

10. In the footsteps of their Mother

The key words of this text of the constitutions of Fr. Colin of 1872 are 'unknown and even hidden, in the world.' The text was written at the end of Colin's life, but the key words date from many years back. To the curate of Cerdon in the early 1820s these words were revealed as a kind of guideline for him to develop. In 1869 Fr. Colin remarked: 'God says many things in a few words.' This is the case with 'unknown and hidden in this world'. Number 50 of the constitutions of 1872 is a long sentence whose tension grows with every word and image. Reading it is like watching a bow being bent, more and more, until the arrow shoots off: 'unknown, and even hidden, in the world.' The text has become part of the new constitutions of 1988 of the Marist fathers. (n. 228)

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Therefore, following in the footsteps of their Mother, let them above all be entirely removed from the spirit of the world, from any greed for earthly goods, and be totally emptied of all self-concern; let them strive to deny themselves completely in all things, seeking not their own interests, but only those of Christ and Mary; considering themselves as exiles and pilgrims on earth, indeed as worthless servants and as the refuse of the world; using the things of this world as if not using them; sedulously avoiding, in their buildings and living quarters, in their life style and in all their dealings with others, anything that might suggest display, ostentation, or a desire for attention; loving to be unknown and subject to all; without deceit or cunning; in a word, acting always with such great poverty, humility and modesty, simplicity of heart, and unconcern for vanity and worldly ambition, and moreover so combining a love of solitude and silence and the practice of 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. Let them all cling fast to this spirit in the knowledge that it is the very pivot and foundation of their whole Society.

Constitutions of the Society of Mary,
Latin text in conformity with the text approved by the general chapter of 1873,
with English translation, Rome: 1992

Even today this text tells us how to approach evangelization. Like every expression, the words 'unknown and even hidden' can lead to misunderstandings, and today we are perhaps more aware of it than ever before. Colin certainly did not want us to go and hide ourselves when confronted with missionary challenges. Far from keeping us from doing great things for the Lord, these words should help us to empty ourselves from all self-seeking so that nothing in how we live or what we say will prevent the Word of God from being heard.

