - Le. as referring to himself. Cf. J. Coste, *Ignoti*, p.49.
37. Cf. the quotation with which we began this essay.
38. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 158, 1; also doc. 157.
39. "Each century has its sickness. In the past there was faith but the heart was sick; now the malady has risen to the head. We live in a century of pride, of madness. We must cure this spirit by our simplicity, by our humility. In the pulpit let us not seem domineering, or else we shall alienate people. Man is more jealous than ever of his freedom, and his independence." *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 99,1; also doc. 92,16.
40. "There are practising Catholics in all parties;... There are some of them in every class. Consequently, let's keep out of politics. We are there to lead all parties to heaven. Now or never is the time to practise our maxim: *tanquam ignoti et quasi occulti*." Mayet, *Memoires*, 7, 689; also *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 167.
41. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 24, 1-2.
42. One must applaud the intervention of John Thornhill at the 1985 Chapter which highlighted this insight and led to its inclusion in the Constitutions. The example of Jesus Christ is not found in the draft text of the Constitutions submitted to the Chapter.

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43. The Greek word translated here by "slave" is *doulos*, which really does mean "slave" as slaves were known in the Greek/Roman culture of that time. They belonged to the lowest stratum of society. It is a stronger word than "(paid) servant", *misthios* or *misthiatos* of Luke 15:17,19 and John 10:12.
44. According to the study of Fr Colin's use of scripture made by Pierre Allard, he made reference to the Letter to the Philippians at least 34 times, quoting or alluding to 15 different passages; cf. P. Allard, *L'influence de la bible sur la pensée de Jean-Claude Colin*, Rome, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S.Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 1979, p.60. Moreover, relevant to our discussion, Fr Colin quotes or alludes" to the Philippians hymn at least six times; cf. P. Allard, *L'utilisation de la bible par le pere Colin: Tables*, Rome, Via Alessandro Poerio, 63, 1979, pp.107-8.
45. OM doc. 336, 1. For an explicit reference to Jesus' "emptying himself", see Constitutions SM (1872), n.242.
46. And that is why Constitution n.18 has us offer the ;*gnosis*; *et occult*; to the Church: "Actively present in the local Church, Marists make a specific contribution to it by practising and communicating an attitude of self-effacement and hiddenness in order to build up the Christian community."
47. cf. John 5:36; 10:25, 37-38.
48. The Sermon on the Mount has sometimes be called the self-portrait of Jesus. In giving his disciples high ideals to follow in their behaviour and attitudes, Jesus was in fact describing himself and his own attitudes.
49. "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength... It was to shame the wise that God chose what is foolish by human reckoning, and to shame what is strong that he chose what is weak by human reckoning." (1Cor 1:25,27)
50. Cf. John 14:7-9.
51. J. Coste, *Marian Vision*, pp.438-476. Coste also developed the theme in the talk he gave to the General Chapter of the Marist Sisters in 1994: *Points of Continuity Between our Founders and Us*, Rome, 30 April 1994, pp.3-4.
52. F. Arnold, 'Discovering the Hidden Presence of God in Our Time', in *USIG Bulletin*, No.107, 1998, pp.24-39.
53. J. Hulshof, *Marists Towards a Marian Church*, Marist Fathers. England, 1995, p.7. He calls Mary the "icon" of the hidden God.
54. "God himself seems hidden and unknown in the world, not because he is hiding and does not wish to be known, but because, as the mystics point out, that is his very nature. He chose to be hidden and unknown in the Incarnation, and he becomes known to people slowly and gradually as they learn to listen, discern and discover, to wait throughout our dark night of the spirit. Our mission as Marists is part of this mystery"; *Intercom-S.M* 1994, n.1, p.2.
55. This is the translation found in the English Breviary which is probably familiar to many English speaking Marists. In fact the text is disputed. For a good discussion, see: G. Kittel & G. Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated and abridged in one volume by G. W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985, pp.476-478.
56. M. P. Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997, p.23.
57. Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*.

58. J. Coste, *Marian Vision*, p.466.

59. Coste develops this theme beautifully in *Marian Vision*, pp.466ff, and also in *Points of Continuity Between our Founders and Us*, pp.3-4.

60. The *Constitutions SM*(1987) when treating explicitly of the *ignoti et occulti* seem to support this point: "Like Mary they are to be gentle with others, respectful of their freedom, and sensitive to their point of view. In this spirit they are able to hear the longings of the people of God and discern the signs of hope present in today's world." (n.24).

61. *Constitutions 8M* (1872), n.118; *Constitutions 8M* (1987), n.11.

62. "The phrase 'unknown and even hidden in this world'... leads Marists to place themselves in the situation of those to whom they are sent and to put aside everything in themselves which might be an obstacle to the working of the Spirit." (*Constitutions SM* (1987), n.136; see also nn.22-24).

63. J. Coste, *Marian Vision*, p.452.

64. *Constitutions SM* (1872), n.8.

65. Le Puy revelation: OM 2, doc.718, 5.

66. *A Founder Speaks*, doc. 60,3.