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Prayer, Mission, and Divine Filiation in Saint Anthony Mary Claret (1807–1870): An Analysis Based on the Reception of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and Nineteenth-Century Spirituality

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Abstract

In the Spanish 19th century, Saint Anthony Mary Claret found in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius a suitable mediation to reinforce his missionary and evangelizing work. In his vital journey as a man, disciple, and apostle, he experienced deeply and fruitfully that the Spiritual Exercises are a methodology that enables the conversion of sinners while reinforcing the perseverance of those who live their Christian journey with conviction. Furthermore, they promote spiritual renewal in all states of Christian life, resulting in an increase in active and committed evangelizers. In this way, his “filial and apostolic prayer” reflects and condenses—with four affective and active verbs—his personal experience of the Exercises, which he offered to others at all stages of his apostolic life in order to transform their lives and renew the Church of his time.

Keywords: Claret; spiritual exercises; apostolic prayer; mission; 19th-century

1. Introduction

“O my God and my Father, may I know you and make you known; love you and make you loved; serve you and make you served; praise you and make all creatures praise you. Grant, my Father, that all sinners be converted, all the just persevere in grace, and all of us attain to eternal glory. Amen” (Viñas and Bermejo 2011, p. 289).

In this article, we will examine one of the key prayerful elements of Saint Anthony Mary Claret’s spirituality, known as filial and apostolic prayer. First, we briefly present the life of the saint and the context of the age in which he lived, together with the most remarkable characteristics of his missionary vocation, highlighting the place that the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius occupied in his spiritual life and his apostolic activity. Secondly, based on the filial and apostolic prayer, we suggest the points of contact that this prayer has with the spiritual tradition of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, of which Claret was a regular exercitant and exerciser.

The four verbs in Claret’s prayer formulation conceal and reveal, suggest and accomplish, synthesize and condense, emphasizing the process that the pray-er (the person doing the exercises) must accomplish during the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. At the end of this journey we understand that, in 19th-century Spain, the Spiritual Exercises were an effective way to rekindle the inner fire in many Christians and allow those seeking God not only to find Him, but also to become involved in apostolic work, because in an apostolic mysticism there can be no love of God without a real commitment to one’s neighbor.



Academic Editor: Hans Zollner

Received: 14 January 2026

Revised: 6 February 2026

Accepted: 8 February 2026

Published: 11 February 2026

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2. Claretian Reception and Internalization of the Spiritual Exercises

2.1. Claret: Man, Disciple, Apostle

Saint Anthony Mary Claret was born in Sallent (Catalonia, Spain) on 23 December 1807, into a Christian family of textile workers, formed by Juan Claret and Josefa Clará and their eleven children, of whom Anthony was the fifth (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. xlix and 179–82). He was baptized two days after his birth. Among his childhood memories, he narrates in his autobiography that at the age of five,

“instead of sleeping (...) I used to think about eternity. I would think *forever, forever, forever*. I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on these and realize that they would never come to an end. Then I would shudder and ask myself if those who were so unhappy as to go to an eternity of pain would ever see an end to their suffering. Would they have to go on suffering? *Yes, forever and forever they will have to bear their pain!*” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 183–84)¹

this memory was the seed of his calling to work tirelessly for the salvation of others. He learned to read and write and was prepared to complete his Christian initiation with the sacraments of confirmation at the age of six and first communion at the age of ten. From these years, he would also remember with immense affection the frequent visits he made with his sister Rosa to the hermitage of the Virgin of Fusimaña, expressing from childhood his deep devotion to Mary, the mother of God (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. l–li, 189–92 and 199–201).

During Claret’s childhood, the political, social and religious situation was complex: in 1807, the year of his birth, Napoleon ordered the military occupation of Spain, which later ended in the so-called War of Independence, which came to an end with the period of absolutist Restoration in 1814 (the return of Ferdinand VII, who reigned in Spain until his death in 1833). From this period, Claret would remind and recount that his family and the entire population had to flee in the middle of the night upon hearing the news that the French army was approaching the town (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. xlix–lii and 187–89; Also cf. [Lozano 1985](#), pp. 16–18).

In 1825, Claret moved to Barcelona to improve his skills in the art of textile manufacturing and design. There he studied drawing, grammar and French at La Lonja school, and developed his creative qualities, confirming that in addition to his natural talent, he had a great passion for art and textile design. His time in the big city offered him a new world of opportunities and projects, but soon, the Word of God, firstly, posed a great question to him from the Gospel of Saint Matthew with the *quid prodest*² wakes him up as from a dream; and, on the other hand, various experiences (he was providentially saved from drowning at sea, he was seduced by the wife of a friend he went to visit, and he was swindled by a friend) challenges him and invites him to search deeply for the meaning of his life beside a radical search for God and His will (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. liii and 210–16; Also cf. [Lozano 1985](#), pp. 33–34 and 130).

In 1829, at the age of 21, Claret was admitted to the seminary in Vic, thus beginning his training to become a priest as an external seminarian. At this time, he began a period of intense spiritual asceticism with fervent prayer, devotions and penitences, and assiduous contact with the Word of God (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. liii–liv, 216–25 and 235–38; Also cf. [Lozano 1983](#), pp. 147–57). During this period, it registers an important milestone in his spiritual journey: every year, he practices the Spiritual Exercises for eight days.³

On 13 June 1835, he was ordained as a priest in Solsona, having previously completed forty days of spiritual exercises,⁴ and celebrates his first Mass in his hometown on 21 June. He took on the role of parish vicar and then bursar of Santa María de Sallent, and continued

his studies until completing his academic training at the seminary while intensely occupied with the obligations of his ministry: celebrating the Eucharist daily, hearing confessions, preaching, teaching catechism, visiting the sick in the town, and striving to serve everyone equally. Every year he did ten days of spiritual exercises and deepened the spiritual life plan he had outlined in the seminary (frequent confession, fasting twice a week, discipline and cilice, mental prayer and praying the rosary every day) (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 230–33).

Within the narrow confines of the parish, and despite feeling loved and valued by the people, Claret feels a more universal calling, which is connected to his deepest vocation: to be happy (to become holy) by doing God's will in his life, working tirelessly to help souls achieve salvation. But how will he do this? Being a missionary! (cf. [Lozano 1985](#), pp. 59–60).⁵ He decided to travel to Rome and offer his services to *Propaganda Fide* to be sent as a missionary anywhere in the world. To do this, he travelled from Sallent to Marseille on foot, then boarded a ship to Civitavecchia, and finally walked the rest of the way to Rome, where he arrived on 6 October 1839 (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 238–48).

On arrival in Rome, the cardinal prefect to whom he was to speak was away from the city for the entire month, so he had to wait. In the meantime, he uses the time to do the Exercises. For this purpose, he goes to a priest from the professed house of the Society of Jesus, who gives him the book of the Exercises of Saint Ignatius and gives him the necessary advice to begin them. On the appointed days, Claret gives him an account of his spirit. After completing these Exercises, Claret is invited by his director of Exercises to join the Society of Jesus, because, as a member, he could fulfil his desire to be sent on missions. After writing his application for admission and meeting with the Father General and then with the Father Provincial, he was admitted to the Jesuit novitiate, where his spiritual life reached new experiences that helped him to deepen the spiritual path he had been following (practice of virtues, mortifications, silence, humble and self-sacrificing works) (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 249–54). But, a severe pain in his right leg—which impeded his walking and whose lack of improvement caused fear that he might become crippled—occurred during the month of Exercises, leading his novice master and the Father General of the Society of Jesus to discern that God's will for Claret was another and that he should return to his homeland. So, he did (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 261–64).

Upon arriving in Catalonia, he was sent to the parish of Viladrau, where he regained his health and dedicated himself to apostolic work. It was here that he began to gain a reputation as a missionary, as it was from here that he began his missionary travels preaching missions and novenas—for the parishes of the diocese; he then extended this ministry to the towns of Catalonia. From Vic, and sent by his prelate—which helped him to exercise his availability in obedience—he preached intensely in different parishes of the diocese and neighboring dioceses between 1841 and 1849, with the obligatory interruption in 1842 due to complicated political circumstances. In July 1841, he had received the title of apostolic missionary from the Roman congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, which endorsed his vocation and itinerant mission (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lvi–lvii, 266, 272–76 and 395; cf. likewise [Sánchez Miranda 2019](#), pp. 83–87 and 88–89; and cf. moreover [Sidera i Plana and Blanco Pacheco 2023](#)).

The evangelizing method adopted by Claret in his missionary work was that of popular missions⁶—adapted according to the possibilities of the context—which included the preaching of doctrinal and moral sermons, administering the sacrament of reconciliation. When the political context allowed it, he added other apostolic strategies, such as the production and distribution of devotional pamphlets and books—ascetic and catechetical—the formation and association of lay people, and the promotion of a more apostolic clergy through the preaching of Spiritual Exercises and conferences (cf. [Sánchez Miranda 2019](#),

pp. 406–9). Claret's apostolic success in Catalonia led him to replicate his evangelizing method for just over a year in the Canary Islands (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lviii and 399–405; also cf. [Lozano 1985](#), pp. 151–74).

After returning to Catalonia, Claret decided to concretize an apostolic project that he had been dreaming about and discerning some time ago; a project that would prolong his missionary spirit and ardor, and in which he could condense and deliver everything he had learned and practiced over the last ten years. Thus, on 16 July 1849, in a cell at the seminary in Vic, he founded, together with five companions, the Congregation of Missionaries Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 405–10), that “great Work” (cf. [Clotet 2000](#), p. 252) through which he would be able to do with others what he could not do alone (cf. [Gil 1970](#), p. 305). Twenty-six days after founding the congregation of missionaries, he received the appointment as archbishop of the diocese of Santiago de Cuba, which shocked him because it disrupted all his plans and forced him to give up the projects he had conceived. After discerning it in prayer, he decided to accept the appointment, and while awaiting the day of his episcopal consecration, he accompanied and trained his missionaries, made Spiritual Exercises, wrote a plan of life for his government, and recruited a group of collaborators for his diocese (cf. [Gil 1970](#), p. 363; and cf. also [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 409–15).

His pastoral work in the Church of Santiago de Cuba was overwhelming. In the six years and two months he remained there, he made the pastoral visit four times (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lviii and 444).⁷ Each Sunday and on holidays, he preached wherever he happened to be (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 425–26), and he preached—like his collaborators—popular missions in parishes, as well as Spiritual Exercises for the clergy. He renewed and updated regulations for the functioning of the diocesan curia and the improvement of pastoral work (cf. [Lozano 1985](#), pp. 290–94), and he reorganized the conciliar seminary and became involved in social action with the goal of alleviating poverty and denouncing slavery, among other initiatives (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lix and 426–31; cf. also [Cabestrero 2013](#), pp. 83–85). In Cuba, Claret preached and practiced the Spiritual Exercises together with his missionary community. The schemes of the Exercises that he made and gave during his six years on the island have been preserved (cf. [Fernández 1941](#), pp. 379–81). His work was not always well appreciated or received by the enemies of the Gospel, so after several threats, on 1 February 1856, in Holguín, he suffered a failed attempt on his life, which seriously injured his left cheek and right arm (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lix, 453–56 and 461–62).

On 18 March 1857, he was summoned to Madrid by Royal Order, where, upon his arrival in May of that same year, he was appointed Confessor to Queen Isabella II (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. lx and 462–64). In order to accept the position, he stipulated that he would not live in the palace, would only participate in essential ceremonial duties, and would make this appointment a true spiritual and pastoral ministry. Thus, he chose not to involve himself in politics and to be available to carry out his responsibilities: hearing the Queen's confession, celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments, instructing the Infanta in the faith and religion, giving spiritual exercises to Her Majesty and other members of the court, attending the audiences required by his role, and visiting the sick and prisoners. He dedicates his free time to writing and preaching sermons and Spiritual Exercises to priests, nuns and the people, thus finding his missionary calling amid his responsibilities. He does the same on the trips he must accompany the royal family on (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 474–89).⁸ Because of his role, he was harshly criticised and slandered, mocked and despised by various individuals and groups in the political world. This stage of his life, characterized by great personal and spiritual maturity, was marked by graces received that confirmed his mission and strengthened his experience of a mysticism

of apostolic and missionary action, which configured him to Christ (preservation of the sacramental species, love of enemies) (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 504–11; and cf. also [Lozano 1983](#), pp. 367–402 and 403–13).

In 1868, following the September Revolution, which led to the fall of Isabella II, Claret went into banishment in France with the royal family, first to Pau and then to Paris, where they lived in exile (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. lxii). On 30 March 1869, he left the court and went to Rome to have an interview with Pope Pius IX. In the Eternal City, he dedicates himself to prayer, study, writing and preaching. He participates in the opening and sessions of the First Vatican Council (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. lxiii). In July 1870, he took refuge with his missionaries in Prades and later in the Cistercian monastery of Fontfroide, where he arrived ill and persecuted by his enemies. There he died a holy death on 24 October 1870. He was buried in the monks' cemetery and his tombstone was inscribed with these words of Pope Saint Gregory VII, inspired by Psalm 45 (44):8: I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore, I die in exile (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. lxiii). He was beatified by Pope Pius XI on 25 February 1934 and canonised by Pope Pius XII on 7 May 1950 (cf. [Lozano 1985](#), p. 573).

Up to this point, we have presented the story of a man, a disciple and an apostle, who sought and found God and discovered his vocation and mission in the world and in the Church, and lived it with faithfulness until the end, despite the difficulties, embracing the missionary path as a manner of proclaiming that the God of love wants all his children to be saved.

2.2. Claret: *Exercitant and Exerciser*

We are certain that from the years when Claret lived and was formed in the seminary of Vic, he had contact with the Exercises—practicing them at least once a year—so we can affirm the saint's familiarity in his spiritual practice with this mediation established in Ignatian spirituality and in the Church, which helped him to grow in his vocation and configuration with Jesus the missionary, the one sent by the Father, whom Claret desires to follow and imitate.

This is attested to by the resolutions he writes each year at the end of the Exercises, as a kind of life plan and guide for reviewing his actions—asceticism—in light of the grace of God he experiences in the Exercises—mysticism—which he wishes to preserve and strengthen throughout for the rest of the year.⁹ These resolutions are “a human plan of action or better yet, human-divine, and because of this, the inspiration of God is reflected in them through the aim and intention of man” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 738). If we review Claret's resolutions that arose in the context of the Exercises, we will grasp the evolution of some key elements of his missionary spirituality, while also contemplating his role as an exercitant:

We can affirm that the first resolutions that have been preserved are those from 1843, and they serve as guiding principles for the whole of his period as an itinerant missionary travelling the roads of Catalonia and the Canary Islands (1843–1849). They reflect how his ascetic efforts were entirely focused on responding to the action of God's grace (balance between personal piety and apostolate). His fundamental spiritual attitude is oriented towards the desire to imitate Christ, poor, humiliated and despised (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 736 and 750–53).

Subsequently, the resolutions of the Exercises practiced during 1850 served as a guide for his entire period as missionary archbishop in Santiago de Cuba (1850–1856) and reflected, together with the novelty of his episcopal ministry, certain continuities (the particular examination continued to be on humility, to which he added meekness in the face of persecution). A new attitude towards Christ emerges, who is no longer only to be followed, but is also a source of action and strength for Claret, expressed in the motto on his archiepiscopal coat

of arms: “*Charitas Christi urget nos*”¹⁰ (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 767–68). In subsequent years—within this period—his interior work will appear, showing his dependence on God in the face of the difficulties and contradictions he experiences, in configuration with the suffering Christ, and which he will repeat for some years, until he arrives at the formulation of indifference in everything, giving thanks and praying for those who slander him, carrying the practice of humility, patience and meekness to the extreme (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 773–74, 776–79 and 781–82).

Finally, the resolutions of his time as royal confessor (1857–1867) and those of the last years of his life in exile and as a conciliar father (1868–1870) point to a new direction in terms of spiritual depth. During these years, in addition to his particular examination of meekness, he also examined the love of God. Aspirations and acts of love abound—quoting Saint Teresa—and, in the last year of his life, he expressed his desire to go to heaven to be united with God (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 736–37 and 854–56).

Based on his personal experience of the Exercises, Claret is convinced that he must share this mystical and mystagogical path with other people, so in July and August 1843, Claret led—with certainty—the first series of Exercises, thus beginning a ministry that he would develop, dedicating time and effort to leading various groups of people until the end of his life (cf. Gil 1970, pp. 112–16),¹¹ helping them to improve the religious life of the People of God, enkindling everyone with the fire of divine love, thus seeking the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just, the greater glory of God, and the salvation of souls (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 255–56, 259, 276, 304, 310, 336, 398, 410, 442–44, 457–60, 471 and 903).

Thus, we can verify that for many years, Claret directed Exercises—developing his role as exerciser—to different portions of the People of God (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 487–89), which we can group as follows:

First, religious life: This group includes consecrated women to whom Claret gives a series of Exercises on various topics and of varying lengths, aimed to perfect the living of religious consecration. He affirms that many souls are saved thanks to the prayers of nuns, which is why he always feels inclined to preach to them and ask them to commend him to God. He preaches to the Carmelitas descalzas and the Beatas (Dominicas); he also gives Exercises to religious women of active life (Adoratrices, Escolapias and Terciarias—Carmelitas de la Caridad de Vedruna-) (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 329 and 542; Also, cf. Claret n.d., Vol. X, pp. 537–56).

Second, priests and clergy: In all the places Claret visits, he always preaches to the priests and gives them Spiritual Exercises. He begins this practice in Catalonia and repeats it in the Canary Islands, Cuba and Madrid. He emphasizes this ministry because he is convinced that priests who are converted by the Exercises are zealous and fervent preachers (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 324–25). This group can be divided into three subgroups, which are of special importance to Claret, as follows:

The first subgroup is the congregation of missionaries founded by him: this long-dreamed-of project was founded with Exercises given by the saint to the nascent community (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 409–10; and also cf. Claret n.d., Vol. X, pp. 23–37), and he also preached Exercises in 1865 to the communities of Vic and Gracia (Barcelona) (cf. Claret n.d., Vol. X, pp. 43–98).¹²

The second subgroup consists of his team of collaborators in Cuba: every year they meet and retreat for ten days of Spiritual Exercises, which Claret preaches (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, p. 473).

A third subgroup is the seminarians: Claret devoted himself intensely to preaching Spiritual Exercises to this group. There are several testimonies that attest to this occupation

on the part of the saint at various times and places (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 325, 397, 401, 414 and 530).

Third, the lay people: Claret also devoted part of his evangelization efforts to the laity, giving series of Exercises—some of them very numerous—(cf. Gil 1970, pp. 1427, 1444 and 1474) based on his conviction that the Exercises bear more fruit than missions. He also wrote books on the Exercises to enable many people to access this experience (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 326–27).¹³ Within this group, we can distinguish the following categories of lay people, namely:

First, we found Her Majesty Queen Isabella II and other people in her circle: The saint himself explains that the Queen practised the Exercises using his book of explained Exercises, although it is also known that on some occasions, he personally directed her in the Exercises. This preaching also reached other members of the court, in some cases on the recommendation of the Queen (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 327, 475 and 543).

The second category is men: Claret preaches to men, including those of the court, in groups with a high level of participation and favorable results in terms of reforming their lives, so much so that on one occasion the saint mentions that he has been told that after the Exercises, a revolution that was about to break out has been dispelled (cf. Gil 1970, pp. 1423–24).¹⁴

The third category is women: Claret directs Exercises to this group, which are also attended by ladies from the palace. The saint appreciates that silence reigns in these large groups and that all of them make a general confession (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 326–27, 475–476 and 543).¹⁵

The final category is children: On some occasions, the saint also directs Spiritual Exercises for children, a group for which he composed a book especially.¹⁶ He directs Exercises for the Infanta Isabella (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, pp. 474–75), and also for the girls boarding at the school of the Vedrunas religious sisters (cf. Viñas and Bermejo 2011, p. 547).

Claret's dedication to sharing the Spiritual Exercises with the various forms of Christian life has an added peculiarity, which is that on several occasions Claret will develop his role as an exerciser—or director or companion of the Exercises—simultaneously with the role of exercitant, that is, practicing the same Exercises that he preaches.¹⁷

2.3. Claret's "Filial and Apostolic Prayer", a Synthesis/Parallel/Update of the Process of the Exercises

Four verbs give life and play a prominent role in Claret's so-called "filial and apostolic prayer", which he records in number 233 of his autobiography: "to know", "to love", "to serve" and "to praise". In this prayer, an intense movement unfolds those springs from the human being and tends towards God, seeking to consciously enter into his mystery, finding him and experiencing his presence, sharing his life with others and raising a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of God himself.

In Spanish, if we join the initial letters of each of the four verbs—in the same order in which they appear in Claret's prayer—we can form the acronym CASA (in English, house/home). Thus, the simple image of a house allows us to condense and show the symbolic power contained in these four verbs, while expressing that those who pray with and like Claret dream of being able to dwell in the home, in the house of God (cf. Psalm 23 (22):6). The four verbs have a circular dynamic that interrelates them, expressing the apostolic openness and interiority that their conjugation in prayer enables, like a house that has interior and exterior spaces. Thus, the verb "to know" can be linked to the most interior aspect of the house. The verb "to love", on the other hand, shows a double dimension, both internal and external to those who inhabit the house. For its part, the verb "to serve" is suggested to us as an action in missionary outgoing, and therefore takes place outside the

house. Finally, the verb “to praise” brings inside that which has been expressed outside, also showing a double dimension of prayerful and spiritual experience.

“To know”, “to love”, “to serve” and “to praise” always refer to God—the protagonist and recipient of prayer—but at the same time, they make visible the co-protagonists, who are, on the one hand, the person praying—the self, who addresses his prayer in the first person to the good God—and, on the other hand, the neighbors of the person praying, whom they wish to incorporate into the same dialogue of love, encounter and sending that they have established through their friendly and solidary prayer.

The dynamic of apostolic prayer, combined with each of the four verbs, follows and is nourished in some way by the structure of the four weeks of the Exercises. Thus, in the first place, the verb “to know” allows us to connect fully with the dynamic and theme of the First Week, in which the exercitant is invited to enter into an inner knowledge of Jesus, of sin and of mercy (cf. EE [45–55, 61–63 and 71], and cf. also EE [104], which, although it is from the Second Week, speaks of internal knowledge). Secondly, the verb “to love” refers to the experiential and relational knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord, which is achieved through the work of the Second Week, which challenges the exercitant with its proposal to contemplate the mysteries of Christ’s life, to place oneself under his standard, to choose him and be chosen, to amend one’s life (cf. EE [189, 97–98, 107–109, 114–116, 164–169 and 184]). Thirdly, the verb “to serve” suggests that outward movement towards reality, where our neighbors inhabit, suffering the way’s hardships, wounded, as well as the space where solidarity is exercised with the pain of the world and of Christ—who actualizes his passion in the little ones of the earth—in coherence and congruence with the theme of contemplating the passion and death of the Lord in the Third Week (cf. EE [191–198, 200–203 and 208]). Finally, and fourthly, the verb “to praise” suggests the confident and grateful action directed towards God, who is found alive and present and contemplated in all that is created and saved; such is the proposal for contemplation and meditation of the Fourth Week, through the Easter journey that proposes the resurrection of the Lord, his new life and contemplation to attain love (cf. EE [218–226]).

The Exercises, at the same time, are the appropriate vehicle for providing feedback and rekindling the dynamic that the four verbs of the prayer enable in Claret’s life of faith and missionary action. He, a missionary impelled by the love of the One he wants to make known, love, serve and praise, also understands that the Exercises are a proclamation of the Gospel, missionary action, since in them it is possible to read the Bible and life (“to know”), and to contemplate the eternal Word of the Father—Jesus Christ himself, our Lord—with whom an affective and grateful dialogue is established (“to love”, “to praise”), encouraging the exercitant, through a choice or reform of life, to place himself at the service of God’s own desire (“to serve”). The Exercises contain and awaken in Claret’s spiritual experience a missionary, apostolic and committed dynamic. Choosing the standard of the Captain and Lord Jesus Christ, and being chosen by Him, the apostle feels welcomed, loved and, at the same time, sent.

The first petition of the apostolic prayer contains the binary “to know”/“to make known”, which denotes a double movement, internal and external. “To know” implies a look towards the internal experience of the person praying; while “to make known” refers to external activity, which, in Claret’s case, involves the apostolic sphere. Both poles refer to the capacity for welcoming and surrender, for appropriation and communication, for reception and transmission (cf. *Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016*, pp. 131–32). The knowledge of God points to the highest human aspiration, which is made explicit in the fourth Gospel when it states that eternal life consists in knowing the true God and his envoy Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3). Claret discovers that seeking and finding God are a grace that God himself grants him, because both actions will enable him to

begin the journey of knowing God, which, in his case, will take shape along two paths. Firstly, the path of prayer. Secondly, the path of study, which includes various registers (reading the Word of God, reading texts from tradition, reading the lives of the saints, contemplating creation through which he perceives signs of the divine presence, awareness and admiration for the action of the Holy Spirit in his life and in the lives of other people with whom he interacts at various times and places), for Claret, study consists of seeking and obtaining knowledge that reflects rather an experiential knowledge of God and his action in daily life (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 136–37).

From this internalization of the knowledge of God arose in Claret the need and desire to make known the God who accompanied him, called him and sent him forth. But since he knew that nothing depended on himself, he asked God for the grace to be able to bring many others to Him so that they too could know Him. Let us remember that his initial motivation for the salvation of people comes from that childhood experience in which he thought about eternity. He wants to address everyone, the just and the sinners—the former so that they may persevere, and the latter so that they may be converted. And to achieve this, he will use all the instruments he knows and has at his disposal, especially those that have proven effective according to his experience (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 137, 142 and 144).

Claret's passionate heart asks for the grace that the Lord may grant him to love and serve Him, so that he may work tirelessly to ensure that others also love and serve Him. Love and service—contained in the second and third places in the apostolic prayer—arise in his life journey from the experience of compassion: empathy for the suffering of others and the desire that no persons be condemned and that all be saved (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 147–49).

The compassion for sinners, and the love he feels for God—who is God himself—make his missionary vocation a passionate and urgent mandate, and his apostolic action unfolds from the intention of reaching deep into people's lives—attracting their attention and goodwill—to bring about a decisive change in them towards God and his project: the love and happiness of all his children (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 150–51). He will accompany his action with a humble heart, always keeping in mind that “the virtue an apostolic missionary need most of all is love (. . .) If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural endowments, he has much love, he has everything” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 380).¹⁸

Service occupied much time and space in Claret's life (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 54). In his autobiography, he gives us several testimonies of his dedication to the service of God and his brothers.¹⁹ Perhaps one of the most eloquent is the one he repeated several times with similar wording in his resolutions for the Exercises: “I resolve never to lose a moment's time, and hence I will always keep busy by studying, praying, preaching, conferring the sacraments, etc.” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 491). From this affirmation it follows that, for Claret, service is apostolic-missionary and he lives it intensely from the ministerial aspect (preaching, administering sacraments, studying, praying) as a service to people (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 56), those whom he calls “my neighbours”.²⁰

Claret will attempt to ensure that his neighbors serve God by inviting them to live their Christian lives consistently, and in order to do so, he will work on several fronts simultaneously. First, he will write several books entitled “Advice to . . .” and through them he will address individuals and groups from different states of life (religious, priests, lay people, children, young people, parents) (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 58). Secondly, he will encourage priests to live their vocation of service to the People of God with fidelity and depth, and to do so, he will work as hard as he can to help them

in their human and Christian formation (improving their economic conditions, pastoral conferences, Spiritual Exercises to renew their spiritual life, exhortation to assume the work of evangelization of the people) (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 60–61). Thirdly, he will be responsible for “devising and putting into action apostolic institutions, both for priests and lay people, which constantly encourage the Christian people in their duty to serve God”²¹ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 63) (apostolic collaboration teams, missionary congregation, confraternities, brotherhoods, Academy of Saint Michael) (cf. [Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), pp. 63–68), as he is aware that “man needs to be reminded that he is a creature, whose fulfilment lies in serving his Creator in this world and enjoying Him in eternity”²² ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 63).

The conjunction of the two verbs found at the center of the apostolic prayer, “to love” and “to serve”, is manifested in Claret’s experience expressed through his apostolic zeal. His missionary heart, inflamed with this loving service, led him to overcome obstacles and devise strategies to tackle the work of evangelization and to invite others to participate in the same task and mission. Claret, both in the experience of his own priestly vocation and in his role as one who accompanies and forms priests for the apostolate, and also as one who exercises priests, knows that the “starting point of the theological spirituality of the ordained ministry [is in] the very revelation of God, God is love and mercy”²³ ([López Hortelano 2023](#), p. 18), and that apostolic zeal—expressed in current terminology as pastoral charity—was, is, and will always be “a way of exercising pastoral ministry, a primacy over other types of love and choices”²⁴ ([López Hortelano 2023](#), p. 18), a manner that reflects God’s interest, care and love for his people, and which is expressed in its dual dimension of love and service through the words of Jesus contained in the parables of Matthew 25:31–46 (judgement of the nations) and Luke 10:30–37 (the Good Samaritan).

Claret cultivated praise as a form of prayer throughout his spiritual life, “not as an isolated or solipsistic movement of the believing heart towards God, but [as] a fontal, broad and integrating experience (...) [within] the totality of an integral experience of faith”²⁵ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 187) that is consciously oriented towards the apostolic/missionary dimension.

The overall experience is so deeply integrated into Claret’s spiritual process that if we study the implications of the verb “to praise” and its relationship with the other three verbs in Claret’s filial and apostolic prayer, we will discover, first of all, that for the saint “praise (...) follows knowledge (...) and at the same time promotes it”²⁶ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 189) because he does not follow a “coldly intellectualised model of Christian life (...) but rather explores and proposes a path of deepening (...) [in which] both the knowledge of God and the study of realities (...) should always result in the praise of the Creator”²⁷ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 187). Secondly, and “like every believer, Claret knew he was called to pass from love of self to love of the Other and of others; from self-vanity to praise of the Lord”²⁸ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 190) and he worked all his life to grow in love and in the praise of that love as “a sublime way of carrying the love of Christ within oneself and of configuring one’s own love in the image of His”²⁹ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 191). Thirdly and finally, service through apostolic and missionary action became for Claret “a privileged and most effective way of praising God and making Him praise”³⁰ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 193) and he lived this out by praying, working and suffering through his “ardent belief and his *determined determination* to make his words an uninterrupted praise to the Lord of glory”³¹ ([Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016](#), p. 193).

One reflection masterfully summarizes what it meant for Claret to express his apostolic prayer, since in it

“he turns to his missionary heart, as if searching for the spring of his evangelising thirst. He then finds a desire (...) and allows that longing to be expressed in the form of a needy and trusting prayer. (...) Thus, through a simple and spontaneous pleading, the saint allows us to contemplate his “deepest centre” and leads us by his hand into an experience that, while inaccessible, becomes accessible to any believer (...) Claret bequeaths to us in the Filial and Apostolic Prayer a plea that is both intimate and universal: perhaps the most personal and the most common of all his prayers”³². (*Misioneros Claretianos Provincia de Santiago 2016*, p. 183)

3. Conclusions

The Spiritual Exercises set Claret on a path of knowledge and love, service and praise along his entire missionary life, leading him to follow a path that began with the personal practice of the Spiritual Exercises to the consideration and proposal to others of the fruitful experience of the Spiritual Exercises, which he adopted and adapted as a way to spread the Gospel and renovation of Christian life.

The personal prayer of Claret, that is a synthesis of his whole life in the service of the Gospel, expresses in a condensed way the spiritual experience proposed by the pieces that open and close the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: the Principle and Foundation, and the Contemplation to Attain Love. On the one hand, the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises [23] contains the verbs “to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord”³³ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 57) and asks us to deepen our knowledge—of humanity and of God—with the expression “desiring and choosing what leads us most to the end for which we were created”³⁴ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 58). On the other hand, the Contemplation to Attain Love in EE [230–237] expresses the love of/for God and neighbour when it says that “love should be put more into works than into words”³⁵ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 134), “love consists in communication between the two parts, that is, in the lover giving and communicating to the beloved what he has, or what he has or can have, and thus, conversely, the beloved to the lover”³⁶ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 134), “to ask for internal knowledge of so much good received, so that I, recognising it fully, may love and serve His divine majesty in everything”³⁷ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 134), and, par excellence, with the Ignatian offering, which says, “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess; You gave them to me; to You, Lord, I return them; everything is yours, dispose of them according to your will; give me your love and grace, for that is enough for me”³⁸ (*de Loyola 2018*, p. 135).

The four verbs of the filial and apostolic prayer, in one part, introduce the uninitiated to the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises in a relational mystagogy, from which the person who makes the experience for the first time knows, loves, serves, and praises God, in order to immediately afterwards make him known, loved, served, and praised by all creatures. On the other hand, the verbs of prayer help to deepen the journey of those who have already begun the practice of the Spiritual Exercises, through the experience of asceticism and apostolic mysticism, which trusts in the action of God’s grace, but which puts personal effort and creativity into spiritual and pastoral work, from the conviction of those who know they are sought, loved, saved and sent by God into the world to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.

In this manner, Claret’s life and apostolic action throughout the Spanish 19th century were enhanced by the Spiritual Exercises, which, three centuries after their original experience and formulation, continue to demonstrate their strength and vitality in renewing

personal life and communities in the Church, through the active and affective, experiential and transformative dynamics of their methodology.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviation

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

EE Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola—Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.
The numbers of the text of the Exercises are indicated between [].

Notes

- ¹ Also (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 277–79). This reflection on the eternity of pain awakens an apostolic reaction in Claret, who affirms in number 9 of his Autobiography that “this same idea has made me work in the past, still makes me work, and will make me work as long as I live, in converting sinners, in preaching, in hearing confessions, in writing books, in distributing holy cards and pamphlets, and in having familiar conversations, etc.” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 184). In our opinion, this experience from early childhood constitutes, as it were, the claretian Principle and Foundation.
- ² The text of Matthew 16:26, which Claret quotes in number 68 of his Autobiography as “*For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?*” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 209).
- ³ In number 92 of his Autobiography, the saint recounts that “Every year in the chapel, during Lent, we made an eight-day retreat, from Sunday to Sunday. The bishop attended all the morning and evening exercises” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 221). In the original version of his Autobiography—in Spanish—Claret uses the expression: “los santos Ejercicios Espirituales” (“the holy Spiritual Exercises”) that in the English version was translated as “retreat”.
- ⁴ He narrates this in number 102 of his Autobiography: “Before my priestly ordination I made a forty-day retreat. I have never made a retreat so full of sufferings and trials but neither, perhaps, so replete with great graces” ([Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 227–28). We note that here too, “Exercises” has been translated as “retreat”. Those forty days consisted of special training for the ordinands, in an atmosphere of fraternal conviviality. The last ten days were dedicated to the Exercises properly speaking, in their classical form. During these days, the bishop often intervened directly (cf. [Sidera i Plana and Blanco Pacheco 2022](#), pp. 119–22).
- ⁵ A study about Claret presents him as someone who welcomes God’s calls throughout the different stages of his life and spiritual journey, leading him to deepen his discernment and choice for what he feels and discovers as God’s will for his life and apostolic mission (cf. [Randle 1993](#), pp. 71–112).
- ⁶ About this term and its meaning, see (cf. [Sánchez Miranda 2019](#), pp. 25–26).
- ⁷ Claret was in charge of a local Church that had been without a bishop for at least 14 years and had a deficient clergy—both in number and formation—a geographically extensive and poorly connected diocese with two major deep-rooted social challenges: slavery and immorality; politically, with separatist attempts (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), p. 423).
- ⁸ Since 1859, Claret was appointed president of the Royal Monastery of El Escorial, with the task of restoring it both physically and spiritually. He established a primary and secondary school, as well as a seminary, a choir and a centre for superior studies (cf. [Viñas and Bermejo 2011](#), pp. 486–87 and 513).
- ⁹ Volume II of the Claretian Manuscripts contains the resolutions of the Spiritual Exercises practised by Claret between 1843—the year he began his missionary travels—and 1870—the year of his death—with the single exception of the year 1848.
- ¹⁰ His episcopal motto is taken from 2 Corinthians 5:14.
- ¹¹ In this letter dated 25 November 1842—a year in which the political situation was unfavourable for itinerant preaching—Claret shares with Jaime Soler his plan to form a group of missionary priests dedicated to evangelising all kinds of people. He also says that he will turn the rectory of San Juan de Oló, where he is currently residing, into a retreat house to receive two priests at a time, in order to give them the Exercises and prepare them for the apostolate.
- ¹² A biblical reflection about the themes that appear in the schemas of the Exercises preached by Claret to his missionaries can be found in ([Franquesa 2008](#)).

- 13 One of the books of Exercises that Claret wrote and published is entitled *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio explicados*, first published in Barcelona in 1859 (cf. Claret 1859).
- 14 Furthermore, in the letter on (Gil 1970, pp. 1441–42), he recounts that 4000 men attended the retreat.
- 15 In (Gil 1970, pp. 1441–42) there is mention of a group of women attending, numbering up to 6000.
- 16 In 1855 Claret published a book in Barcelona entitled *Ejercicios espirituales preparatorios a la primera comunión de los niños* (cf. Claret 1855).
- 17 This can be verified, for example, during the period when Claret stayed as missionary archbishop in Santiago de Cuba (1852–1856), years in which he directed the Spiritual Exercises to his group of collaborators in the Cuban diocese—ten days each year—and at the same time did those Exercises with them (cf. Fernández 1941, pp. 376–92).
- 18 In numbers 438–453 of his autobiography Claret develops the virtue of love of God and neighbour.
- 19 Cf. For example, numbers 40, 111–112, 136, 152, 202–203 of the autobiography.
- 20 Thus it appears in numbers 28, 42, 113, 153, 213, 744, and 789 of his autobiography.
- 21 “Idear y poner en marcha instituciones apostólicas, tanto de sacerdotes como de seglares que constantemente espoleasen al pueblo cristiano en su deber de servir a Dios”.
- 22 “El hombre necesita que se le recuerde su ser criatura, cuya realización se cifra en servir en este mundo a su creador y gozar de Él en la eternidad”.
- 23 “Punto de partida de la espiritualidad teologal del ministerio ordenado [está en] la misma revelación de Dios, Dios es amor y misericordia”.
- 24 “Una manera de ejercer el ministerio pastoral, un primado por encima de otro tipo de amores y de opciones”.
- 25 “No como un movimiento aislado o solipsista del corazón creyente hacia Dios, sino [como] una experiencia fontal, amplia e integradora (. . .) [dentro] del conjunto de una vivencia de fe integral”.
- 26 “La alabanza (. . .) sigue al conocimiento (. . .) y a la vez lo promueve”.
- 27 “Modelo de vida cristiana fríamente intelectualizado (. . .) sino que él explora y propone un camino de profundización (. . .) [en el que] tanto el conocimiento de Dios como el estudio de las realidades (. . .) deberían redundar siempre en la alabanza del Creador”.
- 28 “Como todo creyente, Claret se supo llamado a pasar del amor de sí al amor del Otro y de los otros; de la vanidad de sí a la alabanza del Señor”.
- 29 “Forma sublime de portar sobre sí el amor de Cristo y de configurar el propio amor a imagen del Suyo”.
- 30 “Un modo privilegiado y eficazísimo para alabar a Dios y para hacerlo alabar”.
- 31 “Ardor creyente, y su determinada determinación en hacer de su palabra una alabanza ininterrumpida al Señor de la gloria”.
- 32 “Se vuelve hacia sus entrañas de misionero, como buscando el hontanar de su sed evangelizadora. Encuentra entonces un deseo (. . .) y deja que dicho anhelo se exprese en forma de plegaria menesterosa y confiada. (. . .) Así, a través de una súplica sencilla y espontánea, el santo nos permite contemplar su “más profundo centro” y nos adentra de su mano en una experiencia que, siendo inaccesible, se torna a su vez accesible para cualquier creyente (. . .) Claret nos lega en la Oración filial y apostólica una plegaria intimísima y universal al mismo tiempo: quizás la más personal y la más común de todas las suyas”.
- 33 “Alabar, hacer reverencia y servir a Dios nuestro Señor”.
- 34 “Deseando y eligiendo lo que más nos conduce para el fin que somos criados”.
- 35 “El amor se debe poner más en las obras que en las palabras”.
- 36 “El amor consiste en comunicación de las dos partes, es a saber, en dar y comunicar el amante al amado lo que tiene, o de lo que tiene o puede, y así, por el contrario, el amado al amante”. The translation is ours.
- 37 The original text, in Spanish, says: “Pedir conocimiento interno de tanto bien recibido, para que yo, enteramente reconociendo, pueda en todo amar y servir a su divina majestad”.
- 38 “Tomad, Señor, y recibid toda mi libertad, mi memoria, mi entendimiento y toda mi voluntad, todo mi haber y poseer; Vos me lo distes; a Vos, Señor, lo torno; todo es vuestro, dispond a toda vuestra voluntad; dadme vuestro amor y gracia, que ésta me basta”.

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