

## CONTEMPLATIO: Finding God In All Things

By Eric S. Escandor, SJ

**CONTEMPLATIO** is a simplified interactive version of the Spiritual Exercises in the form of installation art. It was one of the activities featured in Ateneo de Manila University's Ignatian Festival last July 19-31, 2013. When Eric Esteba, SJ, Alvin Laput, SJ, and myself conceptualized this installation art, our goal was to creatively facilitate a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the Spiritual Exercises. More than just an installation art, it became clear to us that the prayer exercises should flow from our own spiritual journey as Jesuits-in-formation in order for it to be effective.



A 45-minute prayer exercise, **CONTEMPLATIO**, was designed mainly for young people who want to deepen their faith and also enrich their Ignatian identity. It is not meant to replace the actual experience of going through the long silent retreat that Ignatius prescribes, but it definitely attempts to give each one going through the installation a glimpse of what the Spiritual Exercises can offer.

Ignatius of Loyola, as we all know, was a man of great desires. And yet, after his great conversion, he refused to cave-in to the demanding noise of the world. Instead, he first patiently listened to God's proddings from within. Deep inside, he knew that this was God's way of calling him. He knew that he needed to struggle with his own "inordinate attachments" so that he could freely make loving and life-giving choices. He turned his back on worldly glories and humbly embraced the values of his Eternal King so that he might follow and serve Him more faithfully. He took on Jesus' Cross so that he could experience the transformative power of His resurrection. And when he had seen the loving Lord laboring in his life, it was no longer that difficult to find God even in the chaotic world outside him.

From then on, his heart was inflamed with the passion to serve the Lord in others. His one true desire burned intensely: to see God more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow God more nearly each passing day of his life. The key to the **CONTEMPLATIO** experience is one's openness to the "grace" which Ignatius suggests we ardently beg from the Lord. Each "week" is structured around a particular theme. Gradually, the one going through the interactive art, will hopefully be more free to listen to the Lord's gentle invitations and thus respond with a firmer conviction of loving Him in others.

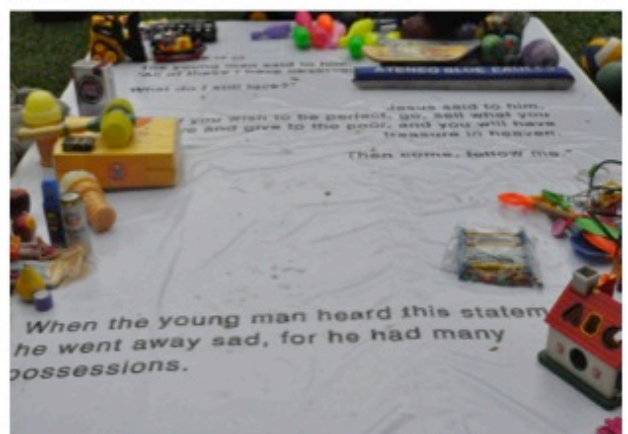
## The Preparatory Exercise: *Praying Over My Attachments*

It is inevitable to get attached to something or to someone. Certain attachments in life, give us a sense of stability. But there are certain attachments that become too central in our lives. They weigh us down so much that stability deteriorates to stagnancy. We lose mobility. We lose true freedom.

Right before them are boxes marked with various of areas of our lives where we might end up hoarding all sorts of attachments – career, security, honor, pride, sinful patterns, addictions, among others. With a reusable shopping bag, they pick up toys which they feel represent the kind of attachments in life, such as things, events, people, and even ideas and emotions that weigh them down and stop them from growing. Each toy has a corresponding number of stones, depending on the intensity of attachment.

As they quietly lift the bag filled with their attachments, they prayerfully ponder on these questions:

- What are these things that weigh me down?
- How long have I held on to them?
- How heavy have they been in my life?
- Once and for all, will I be willing to let go of this heavy baggage? Or even better, will I be willing to let God free me from this heavy baggage?



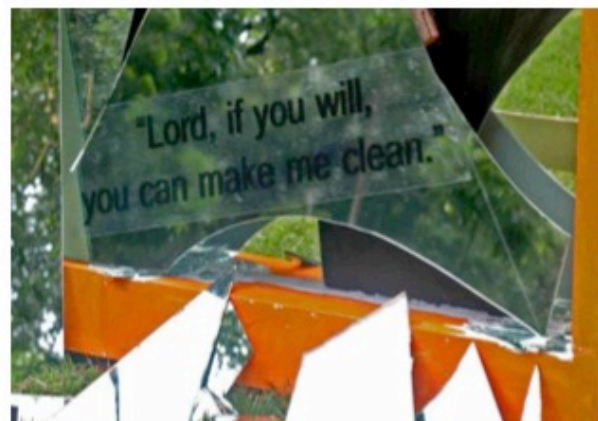


## First Week: *The Three Mirrors*

Right before them are three huge mirrors. The first one is their usual type – clean, whole mirror. They stare into it and reflect on how wonderfully they are made. The point is to go beyond appreciating oneself and instead appreciating more our Creator who created us in His image and likeness, and with His own goodness.

The second mirror is not that easy to look at – broken, shattered mirror. It represents their broken self...broken not by any other violence but the one they inflict on themselves every time they forget that they are meant for greater things other than sins. Sins break us. And sins break our bonds with others and God. Sins can shatter us almost beyond recognition...so shattered that we even begin to doubt our goodness and the Goodness that made us be.

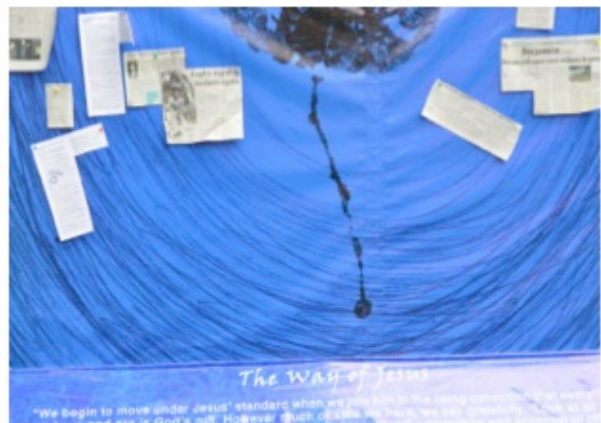
Thank God there is a third mirror- though broken yet pieced together to wholeness! It's not as smooth and chic as the first one, but one is sure more pleased looking at oneself through this third mirror than the second. Christ's saving act of dying on the cross brings healing, forgiveness, and wholeness.



## Second week: *The Two Standards*

Fr. Horacio dela Costa, SJ wrote, “Life is a Warfare: a warfare between two standards: the Standard of Christ and the Standard of Satan.” But much like in modern warfare, the stealth of the enemy makes it even more difficult to win the battle. It takes more than the usual strategy to win this war. St. Ignatius proposes the discernment of spirits: becoming sensitive to the “motions of the soul”, understanding where these motions come from and where they lead us. When discernment of spirits is the tool employed in unmasking the scheming ways of the evil one, you will soon realize that even what seems to be innocuous at the start can actually lead to something terribly pernicious.

Bearing this in mind, they try out their capacity to discern God’s holy way vis-a-vis the devious ways of the evil one in the world. They pick out any of the newspaper cut-outs at the center platform and pin them, according to their discernment to the appropriate wall: Does it belong to the Way of the World or the Way of Christ? As they do so, they hopefully realize that only when they are intimately connected with Jesus that they can truly discern His path and follow His ways.

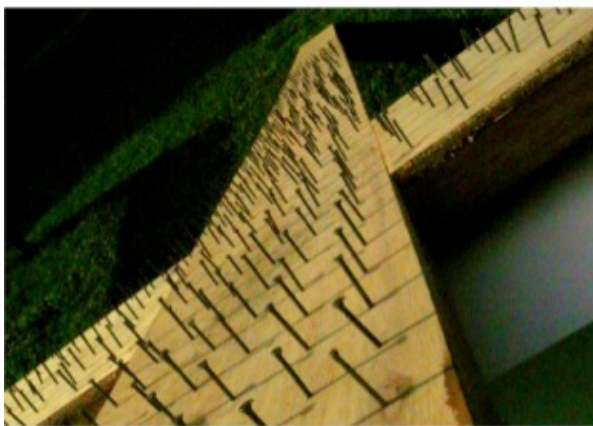




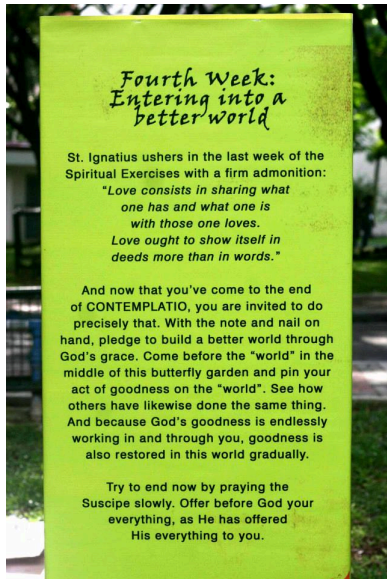
### Third week: *The Nails*

As they walk into the third week, an imposing installation art - a cast of a human torso wrapped up with various images of grief and sorrow – captures the grace of this week. A few feet from them installation art is a cross riddled with nails. Each nail representing the pain that Christ endured and that the world suffers up to this day. They reflect on the horrible pain that one goes through in being “crucified” today: such might be the misery of those informal settlers being uprooted every now and then, only to be dumped to another forsaken slum or maybe it is the affliction of those discriminated by this so-called civilized society because of their gender, orientation, skin color, and even language.

They are to think of one concrete action which they can accomplish within the week. This act may even fuel a lifelong commitment of being a “person-for-others,” ready to give what is necessary, without counting the cost. When they have this action plan pictured clearly in their mind, they write it down legibly on a post it. They, then, carefully pull-out one of the nails from the cross. Holding on to both of these items, they enter into the tunnel that brings them to the fourth week.

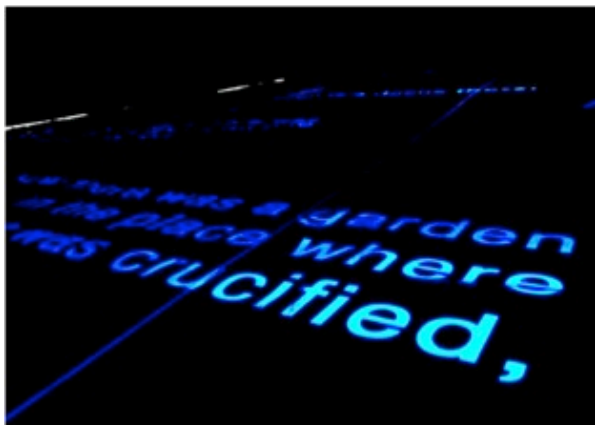


## Fourth Week: *Entering Into a Better World*



St. Ignatius ushers in the last week of the Spiritual Exercises with a firm admonition: "Love consists in sharing what one has and what one is with those one loves. Love ought to show itself in deeds more than in words."

As they have come to the end of **CONTEMPLATIO**, they are invited to do precisely that. With the note and nail on hand, they pledge to build a better world through God's grace. In the middle of a butterfly garden, they pin their act of goodness on the "world". They end by praying the Suscipe prayer slowly.



*\*If you wish to put up CONTEMPLATIO in your area, we would gladly share with you our input. You may contact us through facebook: [contemplatio2013](https://www.facebook.com/contemplatio2013) or email: [easesj@jesuits.net](mailto:easesj@jesuits.net).*