

## *Historical Commentary on the Constitutions of the Society of Mary*

### **N. 8 - THE MARIST WAY IN THE APOSTOLATE : *IGNOTI ET QUASI OCCULTI***

#### **Foreword**

Due to its complexity, and to its position as the terminus of the historical development of the Constitutions, this article brings into play almost every aspect of the spirituality of Fr. Founder, and of the message that he left to the Society. Any commentary would presuppose that we have a clear grasp of the relative importance of these various aspects, and are in a position to synthesize them. We still lack too many detailed studies on the life or thought of Fr. Founder for such a synthesis to be possible at present.

Still we thought we might fulfil the request of our confreres to a great extent by presenting a detailed study of one of the most important elements in the whole of the article *De Societatis Spiritu*, namely, the well-known formula: *ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo*.

In fact, before appearing in the *De Societatis Spiritu*, this expression had been given as the distinctive characteristic of the Marist apostolate in N. 21 of the *Epitome*, which is nothing but the present N. 8 in condensed form<sup>1</sup>. In this commentary we shall try especially to uncover the origin and meaning of this formula for the apostolate. This is by no means an attempt to consider in its entirety the problem of what the hidden life meant to Father Founder and particularly those manifestations, after his retirement; of his own personal desire for a life withdrawn from the notice of men. What is of immediate interest to us is the very formula *ignoti et quasi occulti* as it was used by Fr. Founder in the Constitutions, or in his spoken instructions before 1854. Thanks to the recently completed Index to Fr. Mayet's Memoirs, we have been able to examine every known use of this formula. Placed back in its historical context, it will perhaps have a somewhat new ring for many a confrère. But what does this slight strangeness matter as long as it allows us to recapture in its full vigour and freshness the central insight which lies at the source of our Marist activities?

#### I.

#### **UNKNOWN AND HIDDEN IN THE WORLD**

This formula goes back to Fr. Colin's earliest work on the Rule at Cerdon. Undoubtedly we have here the oldest known element in our Constitutions. For this, we have the valuable testimony of Fr. Founder himself.

We know that in the course of the years 1869-1870, Frs. Jeantin and David, who were then working as Fr. Colin's secretaries, tried by every possible means to get some explicit statement from him relative to the miraculous events which they believed had occurred at the first writing of the Rule. Had not the inspirations often alluded to by Fr. Founder in veiled terms taken the form of a word-by-word dictation? Fr. David put the question to him openly in 1869. Fr. Colin's answer is found in three different passages of Fr. Jeantin's *Contemporary Notes*. To dispel this idea of a verbal dictation, and to guide his secretary towards a more interior and more accurate view of this inspiration, Fr. Founder had merely answered :

When God speaks to a soul He says much in few words. For instance, that phrase: Unknown and hidden in the world.<sup>2</sup>

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. Hence, it is preferable, from the historical point of view, to abstract from them completely. 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 centre 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

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<sup>1</sup> Since the substance of the *Epitome* text had been put in the *De Societatis Spiritu*, Fr. Colin's secretaries would have liked to have discarded it in 1869. In fact, Fr. Founder asked that *Ignoti et occulti* be retained in both passages. But to avoid a tiresome repetition, the secretaries put the primitive text in an abridged, modified form that left it colourless. Without delaying over this condensation, we shall comment at length upon the original text, which is perhaps one of the most compact, best-constructed texts that ever came from the pen of Fr. Founder.

<sup>2</sup> P. JEANTIN,

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. But really this is a telescoping of ideas that must be pointed out. Without wishing to give a detailed exposition of the conclusions that may be reached by an examination of the theme of Nazareth in Fr. Colin, we may note briefly, at least, that Nazareth is not really presented by Fr. Founder as a symbol expressing the Marist spirit until after the year 1853-54 in rather close connection with the semi-contemplative and eucharistic turn taken at that time by the spirituality of the solitary at la Neyliere. From a methodological point of view, we can only gain by making no a-priori identification of the idea of Nazareth with the *Ignoti et Occulti*, whose exact historical meaning we are here trying to elucidate.

These brief preliminary remarks will help us, no doubt, to consider without any preconceived notions the very simple, plain phrase which is our only concern at present: "Unknown and hidden in the world."

Let us note, first of all, that in the three passages of the Contemporary Notes of Fr. Jeantin, this formula appears written in the singular and not in the plural. The point has its significance. Of course, these words were *spoken* by Fr. Founder, and the rules of elision in the pronunciation of French are not so rigid that they would exclude in this case the possibility of confusion on the part of the hearer between the singular and plural, especially since Fr. David, who had heard this sentence, may have himself transmitted it orally to Fr. Jeantin. However, it should be noted that elisions were much more frequent in the nineteenth century than nowadays, and in a case such as this, the presumption rests in favour of the spelling adopted by the secretary. This is all the more true, since Fr. Jeantin, being used to the *Ignoti et occulti* of the Constitutions, in case of doubt should normally have tended to write the plural here. Furthermore, what especially inclines us to think that this formula first came to the mind of Fr. Colin in the singular is the fact that Fr. Founder, when not addressing a group of Marists, did not hesitate to use it in that form, even in Latin. Fr. Poupinel, who was Fr. Colin's companion during his second trip to Rome, said that he often heard him repeating his favourite expression: *Ignotus et occultus*.

With solid probability, therefore, it may be stated that the formula which concerns us, even before it was used by Fr. Founder in the plural as the ideal of a collectivity, must have come to him in the singular as a personal exigency, and as a light for his own religious life. Thus envisaged, the appearance of this phrase in the mind of Fr. Colin would be far more conformable to the internal laws of religious psychology. God's call, even when it is addressed to men as totally apostolic as a St. Paul or a St. Ignatius Loyola, always appears at first as a personal exigency, and it is in the secret dialogue of the soul with God that the ideas later destined to be impressed upon others acquire their true stature. Fr. Founder must also have known those privileged instants when a man's whole life flashes before him and there is cut into the mind words whose richness the rest of existence will fail to exhaust. At least, it is to a spiritual experience of this sort, more or less intense and decisive, that Fr. Colin's answer to Fr. David seems to direct us. The role which the formula *ignoti et occulti* later played in the decisions of Father Founder as Superior and Legislator of the Society would be sufficient, for one thing, to suggest how deeply these words had been imprinted upon the thought of Father Colin.

Inasmuch as we admit that in the expression "unknown and hidden in the world" Fr. Colin saw in the first place the expression of God's design on him, we cannot help wondering what this illumination can have meant concretely for the Curate of Cerdon. While there can be no question of giving an adequate answer to so delicate a problem, the subject allows for considerations which may guide us somewhat in our reflections.

Let us note, first of all, that for Fr. Colin as a curate, the mere idea of an unknown and hidden life cannot have constituted a "discovery," a new and unfamiliar element in his spiritual life. A careful study of the testimonies that have been kept concerning the childhood and adolescence of the young Jean Claude reveals, on the contrary, the very important part played in the psychological maturing of our Founder by his pronounced attraction for solitude and obscurity. Strong enough to counterbalance the perspective of the priestly vocation in the mind of the young seminarian, this spontaneous longing had grown deeper and more steady through the desire for a religious life with a Marian character, a desire that had taken its concrete form from the project of Abbe Courveille. So, strictly speaking, the Curate of Cerdon did not have to discover the ideal of the hidden life. Such an ideal was woven into the very fabric of his temperament, and had been accentuated by the troubles of his early education; it was present as a seed in the first manifestations of his exacting personal devotion as an adolescent; it was, for Fr. Colin, a basic element with which he would have to reckon all his life. This first fact is important to keep in mind when reflecting on the formula that concerns us here.

The second fact to be noted is the gradual acquisition, on the part of the Curate of Cerdon, of a more manly spiritual life, a more mature and enterprising way of acting than had characterized him when he left the seminary. Though many elements in the psychology of Fr. Colin as curate escape us, at least that general

orientation is clear. Cold and lifeless at the start of his ministry, unable to make a decision without writing to his director, prisoner of the very narrow outlook adopted at the Major Seminary, Fr. Colin was able to achieve a liberty of spirit and an activity full of initiative of which his missionary life gives a remarkable example. And if we consider Fr. Colin's attitude in reference to the project of the Society of Mary, the general curve which ends by bringing the most timid of the "twelve" at the Seminary to the feet of the Nuncio at Paris reveals an unquestionably open and positive psychological evolution.

Putting together the two facts that we have just considered obviously is far from sufficient for giving us the interpretation of the formula *Unknown and hidden*, and we must guard against building upon these a systematic explanation that could only be partial. But these two remarks do at least permit us to put negative limits on the scope of the expression which we must try to understand. Awakening to the reality summed up in the words "Unknown and hidden in the world" cannot have meant for Fr. Colin the first discovery of the ideal of an obscure life that he already carried within himself; nor an interior call to less initiative and activity, since, on the contrary, we see his spiritual life turn very firmly in the opposite direction. If these very plain words appeared to Father Founder, according to his own expression, as God's word for him, it is because they introduced into his life a new exigency that cannot be identified merely with the tendency of his natural temperament. Thus we are led to think that in this meaningful formula Father Founder has discerned not so much the material fact of a life withdrawn from the attention of men, as the real spiritual value of such an existence, and the role that obscurity itself could play in the fulfilment of God's designs upon him. It is at this point that we should stress the import of those three words *in the world* which give a very definite orientation to the adjectives *unknown and hidden*. Apparently, it is not so much a question of being sheltered from the curiosity of men, as of taking up in the world the position that God Himself suggests. One may readily suspect that all manner of riches may flow from this single, central insight.

We cannot very well proceed any further here, nor can we hope to penetrate to the core the meaning of this privileged experience of Fr. Colin. Yet these first steps in a study of the positive meaning of this original formula will help, we hope, to better understand its further development. And this development, in turn, will give an indirect confirmation of the dynamism inherent from the beginning in this personal intuition of a particular way of being present to the world.

## II. FIRST USES OF THE FORMULA

The idea so strongly impressed on the mind of Fr. Colin by these words *Unknown and hidden in the world* was destined to see its significance broadened, and to become the characteristic of the entire Society of Mary, in proportion to the growing awareness of the Curate of Cerdon that he actually bore before God the spiritual responsibility for this work. Though the minor, and even the major, seminarian, had never thought of being a founder, still the young priest in his rectory cell realized that a mission weighed upon his shoulders. The "event" which thus determined Abbe Colin to put down the basic points for a Rule, and to take personal charge of the Society will always remain for us shrouded in that secrecy which ordinarily accompanies the intimate action of God in a soul. But that transformation into a Founder of the mere aspirant at the Seminary stands as the central fact outside of which the history of our Society and its spirituality remain unintelligible. We have a significant trace of it in the use made for the benefit of the entire Society, of a spiritual formula which was anchored so deeply in the personal life of Fr. Colin.

The first two known instances of the use of this formula in the plural merit our special attention since they are the only two that we possess for the twenty years which extend from the beginning of the ministry at Cerdon to the approbation of the Society.

The expression appears for the first time in a written document coming not from the pen of Fr. Colin but from the Foundress of the Marist Sisters, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn, writing to Bishop Devie, November 15, 1824.

Authorized by the Bishop of Belley a year earlier to set up a community, and already numbering eight members, the first Marist Sisters, at that date, were not yet allowed to wear a religious habit, properly so called, and they still resided at Cerdon in a rented house that was ill-suited for a convent. Under these conditions the families of Cerdon who saw one after another of their daughters joining the embryonic community could scarcely be made to believe that this project had a truly religious character. There would have to be an official ceremony for the taking of the habit to consecrate the true character of the nascent congregation in everyone's eyes, and the congregation would have to find a more suitable dwelling-place. Such is the brunt of the letter of Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn to the Bishop, and we know she won her case since on the following eighth of December

there took place at Cerdon the first clothing of the Marist Sisters, and in the month of July, 1825 they moved into the convent of Bon Repos at Belley.

Recalling these circumstances was indispensable for a correct understanding of the principal sentence in this letter which must retain us here:

We realize and have been very satisfied with the path that Your Grace has made us keep, that we should remain hidden and unknown in the eyes of men. It is the mode of action that was intended from the instant that there was thought of this work. We hope that Providence will indicate to Your Grace the time when it is to be known and a little less hidden, especially in the eyes of men.

First of all, what this phrase reveals, or rather, confirms for us is the extreme primitiveness in the Society of Mary of a way of acting recalled by the adjectives “unknown and hidden.” *From the instant that there was thought of this work* those words have characterized *the mode of action to be followed*. To grasp the import of the use of the impersonal (“on” in French), we must remember that the Foundress of the Sisters, despite a long-standing desire for the religious life that had kept after her, had not had the idea of a Society of Mary by herself. It was a call from Cerdon that specified her vocation in this sense, a call that took place about a year after the beginning of Fr. Colin’s ministry. In recalling the first moments when *there was thought of this work*, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn must have been making allusion, therefore, not to a personal project, but to the fund of ideas that she had found already constituted on her arrival at the rectory of Cerdon, and which corresponded to the first intuitions of Fr. Colin.

This letter to Bishop Davie that we are now considering shows to what extent she had made these ideas her own. The Bishop’s temporizing attitude kept the tiny community in a difficult and somewhat humiliating situation. But in the thought that even this obscurity fell in line with the vocation of the Society, Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn could find comfort and peace. Yet there is here no passive acceptance of this *de facto* situation. In a way at once discreet and pointed, the Foundress reminds the Bishop that the young community would appreciate setting aside the present situation and being truly recognized as a religious congregation. However, the final say is God’s, and they confidently wait upon His Will.

This twofold, complementary aspect of the thought of Jeanne-Marie Chavoïn already foreshadows the tension that will form both the richness and the complexity of the formula *ignoti et occulti* all through Fr. Colin’s use of it. Marists willingly agree to remain in the shadows; they even see this obscurity as a providential arrangement corresponding to the line of conduct the Society wants to follow. And yet, this obscurity is not sought for itself, and there can be no question of its standing in the way of the aim of the Society, or of its extension, insofar as the latter seems willed by God. This first sketch, still imperfect, already contains the essential premises of a problem that will continually become deeper and more specific.

Due to the almost total lack of documents prior to the approbation of the Society we must pass over nine years before finding a new application of the *Unknown and hidden*. This time it comes from the pen of Fr. Colin himself and appears in a document of an official character: the *Summarium* of 1833.

The first chapter of this *Summarium* is devoted to the priestly branch of the Society: It presents in two separate sections: the general rules, consisting mainly in spiritual recommendations, and the particular rules, to be applied to the different types of ministry in the Society. We find *Ignoti et occulti* mentioned in the first section. After speaking of poverty, obedience, modesty and charity, Fr. Founder devotes a large section to humility. It begins as follows:

Ad exemplum B. Mariae, occulti et quasi ignoti in mundo vivere nitantur; honores humilitate fugiant, muneraque honorifica timeant (s, 32 - Fasc. I, p. 69).

After this is the listing of sanctions directed against anyone who would plot for the office of Superior, and the interdiction of receiving any dignities outside the Society.

As a whole, therefore, this section on humility centres upon a notion that is largely negative, namely the avoidance of any honours. Only the first sentence gives a more general principle: Marists must strive to live unknown and hidden in the world after the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Here for the first time mention is made of the motivating principle for the unknown and hidden life: the example of Mary - which does not entitle us to say that this Marian note was absent from Fr. Colin’s first intuition. It is even probable that it was a determining factor from the very start. And we will have occasion to explain this at length when we examine in what sense Fr. Founder referred us to the hidden life of Mary. It is

enough to point out here the presence of this Marian reference in the first written document of Fr. Colin that contains our formula.

Another noteworthy point in the text of the *Summarium* is the fact that *Ignoti et occulti* comes in only as the manifestation of one particular virtue amongst others, namely, humility. Thus it would seem that the intuition of Cerdon had not yet achieved that central position in the Rule which was due to it, perhaps because it had not revealed all its potentialities nor been fully matured. In a few years, there will come a deepened understanding that will leave a decisive mark on all further use of our formula.

### III. THE APOSTOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FORMULA (*Epitome*, 21)

Between the 1833 *Summarium* of the Society's Rule as it existed before Fr. Colin's first trip to Rome, and the Rule of 1836, the first two parts of which we know through the *Epitome*, several events had occurred which were to exert a decisive, enduring influence on the thought of Fr. Founder. At Rome, Fr. Colin had discovered the Constitutions of St. Ignatius and had adopted their general plan. At Rome, too, through contact with the Congregations he had learnt to re-centre his Rule on the essentials, replacing minute cramping regulations with more general principles that could serve as more effective guides for action. Finally, and above all, there had been the offer and the acceptance of the missions of Oceania; this was to give the newly approved Society a powerful impetus towards the apostolate. These three influences had greatly contributed to setting up the Society of Mary along the lines of an eminently active congregation. Consequently, there should be no surprise at seeing that under this impetus the *Ignoti et Occulti* itself takes on a new dimension and acquires a much more central position in the Rule.

Here is the text of the *Epitome* in which our formula appears:

Eisdem ob causas et ad removenda omnia majoris fructus in vinea Domini impedimenta, humiles corde se ubique praebeant, tantaque cum prudentia et imprimis modestia se undequaque gerant, nemini occasionem vituperii dantes, ut B. Virginis Mariae vestigiis inhaerendo, etsi ad quaecumque ministeria pro animarum salute se possint impendere ac pro facultate debeant, occulti tamen et ignoti in mundo esse quasi videantur (e, 21 - Fasc. II, p. 19).

This compact sentence, with its carefully weighed terms, already poses in all its richness and complexity the problem of our hidden apostolate. We have no hesitations about commenting in detail upon its expressions, for these constitute so many headings under which fall naturally the various uses of the *Ignoti et Occulti* made orally by Fr. Founder and preserved in Fr. Mayet's *Memoirs*.

#### **A. The *Ignoti* and the Universal Scope of Our Ministry**

The most evidently striking feature of this long sentence of the *Epitome* is the juxtaposition of *Ignoti et occulti* with a formula that stresses very much the all-embracing character of the Marist apostolate: *Etsi ad quaecumque ministeria. . . ignoti tamen et occulti*. By joining these two affirmations so closely, Fr. Founder established, without any possible equivocation, that the hidden life, much as he meant it to be practised in the Society, was perfectly reconcilable with the most varied forms of the apostolate. Nor was it only an occasional paradox. On the contrary, this is one of the points that Fr. Founder has most explicitly emphasized in his spoken exhortations.

Listen to Fr. Mayet, recording for us with his usual fidelity some such words of Fr. Colin:

He concluded by saying that we must serve Holy Mother Church with all our strength. For, he said, everything the other Societies have done, in particular everything the Jesuits have done, we must do, depending on God and Mary. But always *ignoti et quasi occulti* according to our calling. Let us, therefore, stick closely to our calling. Although we must exclude no work of zeal from our activities, we must always remain *ignoti et quasi occulti*. The Rule says that although we must give ourselves to all types of ministry, to all the works of zeal, nevertheless, we must conduct ourselves so as to be *ignoti et occulti*. We must do good in a hidden way. Take up all sorts of works, but always remaining *ignoti et occulti*.

These repeated declarations of Fr. Founder are so clear that it is difficult to understand how there could periodically appear in the Society, even from the nineteenth century, the practical conviction according to which the ideal of the hidden life should exclude the Society of Mary from this or that type of ministry, and restrict it to works of a limited scope. At any rate, such an interpretation of the *Ignoti et occulti* cannot in any way claim its authority from the thought of Fr. Colin. More than a concern about being in conformity to the Founder, there may sometimes have come in to play here a certain natural pusillanimity which gladly covered with a typically Marist formula that unavowed fear of action which always has so many secret allies within ourselves.

We would not have felt authorized to make such a remark if we were not backed up on this point by a weighty precedent. In 1867 Fr. Mayet thought it necessary to insert into the copy of his Memoirs an extremely forceful note on this subject. We do not hesitate to reproduce it here since, in accord with the true intentions of Fr. Colin, it puts its finger exactly on that very temptation:

May we be permitted to remark that Father did say unceasingly: *Ignoti et occulti*, but not *mortui*. 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 the 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.

It would be pointless to insist upon this pitfall at any greater length, but side by side with it there is another preoccupation, much more generous, that may likewise make us forget the nuances of Fr. Colin's thought. Fr. Founder's very marked emphasis upon poor and abandoned works may have led some to believe, and this again already in the last century, that the Society, for all practical purposes, should limit itself to that type of ministry, and this choice would in some way be imposed on us by our formula *ignoti et occulti*. Actually, this is a mistaken view. No doubt, Fr. Founder's marked inclination for the most forsaken ministry, his desire that the Society should be devoted to that in preference to more eye-catching work, does constitute one of the most appealing aspects of his apostolic intuition, which coincides on this point with that of a Vincent de Paul, an Alphonsus Liguori, or a Bishop de Mazenod. Very much along that line are the two paragraphs of the present Constitutions which indicate a criterion for choosing ministry, and it would be easy to show how the idea they express was deeply rooted in Fr. Colin's thought. But even when he gave this criterion, Fr. Founder subordinated it to the typically Ignatian maxim: "Provided that the glory given to God be the same." The determining factor, therefore, always remains the greater glory of God and the greater honour of Mary. As with St. Ignatius, this implies the acceptance on principle of the most varied types of ministry. "Everything the Jesuits have done the Marist may do." These words, often repeated by Fr. Colin in equivalent terms, confirm very clearly his thought on the necessity of an all-embracing Marist apostolate. Within this very broad framework, the insistence on the ministry to the poor retains its full force, and nothing authorizes us to minimize it, since it is written in our Rule. But the very fact that this is a matter of preference and not applicable to all cases suggests that this criterion should be carefully distinguished from the principle *Ignoti et occulti* which we have just seen to be universally valid. We can never penetrate the thought of Fr. Colin with any precision unless we make that distinction, which he himself stated very clearly on certain occasions:

Let us be everywhere, let us do all the good possible while remaining modest and hidden. But, Gentlemen, the Society must also strive after learning, otherwise it would not achieve its goal. There are some who think that Marists should undertake only hidden, unknown, abandoned works. . . Gentlemen, the Society does not refuse these, it prefers them, it will always have a predilection for such works; those who are so attracted will be able to devote themselves to them if obedience

permits. But the Society will not shrink from any ministry, from any work; it is called to do everything. It is like a soldier who goes wherever there is danger, wherever there is need of his strength.

The preference of the Society for hidden and unwanted works, and the Rule that Marists be hidden and unknown in all the fields of their apostolate, represent, therefore, two different aspects of the thought of Fr. Colin. Nothing is gained by trying to reduce them to a single unity. Of course, there is a profound relationship between them, but to have it understood that the *Ignoti et occulti* implies *per se* a definite preference for certain types of ministry is at least a deviation from Fr. Colin's way of speaking, and by that very fact creates confusion. The same methodological concern that made us distinguish earlier between the *Ignoti et occulti* and the idea of *Nazareth* now leads us to this second distinction, which can also help us grasp more precisely the meaning of our formula for the Marist apostolate.

For Fr. Founder, then, being *ignoti et occulti* is perfectly reconcilable with the most varied forms of the apostolate. Yet that statement is only a preliminary step, incapable as such of giving us the real positive content of Father Colin's expression. This positive content is really the important thing to understand. To get at that, it will be enough for us to comment upon the remaining actions of the sentence that we are now considering, here again basing ourselves on the statements of Father Founder himself.

## **B. The Ignoti as a Means for the Apostolate**

*Easdem ob causas...*

This expression, found equivalently in nn. 16 and 21 of the Epitome, was for Fr. Colin a means of linking each feature of this first part of the Rule with its principal object, namely, the ends and scope of the Society. In the last analysis, the reasons for wanting to be *ignoti et occulti* lie in the desire to accomplish the mission of our Congregation, that mission which Number 1 has already described in terms so urgent and so comprehensive.

*et ad removenda omnia majoris fructus in vinea Domini impedimenta.*

With these words we touch upon one of the ideas most frequently developed by Fr. Colin in his comments on *Ignoti et occulti* during his time as Superior General. To remain unknown and hidden in the world is to do away with the main obstacles that offer opposition at the present time to any truly productive apostolate and to all progress in the Lord's vineyard. We can see here how inadequate it would be to merely say that this typically Marist attitude is "reconcilable" with the apostolate. Actually it is a means for the apostolate; it constitutes a special way of working in the Lord's vineyard, a way that gives hope of overcoming certain obstacles, and thus achieving greater results.

Because there has not been sufficient attention given to this aspect by Fr. Jeantin and those who followed him, we must let Fr. Founder himself speak of it at length.

The first recorded instance found in Mayet of Fr. Colin's speaking of the formula *Ignoti et occulti* occurs in a situation where there is already question of getting rid of obstacles and by that very fact assuring a more effective apostolate :

I want us to be un-noticed in the Church, *quasi occulti*. Unnoticed from every point of view. I don't even want us to be outstanding in piety. A simple ordinary piety with nothing striking. As for modesty, nothing extraordinary. When the Jesuits arose, the Lutherans were maligning the clergy, and the times were quite different from the present; the needs differed too. Many precautions were necessary. They (the Jesuits) were given very peculiar rules of modesty. Nowadays, there are some who would be attracted by that, but *others would be driven away*. I wouldn't want our modesty to be anything out of the line of regular ordinary modesty. We should be no more noticeable for that than for anything else : *quasi ignoti*. There's a certain way of acting with the students' parents : don't talk too much about piety, that keeps *them at a distance*. They say: "What's all this about?" Often *they succeed best* whose piety is the simplest, the most natural. *They are Less mistrusted*. Look at Fr. X. Often with just one or two conversations he brings to the Confessional men who were a long way from it.

The phrases we have taken the liberty of underlining clearly express the significance for the apostolate that Fr. Founder saw in not drawing attention to ourselves. Of course, this effacement is not primarily an expedient, an effective “trick”; we shall have occasion very shortly to see the profound inspiration underlying it. But it does, unquestionably, constitute a *means* for the apostolate. We must not pass over this aspect in silence, since Father Founder was not afraid to insist upon it time and again:

Coming back to the article *tanquam ignoti et occulti*, he said: After all, Gentlemen, that’s actually the way to take over everything. That’s the way the Church followed, and you know that we must have no other model but the primitive Church. The Society is beginning with poor, simple men, too. But see what the Church later accomplished

Always remember our motto: *ignoti et quasi occulti*. Today there’s no other way of doing good

Let’s remain small, Gentlemen. I say this so that no one will ever want to change our way of doing things. That’s the only way to do any good: be small. The Society is called to do an immense amount of good. It must be faithful to its vocation. Small. *Ignoti et occulti*. The times demand it. We must keep in step with the times.

Fr. Colin’s last official words to the Society, at the end of the Chapter of 1872, will once more reaffirm this point:

Let us always be *Ignoti et occulti in mundo*. If we hide in the midst of men we will draw them to us. But if, on the contrary, we put ourselves forward, they will resist us.

These different passages from Fr. Founder, and many others in which he has the same idea without any explicit mention of *Ignoti et occulti*, all go to show that Fr. Colin had clearly sensed the efficacy of an unknown, hidden way of life for the apostolate of his times. It is very likely that Fr. Founder had first experienced this for himself, and that his temperament had played a great part in it. It is not for us to consider this point by itself right now. Only a complete biography could provide a safe criterion for this. But on the other hand, we cannot pass by without some analysis on a more objective plane of those obstacles that Fr. Founder meant to push aside with the help of his *Ignoti et occulti*. In fact, we will thereby acquire a much deeper understanding of this formula.

At the very beginning of their ministry, Fr. Founder and his companions encountered the *first obstacle* to a fruitful apostolate in the style currently in vogue then for preaching and missions. Charged with the reconquest for God and for Religion of the parishes snatched from them by the Revolution, the missionaries of the Restoration spontaneously conceived their work as a re-installation, a re-establishment of the rights of God that had been denied, a return to a Society based upon the recognition of these rights. Even when the alliance between the political Restoration and the religious Restoration was not at all evident nor put into practise, the fundamental outlook on the missions remained necessarily a condemnation of the immediate past, and a triumphant re-entry of Religion into the same places from which it had been chased. No wonder then that preaching took on an authoritarian, domineering tone. Contemporary witnesses have left us many examples indicative of the technique of taking by storm; excessive severity, terrifying exaggerations, affected declaiming and gesturing: all were current coin. And this style, had survived even after the Revolution of 1830 had demonstrated the impossibility of a return to pre-Revolutionary forms both in the field of politics and of religion.

The collection of Fr. Colin’s sermons is still there to show that during his own missions in Bugey he, too, had thundered loudly on occasion to awaken the Faith amongst a peasant population dulled by thirty years without religion. But he seems to have had a subtle feeling of how domineering preaching which sought to force the approval of the listeners proved ineffective and harmful in the liberal, critical-minded atmosphere of the July Monarchy:

Gentlemen, each century has its peculiar disease; formerly there was Faith, though the heart was ill. Today, the disease has mounted to the head. We live in a century of pride and madness. This spirit must be cured by our simplicity, our humility. In the pulpit, let’s not look as though we want to dominate; otherwise we will keep people at a distance. More than ever before, man is jealous of his liberty, his independence.

Let's be small; let's be humble: In the pulpit if we try to be victorious and take men by assault, they will bolt and escape us. We must take them from beneath.

What must be kept in mind when we hear Fr. Founder urging preachers to be *ignoti et occulti* are those exhortations to a humble approach free from any attempt at intimidation. Speaking to the preachers in 1844, he added, after recommending to them a certain dignity: "However, let there be nothing severe or affected about us. Let's be *quasi occulti*"; and in 1846: "Let us work, but always *ignoti et occulti*. Let's forget about those who rely on purely human eloquence".

While the first text is especially concerned with the attitude of the preacher outside the pulpit, the second applies the Marist formula to the very act of preaching. The meaning is that the Marist must, in general, renounce all artificiality in the exercise of his ministry. Thus the *ignoti et occulti* sweeps aside the first obstacle to an effective and truly supernatural activity.

The *second obstacle* hindering the apostolic activity of religious congregations at the time of Fr. Colin's Generalate was the rather widespread suspicion in which they were held by Government and Bishops alike. The former looked unfavourably upon the presence in its territory of clerics directly attached to Rome; the latter feared the encroachments upon their Episcopal jurisdiction. In any case, the situation was precarious for most of the religious bodies due to the lack of legal approbation, a weak point of which the liberal anticlerical press was well aware.

An extreme reserve was thus imposed on the religious, and they found silence and obscurity the best working conditions for the apostolate. To be convinced of this, we have only to listen to the authoritative testimony of the Nuncio, Mgr. Garibaldi, writing to Rome in 1838:

As has happened before, I noticed that the Minister (Barthe) really has no aversion to the establishments in question after all; perhaps he would even look favourably upon them, but he fears that some embarrassment for the government may arise from them, especially if all this is carried out in a noisy way with too much publicity. I agree with Mr. Barthe on this point, namely that the religious institutes, old and new, should carry on in France, in the present state of affairs, with a lot of prudence and circumspection, and *do the good they can without being anxious to have themselves talked about*. For instance, we have here the Jesuit Fathers and the Fathers of Mercy, who actually do a lot of good, but *they do it precisely because they do not even, seem to exist*.

The Nuncio's evaluation of the Jesuits' way of acting is not an exaggeration. This was the time when Fr. de Ravignan, the preacher at Notre Dame, was known simply as Abbe de Ravignan. But actually, a few years would be enough to bring the religious state back into the limelight. By a magnificent stroke of genius, Lacordaire succeeded in securing popular support for the re-establishment of the Dominicans in France. Undergoing renewed attacks, the Jesuits had to courageously attempt their own defence before the public in 1844; the following year, the government, in accord with Rome, decreed their suppression.

In this touchy situation, *Ignoti et occulti* remained for Fr. Colin the golden rule for guiding the Society. With the passage of time, we now realize the profound wisdom of this attitude, which was also so clearly in accord with the wishes of the Roman Court. At any rate, there could be no more faithful echo of the Nuncio's words than Fr. Colin's own statements relative to the Society's position in these difficult times. Listen to him speaking on January 27, 1845, just as the campaign against the Jesuits was breaking out :

They say: We must do good. I say that in the present century we must do it as our Rule would have us do everything: *tanquam ignoti et occulti*. We were born in the shadows. Let's stay there as much as we can. I know that we cannot remain there forever, but. . . Before many years, Gentlemen, we shall be violently persecuted. They will accuse us of being Jesuits, Jesuits in disguise. We mustn't be afraid of that, but neither must we provoke it.

The last part of this passage indicates sufficiently that the attitude praised by Fr. Colin was not based on fear but on wisdom. The same discriminating supernatural balance is found in this other statement made at the very moment when there had already broken forth the campaign that would culminate in the Revolution of 1848. Commenting precisely on the words *Ignoti et occulti*, Fr. Founder remarked :

This, Gentlemen, is one of the characteristics of the Society, and according to the spirit of its special calling, this is the one that should distinguish it from others that have preceded it, and whom I neither judge nor condemn. The animosity against some of these does not seem to me to

spring entirely from hatred of religion. It could be that, for many, this antagonism is partly due to the way of acting adopted by some of these communities. I have heard it said that at one time there were bishops who, out of a sense of duty and for the sake of principle, upheld certain religious congregations while at heart they, personally, would not have been displeased to see them get out of their dioceses. Let's profit by their example. Try to adopt a modest way of acting that will cause the least possible resentment amongst those with whom we live, and that is in accord with our calling and with the spirit of the Blessed Virgin whose name we bear.

Within the context of the same crisis of 1848, Fr. Founder was led to denounce, always in the name of this key-concept, *a third handicap* to truly apostolic action : mixing politics and religion.

It is well known to what extent the religious and political Restorations had thought they could support each other in France after 1815. The Revolution of 1830, on the contrary, had thrown a great part of the Catholics into opposition to the government, while an active minority were trying to turn to the Church's benefit the liberal ideas that had given birth to the new regime. For a few years, however, the struggle for freedom of education had united Catholics in a common fight against the government. In brief, no longer bound by the common fidelity to a monarchy of divine right, Christians were learning to take position politically, and the clergy spontaneously entered the arena with the full weight of their influence. It is easy enough for us to see nowadays to what costly consequences this mixture of religion and politics was to lead. But there was far more merit in seeing the obstacle at that very moment and in avoiding it by giving the work of the apostolate a strictly religious orientation. With rare insight, Fr. Colin seems to have achieved this and, here again, he sums up the Marist attitude in this delicate matter by *Ignoti et occulti*.

On January 30, 1848, less than a month before the Revolution, Fr. Founder affirmed his indifference to any form of government, in connection with the opportuneness of obtaining from the government legal approbation for the Society:

Some will say: But if, as everyone expects, another government replaces the present one, won't the approbation obtained from this one be to our disadvantage? What will we do? Gentlemen, it is an understandable reaction, but if another government should come, we would be to that what we have been to this. We would accommodate ourselves even to a Republic, and we would carry on our mission under a Republic. . . Gentlemen, the Church does business and deals with this government; let us do as the Church does. In a way, the times in which we live are worse than those of the Apostles; but look, the Apostles didn't say anything; they performed their task and worked for the Church. I'll be touching up the Rule and I intend to outlaw once more anything that has to do with politics. It's up to the Bishops to take the initiative. We're auxiliary troops, which doesn't stop us from doing a lot of good; on the contrary, it's a means for doing it. Who would ever say the Lazarists are not accomplishing much? I know exactly what they think of them at Rome, how much they are esteemed there. They aren't noisy about it; they don't get themselves talked about. That's how we must be. Here's what I would like the members of the Society of Mary to be: learned priests, modest without anything put on, doing all sorts of good, but still keeping *ignoti et quasi occulti*.

These counsels of Fr. Founder did not remain a dead letter. The testimony given by a layman around the end of that troubled year enables us to realize this and to hear a fresh reminder on this subject from Father Colin:

A layman just mentioned to me : Everybody is well aware of what the Marists are doing, but nobody talks about it. You can see that they do not talk politics in the pulpit; you can even tell just by listening to them that they are not all taken up with the newspapers; and people are edified by it. I was very pleased to hear it. Gentleman, that is the way we must always work. We must do good in a hidden way, take up all sorts of work, but always remaining *ignoti et occulti*.

A few days later, Fr. Colin made an even closer connection between aloofness from politics and the maxim of the Society:

There are practising Catholics in all parties; there are some amongst the former Republicans, and others amongst the Republicans-to-be. 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*.

Whether it was a question of avoiding the dangers of authoritarian preaching, of side-stepping the disastrous disputes brought on by over-conspicuous activities, or of keeping away from dangerous alliances of politics and religion, Fr. Founder discovered in the principle *ignoti et occulti* the secret of an apostolate that could be more free, more clearly supernatural, and thereby, more lastingly effective. Besides, these three *impediments* were only particular aspects of a more general difficulty overshadowing all religious activity in the France of the nineteenth century. In this modern society, born of the Revolution, which was so jealous of its autonomy, and extremely sensitive to any clerical meddling in the secular sphere, the Church could not hope to cling to the place that had been hers in a State belonging to Christendom. She must present the Gospel message in a form shorn of all worldly prestige, respectful of the personal dignity of each, caring less about reclaiming rights than about rediscovering a path to souls.

Fr. Colin had a deep grasp of this need of his age; but the telling point for us is the fact that, far from vanishing with time, the problem that Fr. Founder coped with has only grown in amplitude and urgency. The autonomy of temporal society with regard to the Church is becoming greater and greater and the Church sometimes finds in the prestige and power that she inherits from a long past not an aid but an obstacle to the apostolate. The setting up of the Communist regime in traditionally Catholic countries has at times tragically illustrated the existence of *impediments* that had blunted the effectiveness of the apostolic work. The impressive accounts which have come to our notice on this score would suffice to show the dramatic timeliness of the method of religious activity evoked in a positive way by Fr. Colin in the words *ignoti et occulti*.

Here again, though, it would be regrettable to put so much emphasis on the aptness and effectiveness of this apostolic technique as to forget its genuine spiritual content. The sentence from the Epitome which we are commenting upon is there to recall this to our minds : although *Ignoti* is a means for the apostolate, it is also a consequence: *tanta cum prudentia, modestia. . . se gerant. . . ut occulti et ignoti in mundo esse videantur*. Genuine supernatural self-effacement (the only type that concerns us here) springs naturally from a certain interior attitude which Fr. Founder breaks down into its constituent elements in the main clause of the text under consideration.

### C. The Spiritual Content of the Hidden Apostolate

*Humiles corde se ubique praebeant, tantaque cum prudentia et imirrimis modestia se undequaque gerant, nemini occasionem vituperii dantes ut...*

While resorting to the standard vocabulary of the virtues, Fr. Colin apparently wanted to avoid having this description interpreted in the form of an overly strict theological ascetical definition. By writing *se praebeant* and especially the unwieldy Gallicism *se gerant cum*, he clearly indicated that he was thinking of something pre-eminently concrete, namely, the Marist's spiritual attitude in the actual exercise of his ministry. For, we must not forget the definitely apostolic nature of this whole sentence of the Epitome. In a few words, Fr. Colin sketches a whole spirituality, but a spirituality for apostles which finds its expression in the very attitude adopted with souls.

These few remarks indicate the way to a clear grasp of Fr. Colin's thought in this matter. The only sure point of departure for recapturing the meaning of the expressions is Fr. Founder's own exhortations in which the expressions used here come back again and again. Here, however, we must renounce citing texts, for each one of them expresses only a very limited, particularised aspect of Fr. Founder's thought, without offering us any definition. Moreover, these different characteristics are played in such close harmony that they tend to become confused. As a result, the best we can do is indicate the dominant tone of each of the expressions used here by Fr. Colin, such as it emerges from his exhortations taken as a whole. Along with this, we will mention the principal practical attitudes that are most often connected with these traits.

*To be humble of heart.* For Fr. Founder that means to work without relying on ourselves but depending upon God alone. The *humility of heart* defined in this way was expressly distinguished by Fr. Colin from *humility of mind*, which is a reasoning process whereby we are led to recognize the nothingness of our position as creatures and the wretchedness of our condition as sinners. We know that Fr. Founder recalled these conclusions drawn from reason often enough in his exhortations; but they do not interest us directly here. For, humility of heart is not the fruit of thought but of prayer, of limitless confidence in the power of God. It finds its full expression in the prayer so often recommended by Fr. Founder in all sorts of circumstances: "My God, I am nothing, but this I

know: you can do great things through me". In Fr. Founder's opinion the man who best incarnated this apostolic humility was St. Francis Regis, the apostle of the country district of Vivarais, who, despite an astonishing poverty of means, had brought back a whole region to God. On this point, Fr. Colin liked to recall that this deep-rooted humility, dependent solely upon God, makes us more effective instruments of God's Mercy. The humble hearted man, not trying to push his point of view, is a unifying, strengthening element in a team of missionaries; he strives to put the others in the limelight and thus gives everyone a chance to do his best. Moreover, devoid of all pretence he succeeds where others can get no results. Far from being a consolation prize for failure, humility of heart, on the contrary, thus stifles failure at its source. Father Founder once heard that a Marist wanted to retire from the active ministry because he was not succeeding; his remark on that occasion shows better than any other how he could see in humility the fountainhead of a more productive apostolate:

There is no success because there is too much looking at self, too little dependence on God; if we forgot self, and had confidence in God, we would succeed in the tasks which have been confided to us.

*To act prudently* - for the apostolic man, that means striving to find in every circumstance the right words or the practical decision that will assure the maximum spiritual benefit for these souls here and now. Naturally such a definition does not take in all that Fr. Founder understood by the word prudence. There is the prudence of a Superior in the exercise of his administration, and the prudence of the Marist in the whole gamut of his social contacts, of which Fr. Colin had spoken at length. What concerns us more directly here is prudence in the actual exercise of the ministry; the prudence that removes the *impediments* to apostolic activity. What is the best way to avoid anything that could lead the faithful to refuse, or break off with, the Church? How can we discover, or even originate, those answers which, without giving in on principles, will avoid breaking the bruised reed, and will offer souls that last chance for salvation? These are the questions that constitute the true field of priestly prudence in the mind of Fr. Founder: As early as 1838 (the year Fr. Mayet began to record his sayings) Fr. Founder gave an example of this priestly prudence which deserves to be quoted in full:

He then talked a lot about the prudence of Fr. Convers. One day, he said, a priest gave a rather strong sermon on the words: *Outside the Church, no salvation*. That sermon upset the whole parish, in which there were some Protestants. The following Sunday, Fr. Convers mounted the pulpit, and without contradicting what had been said a few days before, he skilfully went back over the same subject, explained the Christian doctrine with gentleness and moderation, and put everyone's mind at rest. This had a fine effect, and spread such good will that the Sub-prefect himself immediately paid him a visit. Harsh zeal will never accomplish anything in these sections. Since he's been in that parish of Cognac, one man has refused the sacraments. And what did Fr. Convers do? He always went to visit him, as though he were well-received; but he was careful not to have others present. This man insulted him; Fr. Convers knelt and prayed for him. He went on this way for some time without making any fuss about it, and he was thought to be fulfilling the duties of his ministry for this man. The man died. Fr. Convers buried him without raising any difficulties, and with all the ceremonies. And he did the right thing. If he had acted otherwise, he would have upset the whole parish which is just beginning to open up to him, and which is full of people who don't bother with confession and who practise no religion. Gentlemen, how I love that maxim which Rome follows: *Everything for souls*.

"Everything for souls." This principle, repeated by Fr. Colin on other occasions in similar circumstances, clearly expresses the eminently supernatural character of this apostolic prudence. It is easy enough to get some idea of how to apply this in the pulpit and in the confessional, for Fr. Jeantin has carefully collected all the most striking texts of Fr. Colin on this subject in volume IV of his life of Fr. Founder, pp. 168-186, reproduced in the *Doctrine Spirituelle*, pp. 85-99. Much better than the chapter in volume V entitled *Prudence and Simplicity*, which gathers together numerous instances of Fr. Colin's way of acting which was strongly stamped with his own personal temperament, those pages in volume IV will give us an idea of what, for Fr. Colin, constituted the prudence of the Marist apostle. We might well sum them up by saying that it is a matter of bending all the resources of our intelligence and of our tact to the one single objective which must become a passion for us: the concrete spiritual well-being of those confided to our ministry.

*To act modestly*: this final point means avoiding as much as possible anything in our ministry that would throw us into the limelight, and attract attention to ourselves. In this instance, too, we must admit that Fr. Founder gave modesty a very broad meaning, and often included under this title part of what we have analyzed under the words “humility” and “prudence.” But the predominant note still remains that of self-effacement: letting ourselves be forgotten, not talking about the Society, neither for nor against, not thinking that we are the only ones doing any good, not fighting over matters of precedence in processions or anywhere else, not becoming singular by reason of an original style of preaching which would show poor taste. These are all just so many ways for a Marist to sink out of sight in the exercise of his ministry and to cast aside that final *impediment* which drags in the wake of an overbearing, self-centred personality. No need to insist at length on this aspect since it is the one the Marist tradition has most faithfully cherished, sometimes to the point of reducing, to this attitude of modesty the *ignoti et occulti*. We have just seen, on the contrary that that expression connotes a much broader and more nuanced way of acting.

Neither will we devote much time to the incidental clause *ncmini occasionem vituperii dantes*, an evident echo of St. Paul’s words (II Cor. 6:3). Though this is by no means a negligible point in Fr. Founder’s thought, our analysis of the *obstacles* to the apostolate is equivalent to a commentary upon it. Radical preaching, imprudent parading of religious activity, regrettable interference in politics - all these are legitimate grievances that public opinion or the government would be quick to raise against our ministry to our great disadvantage. Without going back over what we said above, it is enough to point out that at least three times Fr. Founder invoked the *ignoti et occulti* as the Society’s way to avoid giving needless cause for criticism: 1) in reference to the foundation of a house in Paris that could have led to charges of our taking over too much, especially during the anticlerical campaign of 1845; 2) as regards the consecration of the Marist bishops which, with all its fanfare about the Society, ran the risk of causing resentment amongst the French Bishops; 3) lastly, for the criterion to be observed in building or buying Marist houses, when lavishness would not have failed to arouse animosity. It may be recalled, moreover, that in the Constitutions Fr. Colin has applied this principle to the specific case of our dealings with pastors (N. 14).

Keeping in mind this last characteristic, if we go back over the three notes: humility of heart, prudence and modesty as recommended by Fr. Colin, and try to see how one is linked with the other, we will find striking evidence of a basic unity in the apostolic approach which they concretize. It is as if Fr. Founder, unable to describe the spiritual attitude of the Marist apostle in a single word, had resorted to this plurality of expressions so that one might correct the other, as it were, and to encourage us to reach beyond whatever might be too narrow in any one of them. Relying upon God alone, having nothing in view but the spiritual good of those entrusted to us, keeping in the background as much as possible so as not to be a block between God and these souls - fundamentally this all boils down to one, single deep-rooted disposition which seeks to put the apostolate back on a supernatural plane where the only thing that matters is the meeting of God and man, while the apostle himself remains off-stage. It is this basic disposition that automatically makes us *ignoti et occulti* in the world and by that very fact secures the fruitfulness of our ministry. We can see, then, how this expression in its negative form is only the visible result, the external criterion of an interior attitude that is essentially positive. We have reason to be proud that with these few words Fr. Founder has led us so unerringly to the very core of our priestly responsibility.

In order to complete this study of the sentence of the Epitome that has already kept us so long, we would have to comment upon only five more words : *B. Virginis Mariae vestigii inhaerendo*. But, as one may have guessed, this little incidental clause is actually at once the most important and the most difficult of all. In point of fact, how can the Virgin Mary be our model for the hidden apostolate? When he wrote these words, did Fr. Founder have expressly in mind the image of the life at Nazareth or was his Marian meditation thrown against a broader, deeper perspective? We cannot hope to answer in a few lines questions of such vital importance to every Marist.

And so we intend to devote the next two commentaries to a study of the way our hidden apostolate is linked to the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Only then will it be possible to unfold in all the fullness of its meaning the expression *Ignoti et quasi occulti*. For the present, however, we can give a brief synthesis of all the points we have encountered in our study up until now.

From its first appearance in the consciousness of Fr. Colin at Cerdon, the phrase *Unknown and hidden in the world* has been seen by us to refer not directly to a negative attitude (seeking to be unknown and avoiding the notice of others) but rather to a positive way of getting into the world by making use of obscurity and self-effacement to fulfil God’s designs. What we saw consequently in the development and use of the phrase by Fr. Founder gave abundant confirmation, we believe, to the fact that these words do not express an ideal, nor an end

to be sought for itself. If such were the case, the Marist apostolate would have to give up its all-embrace character which was so often reaffirmed by Fr. Colin. Actually, nowhere at all does he present obscurity to us as a goal to be attained. On the contrary, the attitude called to mind by the words *Ignoti et occulti* is presented both as the *consequence*, the outward expression of interior spiritual dispositions, and *as a means* for a more profound, a more effective apostolate. Therefore, this famous formula does not constitute our program; that remains expressed in the only true motto of the Society: *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam et Dei Genitricis honorem*. But it does constitute the touchstone of our Marist spirit, such as it can be lived in all the different types of ministry that come our way. If we really do seem to, be hidden and unknown in the world (*in mundo videantur*), then it is a sure sign that we are humble-hearted, prudent, modest, and that we have been able to efface ourselves completely by relying on God alone, and seeking only the good of souls. And in this very effacement there comes to light the secret of our apostolate, the source of its supernatural efficacy. In fact, this alone succeeds in removing the obstacles that hurry to hinder religious activities today; this it does by knocking down prejudice, removing occasions for criticism, opening the way to hearts. The riches inherent in our *Ignoti* can be explained only by this twofold connection with both the interior exigencies of the apostolate, and the practical conditions for its fruitful exercise in the modern world. The *Ignoti* thus expresses a comprehensive spirituality of action which is apt to govern the entire way of life of every Marist, and of the whole Society. At least that is the way Fr. Founder understood it when he used this formula to clarify all sorts of situations in which the Society of Mary had to determine its line of conduct. Our Marist apostolate can best recover its vigorous strength and productivity by a return to this profound intuition that gave it birth.

J. Coste, s.m.

Actually, Fr. Colin has made concrete applications of this maxim only to the kinds of ministry which he had personally exercised. We must not wonder therefore to find that the examples quoted in the article leave aside some of the most usual Marist activities, such as teaching. The educational tradition of the Society stands as a reminder that, in this domain also, the principle "Hidden and Unknown" can originate a very definite comportment.