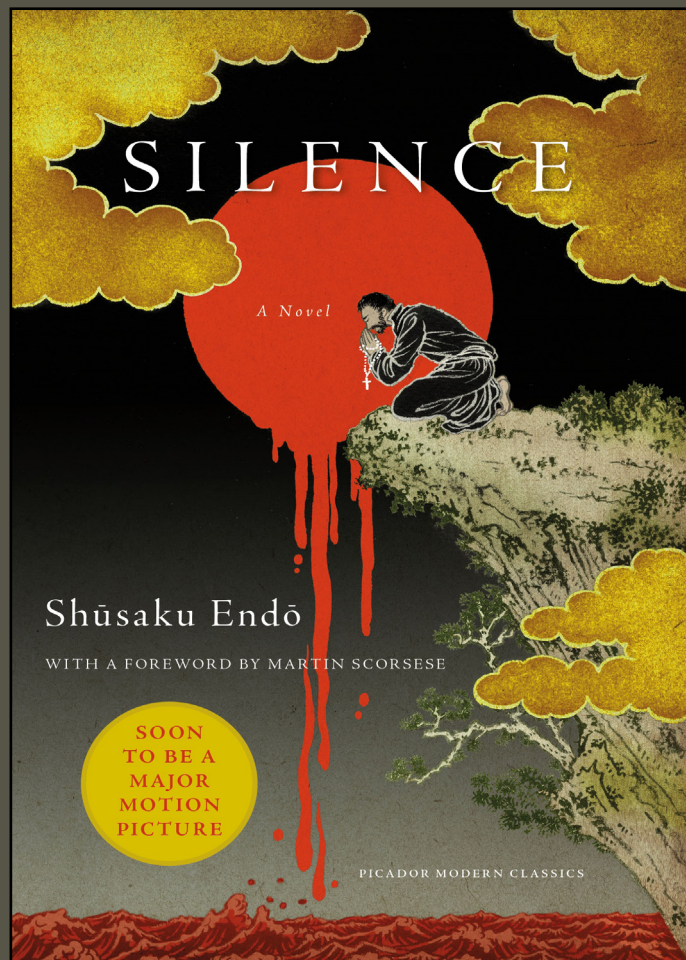


Picador Modern Classics

Reflecting *Silence*: Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Masterpiece



Compiled by The Clapham Group

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Introduction

The following is a compilation of reflections on Shusaku Endo's *Silence*, whose complex message has touched thousands of readers. Pastors, authors, musicians, theologians and professors have read *Silence* and have been moved by its story and its themes.

The reflections gathered here only hint at the powerful impact the book has had, as well as the diversity of responses to it. Each perspective is unique and hones in on a different aspect of Endo's work, yet collectively they reflect on the larger human questions and conditions that affect us all.

We have all wrestled with the question of why a good God would allow evil to exist in the world. *Silence* explores a cavern, a place we all find ourselves in at some point, where we cannot avoid the reality of suffering and persecution. Theologically, culturally, emotionally and psychologically, this story is heavy. Perhaps this weight is why the book has touched so many people from various backgrounds in different ways.

The experience of suffering is wide felt but also specific to each individual. One cannot read *Silence* and not be implicated. It's these dual universal and personal aspects of the story that also makes it so powerfully resonant.

Our hope is this: that as you journey through Endo's fictional account of a true story of persecution, faith and suffering is given a new perspective, a fresh and challenging one, in your own journey.

To travel down this way is perilous, but take heart, for we do not travel it alone.

Laura J. Bloxham

Adjunct Professor

Whitworth University

For years I read and taught *Silence* as a search for the father, the young priest's own search for his vocation to be a father, his search for his mentor Ferreira who has apostatized, and his search for God the Father. Rodrigues thinks he knows who God is when Rodrigues leaves home and the desk where he has studied since he was seventeen; but he finds along the way a God and His Son who are different from their European faces ("the clear blue eyes") in his mind.

But over the past few years I have more and more read this novel as a recognition of the love of God, the sacrifices God made, Jesus made, and all of us in the guise of Rodrigues, can make for those we learn to love and serve. Stepping on the fumie, giving up one's prescribed beliefs and "Priestly duty," for the sake of those whose faces are different from our own ("their faces all look the same"), even those who seem unworthy ("the hard thing is to die for the miserable and the corrupt") is the call to follow Him. Ultimately, Christ calls Rodrigues not to save souls in the way he had thought, but to love them. Ferreira says that act of love is "the most painful act that has ever been performed." That work is more important than the church, more important than the missionary vocation; it is to be like Christ, to be trampled on by the world.

Stephen M. Colecchi

Director, Office of International Justice and Peace

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Silence by Shusaku Endo is more than a literary masterpiece. Endo's novel elicits a spiritual journey. For me, it brought back vivid memories of my 2010 visit to Nagasaki for the 65th Anniversary of the atomic bombing. At that time, leaders of the local Catholic Church took me on a pilgrimage to the sites of the martyrdom.

My hosts introduced me to the Hidden Christians who survived brutal persecution in Japan in the 17th Century. The martyrs' spiritual and physical suffering found echoes in the 1945 atomic devastation of the restored Catholic Church in Nagasaki. The faith of the Church in Japan was tested in the fires of both the persecution and the bombing. The twin catastrophes seared into its soul a commitment to peace amidst human woundedness.

Endo tells a profoundly moving story of Christian heroism and human frailty during the time of persecution. His vivid character portrayals invite us to examine the strengths and weaknesses, the motivations and actions, of our own faith. I look forward to Martin Scorsese's motion picture depiction of *Silence* as another opportunity to examine my own Christian journey.

Paul J. Contino

Blanche E. Seaver Professor of Humanities

Pepperdine University

In 1996, I remember walking the streets of Tokyo and seeing a poster advertising Martin Scorsese's *Silence*. We've waited twenty years, and now that promised work has finally arrived!

In Japan, my wife Mary and I felt it vital to make a pilgrimage to Nagasaki. First, out of respect for the horrific suffering in the wake of the United States' dropping of the atomic bomb there in 1945. But secondly, and relatedly, to visit and pray at the shrine to Nagasaki martyrs, the European and Japanese Christians who were put to death by the Takagawa government in the 1600s, whose suffering Endo renders unforgettably.

Three images stand out from our pilgrimage: First, the dominating golden statue of Kanon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, which made me recall Ferreira's claim to Rodrigues that Christianity could never be transplanted to Japan; second, the shrine to Peter Miki and the Nagasaki martyrs, which displays original *fumi-e*, images of Jesus and Mary upon which the martyrs – unlike Rodrigues – refused to trample; and third, the statues of Mary and the apostle John that still stand, in postures of grief, at the ruined entrance of Nagasaki Cathedral, representing the saints' participation in Christ's suffering, but recalling too the weight of human sin taken up by Christ on the cross.

These images conjoin when I reflect upon and teach Shusaku Endo's *Silence*. My students grapple intensely with this novel, especially with Rodrigues's decision to apostatize – and the questions it raises about human responsibility, divine grace, and the meaning of human suffering.

Here is one student's testimony that points to Endo's suggestion of God's vast mercy in response to weak human beings – be they Rodrigues or Kichijiro: "This book is absolutely heartbreaking. ...Rodrigues gave up everything for the sake of his brother, actually a stranger [Kichijiro] and he suffered for it for the rest of his life. ...We all know so many Kichijiros and are taught to avoid them. We believe they bring suffering upon themselves and therefore deserve it. Did Christ die for only the "undeserved" suffering? I don't think so. What a life changing testimony of love."

I am hopeful that Scorsese's film will also be a "testimony of love," and bring many others to Endo's novel and the perennial religious questions it raises.

Lydia R. Cooper

Assistant Professor

Creighton University

Since its publication in English in 1969, Shusaku Endo's *Silence* has been heralded as one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the novel's gripping depiction of a 17th-century Portuguese Jesuit in Japan during the days of the violent expulsion and suppression of Christianity has been widely recognized as one of the most moving portrayals of faith in contemporary literature.

The novel is presented as (fictional) historical narrative interspersed with "found" letters that document Fr. Rodrigues's fateful journey across the globe and into unbearable suffering and great hope, into apostasy and redemption. The narrative is subtle and complex, and seems to offer no clear answer to its critical question: Why is God silent? Yet the novel offers subtle patterns that nudge the reader toward enlightenment. We notice patterns of threes: three choices, three tests of faith (Santa Marta's, Garrpe's, and Rodrigues's); three "silences" of God that haunt Fr. Rodrigues; and three times the "face of Jesus" appears to Rodrigues. Each repetition of an image challenges the one that came before it, changes it, and shakes our understanding of what we know, or think we know, of faith, of God, and of what redemption looks like. Endo's novel invites readers to bear with Fr. Rodrigues that unbearable silence of God, and to endure that terrible shaking of faith and waning of hope until they, too, understand the courage that it takes to fail, to fear, and to be silent.

Ian Deweese-Boyd, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Gordon College

Shusaku Endo's *Silence* touches on the all too common experience that God seems to have abandoned this world, leaving even the most faithful followers to suffer alone under silent, empty skies. Set in seventeenth century Japan during one of the most intense periods of Christian persecution history has seen, *Silence* traces the journey of the Portuguese Jesuit priest Sebastian Rodrigues as he lives among the *Kakure Kirishitans*—hidden Christians. He expects to bring hope and light to these downtrodden people but is instead simply staggered by the real horror these Christians endure. He had heard the reports of the thousands who had been harassed, tortured, and killed; he had heard and accepted the narrative of their redemptive suffering and glorious martyrdom. But when he personally witnesses two Christians, bound to stakes set on the shoreline, killed over the course of a week as the relentless tide ebbs around them, this narrative begins to sound hollow. Haunted by the silhouette of these men with the cold, silent sea behind them, he cannot rid himself of the thought that "while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent." Shaken, Rodrigues longs for some sign of God's love, but seems to find nothing but brutal suffering under the leaden skies. Ignatius of Loyala, the founder of the Jesuit order to which Rodrigues belongs, encouraged the use of imagination in prayer. He asked his followers to imagine the details, the smell, the angle of light, the tone of voice, the expression of the face,

the cast of the eyes, whether contemplating their own life or a scene from the gospel. Ignatius believed attention to such details creates space for God to speak. Clearly schooled in this practice, Rodrigues often merges his experience with Christ's passion, reading his journey as so many stops along the *via dolorosa*. When his experience of silence is at its most intense, Rodrigues finds Christ's, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" echoing in his mind, and senses the true, human terror at God's silence Jesus felt. As readers, Endo invites us in Ignatian fashion to stand with Rodrigues even as he stands with Jesus with this bewildering question on our lips, hoping for some consolation even when there is no demystifying word to be heard. That Endo renders the inner landscape of this bewilderment and its complexity without offering any neat resolutions is one of the marks of the greatness of this novel and what makes it one of the most existentially satisfying responses to the problem of God's silence.

Todd Detherage

Executive Director and Co-Founder

The Telos Group

Near the bottom of a hillside in the ancient city of Jerusalem is a small garden that would be entirely unremarkable except for the fact that it is set aside to mark the place to which Jesus withdrew with his three closest friends the night before his crucifixion. And it was here that a deeply divine story also became a deeply human one as well. With bitter enemies plotting his demise, a brutal regime preparing for his arrest, and committed friends flagging in their devotion, Jesus no doubt felt increasingly alone. In the stillness of that cold night, he withdrew to commune with God the Father in solitude. Luke tells us he knelt but Matthew adds that he placed his face against the hard and cold ground as he cried out to God to relieve him of the unbearable darkness that was settling in all around him. And even more devastating than the evil machinations of men and the betrayal of friends was the silence of God the Father.

When I first read Shusaku Endo's brilliant novel *Silence* I could not help but think of Gethsemane. The theologians will rightly explain the power and unique importance of what happened at Gethsemane as Jesus embraced his own path toward the cross. But its significance is not cheapened by any identification we feel with the silence of the garden arising from those times our own heartfelt cries to God seem to evaporate into the ether. The brutality directed at the missionaries, the abandoned and persecuted Japanese believers, and the forced renunciations of creed and religious faith all happen without obvious intervention by the God these poor people seek to serve.

Endo's deeply affecting tale raises honest questions, and only provides answers that raise other questions leaving us to wonder why too often a God of love and mercy remains silent. It's perhaps possible to pretend this is not true, though any clear-eyed experience of life make this an unserious response. It is also understandable that some might choose to reject God as a fiction or an indifferent being at best. But then there is the path in between which allows for honest complaint coupled with reverent mystery. Endo's story manages to take

this path, and Scorsese's film—coming as it does in an era of war, genocide, an epidemic of human trafficking, and massive displacement of civilian populations—leaves many asking God to speak. It is a story for our age, deserving of our sincere reflection.

Charles Clay Doyle

Emeritus Professor of English

University of Georgia

In a novel about Christian faith beset by trials and obstacles, we are not surprised to find “Christ figures” and various images and conceptions of Christ. Of course, young Padre Rodrigues, as he journeys to the far end of the world, is preoccupied – even obsessed – with envisioning the beautiful, serene, heroic face of his European Christ. However, it might be argued that the true face of Christ in the novel belongs to the despised Kichijiro, a point that Rodrigues himself may (or may not) ultimately realize. Christ promised his disciples and missionaries, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). *That* is the tenacious Kichijiro! Not a lovely or exalted vision but a real presence, he incarnates weakness and misery and shame – most closely resembling the Christ whose face appears on the trampled fumie.

The numerous comparisons of Kichijiro with a *dog* suggest an allusion to Francis Thompson's famous Catholic poem “The Hound of Heaven” (1893), which presents Christ as a dog that relentlessly tracks and follows sinners, even those desperate to escape Him and His offered mercies: “I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; / I fled Him, down the arches of the years; / I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways / Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears / I hid from Him”

James Felak

Professor of History

University of Washington

I have been assigning Endo's *Silence* to my class on the History of Christianity for nearly a decade, in long anticipation of the Scorsese film. I have been eager to assign students a short paper comparing the novel and the film, and now that hope is soon to be realized. I appreciate that the novel gives a non-Western view of Christianity, and presents Western and Japanese characters in dialogue. I also appreciate that the novel, though set in the seventeenth century, raises questions that are quite contemporary, even timeless. There is the question of the “silence” of God in the face of human suffering. There are questions connected with the potential for Christianity to take root in cultures with very different religious traditions—is such acculturation possible? On what terms? Are some cultures impervious to Christianity? My favorite question, and one I often ask students to address in papers or discussions, is whether the novel is a story of conversion or a story of apostasy. Is

Father Sebastian abandoning his Christianity, or is he experiencing a conversion to a deeper or at least a different faith? I have been made aware of the impact that dimension of the novel has on students by the fact that several have gotten their parents to read *Silence*, and some students have even felt the need to consult with their pastors after reading the work. The novel is unique—there have been major Catholic writers (Flannery O’Connor, Sigrid Undset for example) who have set their works in non-Catholic milieus, but Endo singularly tells a Christian story in a land with little Christianity and even less Catholicism. I am delighted that a director of Scorsese’s caliber has appreciated the power of this work, and I await with great anticipation his interpretation of the novel.

Makoto Fujimura

Artist and Author of *Silence and Beauty*

I write in my new book *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* on Endo’s writing:

Endo’s faith was neither prototypical nor well defined, despite his intense interest in Catholic history and Catholic theology. What comes through in Silence and his other works is that he viewed faith as a way to affirm the ambiguity of God’s working through the suffering of human existence.

I offer Japanese concepts of “beauty” and “ambiguity” as two paths through which we may understand Endo and *Silence*. To provide the cultural context for Japanese beauty and ambiguity, I explore the art of 16th- and 17th-century Japan, and, in particular, I explore the life and aesthetics of tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591). Why is Rikyu so important to the readers of *Silence*? Hidden faith, ambiguous to most, lay beneath his life—the same path, I argue in my book, that Father Rodrigues took at the end of the book *Silence*. Despite the outcries that greeted the release of *Silence*, and that may soon accompany the release of Scorsese’s film version of the novel, *Silence* is ultimately neither about the denial of faith nor about the silence of God. It is the Voice of God, however ambiguous to us, speaking through the Silence that Endo desired to depict.

Rikyu was the originator, refiner and perfecter of Japanese aesthetics. Perhaps you have heard the term *Wabi, Sabi and Suki*, seminal concepts in Japanese aesthetics; it’s all due to him. Rikyu gained power and prominence during the “War Period” (Sengoku-jidai) of Japanese history marked by feudal power struggles. Paradoxically, what he promoted was biblical Shalom, a contemplative place of repose, safety and deeper communication. In doing so, Rikyu prepared the soil in which Japanese culture will be birthed. He was forced to commit *Seppuku*, a ritual form of suicide, at the very teahouse dedicated to peace, and he was fully aware that in the years following his death, persecution of Christians would accelerate. It is my thesis that Rikyu intentionally hid, through a Japanese sense of beauty and ambiguity, the Christian message of hope.

When I traced these elements, crucial for understanding what happened to Father Rodrigues at the end of *Silence* (and even more importantly, in the novel’s appendix), I had

not anticipated this would lead to the conclusion I've laid out in the previous paragraphs. Today, I not only believe that Rikyu and many of his disciples were Christ followers; I also believe that Japanese culture owes a deep debt, quite possibly an *exclusive* debt, to Rikyu. Last year, the Catholic Church canonized Ukon Takayama, one of Rikyu's seven disciples, most of whom were exiled due to their faith. But I suspect that when my book is released in Japan this fall, this idea of Christian faith at the root of Japanese culture will be rejected widely by scholars of Japanese history.

Endo's depiction of Fumi-e induced persecution in 17th century, what I have named the "Fumi-e culture" of Japan, points to this hidden reality of rejection. By exclusively rejecting the claims of Christ, by dictatorially continuing to oppress Christians for 250 years, by singling out Christians, Japan uniquely etched (or debossed) the image of Christ into its culture, creating a hidden image deeply embedded in Japanese sense of beauty and ambiguity. This Fumi-e culture, despite the modern liberations, continues as an invisible reality of suppression in Japan.

Since completing my book, I have begun to conjecture that Rikyu and his followers not only seeded the aesthetics of Japan into her "muddy soils," but also helped to stimulate an entrepreneurial economy that will begin to rival the Tokugawa dictatorial oppression. Tracing this historical reality will require another book. Rikyu literally raised the value of beauty and peace: his tea wares gained power and value, especially after his death. This covert economy grew during the stable years after consolidation of the Tokugawa dictatorial era, and the underground economy birthed the Edo merchant class. When the Meiji era arrived in 1868, the toppling of the Tokugawa Shogunate was due as much to this entrepreneurial economy of middle class merchants as it was to the pressure of the "gunboat diplomacy" of the West.

Rikyu's teahouses were places of free thought, albeit via covert means, and many of the teahouses – including the famed Daitoku-ji temple, the mecca of Zen Buddhism – served as places for Eucharistic gatherings of hidden Christians. Rikyu's and his followers' tea wares became emblems of freedom from dictatorial oppression, and the art of 17th-century and 18th-century Japan specifically points to this hidden faith being kept alive through Japanese beauty and ambiguity. The Japanese ideal of silence merges these two strands of beauty and ambiguity and imbues them with theological value; but they are so hidden today that Japanese themselves do not realize this hidden Christ culture they value.

Endo, in *Silence*, captures in the fabric of his craftsmanship these hidden elements that Japanese are so reluctant to acknowledge. Both beauty and ambiguity surface throughout the book, bobbing in and out of the dark waters of deaths, and he achieves deeper communication through the universality of trauma. Through Endo's writing and now Scorsese's film, the novel's most hidden—and ambiguous—character, Father Rodrigues, has become the most public, yet still beautifully hidden, sign of faith in our time. In these dark days of trauma, fear and anxiety, Endo's narrative injects into our psyche an antidote: hope, countering oppression. The narrative of terror moves us toward a new mission. Through Japanese aesthetics, the hidden-Christ of the Japanese past and present haunts us all. Through Japanese beauty and ambiguity, we may yet find ourselves liberated from our bondage to Modernity's decay.

Dr. Steven Garber

Principal

Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture and author of *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*

“But do not tell that all is fine” is the poetic argument of Mumford and Sons, and we all know in our very different ways the reality of their protest.

Even in this very wounded world, it is possible to grow up with innocence. Family lives and social circumstances allow some the gift of seeing life as more whole than broken— but there comes a time for everyone everywhere when what seemed whole no longer is. For me this came in my dropped-out years, living in communes in America and Europe, trying hard to understand my life in the world. I read Camus for the first time, lingering over the weighty words in *The Plague*, knowing that I was being asked a question that I had never before considered— what will I do with the sorrow of the world?

I have lived with that question for most of my life.

And now we are the very edge of this question being one for the world to answer, as Shusaku Endo’s novel becomes the film, *Silence*. Camus raised the stakes on my life as a young man; Endo asked even more of me. I have never read a more difficult book, one that in its very substance is born of the hardest question of all. We all know the contours of the story by now: the

Jesuit missionaries in 16th-century Japan whose faith, hope and love are stretched taut, face-to-face with the greatest suffering imaginable— which is still unimaginable —asked to recant their deepest beliefs about God and the world.

The novelist Walker Percy argued for stories that offer “hints of hope”— not ones where the angels always sing, and the heavens always open, but instead, in the face of horror and grief we can still see a hint of hope. We need stories like that, knowing what we know about life in the world. If we have eyes to see, *Silence* is that story.

Os Guinness

Author of *The Call, Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, and *The Case for Civility*

Films chase each other out of the Hollywood chute so fast these days, and each one is given its own soporific effect by America’s multiplex culture of entertainment, that few have a chance to initiate anything approaching a serious discussion. But Christians must not allow that to happen to Martin Scorsese’s upcoming film of Shusaku Endo’s novel *Silence*.

For those concerned to think, *Silence* will hit the Western church like a branding iron between the eyes. We may be twenty-first century Christians in America and far removed

from seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries to Japan, but the story raises issues that go right to the heart of the crisis of faith in the West today. I was born in China during the Japanese invasion in World War Two in which seventeen million were killed, and we lived in the Chinese capital soon after it had suffered the brutal savagery of the rape of Nanking. So I read the novel, and doubtless I will see the film prepared to steel myself against the graphic accounts of torture as the Japanese stamped out the incursion of Portuguese Jesuits in the seventeenth century.

Endo's novel is certainly graphic, and Scorsese's film will surely be so too, but the violence in the story is historically accurate, and it raises issues for faith that far surmount the violence. Have we grown complacent in repeating that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and at the same time whining when we face any opposition and rejection? Have we thought through how far we can adapt the gospel to our own culture without compromising its integrity beyond recall? Does advanced modernity act like the Japanese "swamp effect" to neutralize the Christian faith and stunt its growth? Have we Christians in America shown that we too have our price? Have the extremes of the Emergent church, or trends such as the "Insider movement" in missions, acted to neuter the strength of evangelism, conversion and discipleship? Is our "amiable accommodationism" toward the culture any better than outright capitulation? And above all, are we better prepared to answer the three questions that drive through the book: Would we stand firmer under such ultimate testing than the two priests who deny the faith? Who are we to call for faithfulness from others when it will be they and not we who will bear the cost? And are we able to trust God when he is silent and seems to do nothing in the face of the excruciating suffering of his people?

Silence will be a litmus test for the American church. Either we will engage with the eminent novelist and the equally eminent filmmaker and grow stronger in our faith and more faithful in our time, or their powerful works will provide the background commentary that throws light on the progressive weakness and multiple betrayals of the Western church. What Søren Kierkegaard called "kissing Judases" – those who betray Jesus with an interpretation – is a central challenge in our time. But shame on us that we are bowing, not to the savagery of seventeenth century Samurai, but to the siren seductions of the twenty-first century. The hour is late, and Endo and Scorsese are providing a wake-up call to the church in the West.

Benjamin L. Hartley

Associate Professor of Christian Mission

Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University

For six years I have used Shusaku Endo's *Silence* in my introductory history of world Christianity course. I have done so to highlight the situations of Christian persecution in the past as well as the present and to encourage the development of historical empathy so critical for students who too often view the history of Christianity as a cold gridiron of meaningless names and dates. *Silence* helps me to displace those unhelpful perceptions of history and so

much more. I also bring the novel's climax scene into another course my students usually take at the end of their seminary careers. I do so to make a critical point about the vulnerability of Christian mission. My students have had and will have silent nights of doubt and anguish by hospital bedsides, in prisons, and on Philadelphia street corners. They will know such nights alone by themselves as they face head-on tough questions about faithfulness in the midst of their difficult contexts. It is my hope that they will remember Shusaku Endo's work and gain courage from Rodrigues who I believe was ultimately able to hear Christ's gritty grace loud and clear.

Dr. Laurie Camp Hatch

Assistant Professor of English

Vanguard University of Southern California

What does it mean to lose your life for Christ? What precisely is lost? Are personal desires lost? Family? Culture? Language? Vocation? Never have I read (or taught) a novel that forces you to live these questions in so many ways; in *Silence*, the characters seem to have abandoned all for Christ, and yet more is required. The missionary-priest Sebastian Rodrigues enters the novel as a Christian hero – he leaves behind the safety of his own country to enter a land in which Christians are persecuted, tortured with unimaginable brutality, and martyred. It is not enough. The missionary-priest Rodrigues must sacrifice his own cherished identity as a priest and follower of Christ, and he must relinquish his very image of Christ. And yet, Rodrigues' stunning failures allow God to shape him in a powerful way and see Christ with renewed eyes. It is not the heroic missionary, but the suffering Judas that becomes God's instrument. Rodrigues, and Kichijiro before him, demonstrate that only a thoroughly empty vessel may be filled. *Silence* forces me to confront my own concept of Christ and my own identity in Christ. Is the Christ I am following a product of my Western culture? What have I not yet relinquished to Christ? How much room do I allow God to work through me? What am I willing to surrender to the suffering Christ who sacrificed all for me?

Gary A. Haugen

Founder and CEO

International Justice Mission and author of *The Locust Effect*

Endo's *Silence* wrestles with the nature of mercy, love and God's silence in the midst of terrible suffering and persecution. It is a story that causes us to grapple with our faith, and ask questions about the changing nature of faith when confronted with the reality of violence. There have been times, when faced with terrible atrocities, like genocide, slavery, and trafficking, that I have wrestled with the silence of God. In the same way that Rodrigues wrestled with God's apparent lack of response – I too have wondered about the mysterious

ways of God. As Rodrigues examines his heart, and wrestles with the true nature of faithfulness, I felt challenged to re-think the easier answers. There is a way that violence disrupts overly simplistic assertions. And Endo's *Silence* gently shakes us and invites us to ponder.

Joel C. Hunter

Senior Pastor

Northland - A Church Distributed

This is an excruciating book to read. The evil and raw details of persecution gnaw deep into our souls. The challenge of faith is not always one of merely choosing between courage and cowardice; it is the inescapable agony of not knowing what Christ would have us do. *Silence* took me on a journey not only back into the missionary's experience in Japan, but also into realms of my own longing to do right while suffering the pain of uncertainty that accompanies contemplation of what "right" even is in the given circumstances. Every decision comes with a cost that I must be willing to pay. But if the essence of the Gospel is the grace that comes through Christ, and not the righteousness earned by our own behavior, then *Silence* is as exhilarating as it is excruciating. Few of us will be tortured physically and mentally to the extent of the Christian martyrs in this book, but many will be sobered and recommitted to Christ by their story. Many will be driven again to their knees repeating the simple and ancient prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." I am one of those.

John Inazu

Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion

Washington University in St. Louis

In *Silence* we learn – or rather, we are reminded – that the isolation of guilt and pride and shame can be as terrifying and testing as the nearness of a hostile and even violent culture. "There's something in this country that completely stifles the growth of Christianity," says the fallen priest, Ferreira. That something turns out not to be the political horror that engulfs the Japanese Christians. Rather, it is that "the Christianity they believe in is like the skeleton of a butterfly caught in a spider's web: it contains only the external form; the blood and the flesh are gone." Such are the hauntingly brilliant indictments from Shusaku Endo – perhaps not only indictments of a distant place and time. Yet Endo is no despairing fool – the ever-present reality of another's blood and flesh pierces the agony and anguish of this book. And we are left with an almost inexplicable hope from the ruins of broken lives – we are left with a grace that is sufficient and a strength made perfect in weakness.

Mamoru Ishida

Director

Dallas Baptist University East Asian Studies Program

In *Silence*, Endo challenges readers to search what the silence of God means. The silence of God must be the intimate sign that the Lord trusts us and plans to bring us into an even deeper relationship with Him. What a hope! What a love! At the end, Rodrigues realizes a new level of love toward the Lord that he never encountered before. Everything he has experienced up to the final moment was necessary for this realization. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, the experience of Rodrigues is summarized. “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Time is nothing to God. Moreover, life is not about us at all. We too must come to this realization and become free from this world by understanding that it is all about Him and living as though that is true. This is one of the key truths of our life for us to walk in the light of the Lord. In the series of struggles Rodrigues faces, in the process of Christian persecution in Japanese history, the Lord has uncovered this truth. God’s silence is actually His answer.

Seth Jacobowitz

Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures

Yale University

The Universal and the Particular in *Silence*

Shusaku Endo’s *Silence* (1966) seeks to grasp the universal essence of Christ and the Church from within a particular historical moment: the final years of the so-called “Christian century” in Japan. The mission that began with the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1549 saw rapid, auspicious gains, including some 300,000 converts and the development of Nagasaki as a Jesuit colony. Yet all too soon the Church’s ambitions ran up against the warlords intent upon unifying Japan. Culminating in the Shimabara Rebellion of 1638, the Church was expelled, its priests martyred, and the scattered, leaderless Christians forced to practice in secret or abandon the faith altogether.

Silence is a consummately researched work of fiction based on the life of Sicilian Jesuit missionary Guisepe Chiara (1602-1685). Akin to Chiara, the protagonist of the novel, Sebastian Rodrigues, sneaks into Japan in 1643 after the prohibition against Christianity. He is determined to attend to the faithful or become a martyr in his own right. Akin once more to Chiara, he arrives troubled by rumors that his mentor, Ferreira, who came to Japan before him, apostatized under torture. The same fate awaits Rodrigues. Will Rodrigues achieve his goal of walking in the footsteps of his beloved Christ, or utterly betray his ideals? Endo does

not leave us with simple answers. In his portrayal of the disputations between Rodrigues and the Japanese magistrate-inquisitor Inoue, Endo crafts what may also be read as a quintessentially existentialist novel. *Silence* puts the test of faith to the ultimate test, culminating in the philosophical position of the absurd. As Camus wrote in the *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), “The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”

Preston Jones

Professor of History

John Brown University

The day I received an invitation to reflect on Shusaku Endo’s *Silence*, I heard a conference presentation on the First World War. In its own day called a “war to end all wars,” that conflict merely set the stage for another far deadlier global struggle. Nearly nine million died in World War I, and as the war was ending in 1918, the planet was struck by influenza. Between 20 and 40 million died from that. Another presentation centered on an event little remembered in the U.S. – the sinking of the *Princess Sophia* off the Alaskan coast in October 1918, leading to the death of more than 340 people.

This grim historical recounting seemed apt as I thought about the effect *Silence* has had on me. The novel’s messages are many. One of these seems to challenge an idea many Christians deem basic – namely, that suffering isn’t part of how things are supposed to be, that God didn’t create the universe with suffering built in. Certainly human willfulness and stupidity are the cause of most suffering. We think of Inoue’s cruelty, of Kichijiro’s dispiriting if understandable cowardice. But cruelty and forms of cowardice exist in the natural world: chimpanzees brutalizing one another for no apparent reason; weaker, slower animals left behind by a herd that, in a different reality, might have protected them. Humans are animated by God’s breath and image, but they are made of the physical stuff of the world, and the world is full of suffering (Genesis 2:7).

Until I read *Silence* I never noticed a verse in the book of Revelation, where we read about “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:7). In some sense, suffering was built in from the beginning. “I suffered beside you,” Jesus says to Rodrigues.

Since reading *Silence*, I have concluded that at the center of the universe, wherever that is, there is a cross.

Jaeyoon Kim, Ph.D.

Professor of History

Point Loma Nazarene University

Silence by Shusaku Endo is an extremely interesting and thought provoking work of historical fiction. Aside from giving the readers a unique reflection on Seventeenth century Japanese society, it is posing serious challenges to Christians today as well. Through the narrative of Padre Rodrigues and his experiences of brutal Japanese persecutions on Christian at the time, Shusaku indirectly acknowledges the Epicurean paradox. Shusaku wrestles with the notion that God does not hear our prayers and forsakes us in our need. This issue of hearing God's voice is something to which many Christians and non-Christians alike can relate. People are constantly lacking answers when it comes to God's absence in this world where genocides, wars, famines, murders, terrors, and incurable disease are banalities. How could God stay silent in the face of so much violence and brutality? Even though this question of God's silence amidst suffering is not clearly answered by the story, Shusaku is presenting the reader with Jesus who loves the outcasts, the heartbroken, and even the deceivers. In some ways, it is a story of hope. It is the paradox of evangelism. It is through God's silence that Rodrigues realized that God was never actually quiet.

T. James Koder

Professor of Religion

Wellesley College

Silence (*chinmoku* in Japanese) evokes many responses and reactions. On one end of the spectrum, "silence" is vacuous, nothing happening. In today's busy life, we become quickly nervous when "nothing is happening." On the other end of the spectrum, "silence" is loaded with meaning and perhaps purpose. When a tragedy occurs, we are silent, not knowing what to say. "9/11" was surrounded with silence, until we started talking. The same may have been true in Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Sandy Hook, among so many other places, where the tragedy defied words. Acts of mercy are also given and received in silence, for no word suffices to express our gratitude.

In the case of Endo's novel, upon which Martin Scorsese's movie is based, "silence" points to the appalling absence of words, when the feudal government of Japan tortured and killed the Japanese converts to Christianity in the late 16th and early 17th century, for the feudal lords feared that the missionaries were part of Europe's design to colonize Japan. Although Francis Xavier who reached Japan in 1549 was motivated by his desire to bring the "Gospel of Christ" to the Japanese, those who followed him perhaps had less genuine motive behind their missionary activities. The Portuguese who had commissioned Xavier's trip to Japan had brought firearms to Japan in 1543. The Japanese could not tell how the two were related. They feared that the firearms and Christian mission were one and the same. To expel colonizers from Japan, they felt compelled to kick out the missionaries and torture and kill the converts. The 26 Martyrs of Japan in 1597 was a direct result of the feudal Japanese

regime's fear of European colonizers. We know that the mighty powers that be in Europe at that time were Spain and Portugal. Japan's fear of the Europeans was not without good reason. Spain and Portugal were establishing colonies in South and Central America, Africa and Asia. On his way to Japan, Xavier travelled first to Goa, Portugal's colony in India. Macao, next to Hong Kong, was another Portuguese colony. The Tokugawa regime thought Japan was next.

"Silence" in Endo's historical novel is much more than Portugal's colonial design on Japan. It echoes the Biblical narrative. When Jesus of Nazareth was tried, convicted and executed on a tree, he was branded a political criminal. For only the political criminals were "crucified," while other criminals were stoned to death. As Christ died on a tree, many wondered why God in Heaven was not doing anything to help him, to save him. Instead, there was silence, just as there was when the Japanese converts, many of whom were peasants and fisher folk, were crucified in and around Nagasaki. The ban against Christianity was not lifted until 1873, five years after Japan's decision to open the country to the West.

Martin Scorsese's movie, based on Endo's novel, is to be recommended for people in many different fields, including: history, religion, and peace studies.

Nace Lanier

Chaplain

Ronald Reagan National Airport

How many times do you forgive someone before you start enabling him or her to hurt you? In Matthew 18, when asked how many times a person has to forgive someone, Jesus picked an outrageously high number: seventy times seven. His closest followers could not fathom forgiving someone that many times. In years of counseling and in my own life, I have come to teach and embrace the life-giving gift of boundaries. But having certain limits placed around you cannot replace the essential nature of forgiveness. Kichijiro is desperate for forgiveness. He cannot run away from his past failures and needs others to accept his weaknesses. How you view Kichijiro can give you important personal insight. Could I forgive him? How would I talk to him? How does he make me feel when he is "helping"? Most importantly, how am I like Kichijiro? I must be forgiven. I need to forgive. How do we live in the tension of untrustworthy people... like myself? Lord, help us.

Michael Leaser

Vice President

Cave Pictures

Silence was definitely one of the most challenging books I've ever read, but it was also one of the most rewarding. As I was following the struggles of the young priests and the

tormented Kichijiro, I was reminded of how fragile human beings can be, but also how capable of great love they are, especially when they turn their hearts and minds toward Christ. Many of us have thought at one time or another about possibly dying for our faith. How many of us are willing to let other people die for our faith? What would I do when forced to choose between publicly denying Christ or refusing and thereby sentencing five people to death? If I'm truly honest, I'd have to confess that I don't know what I would do in that moment. Would I choose the path of Father Rodrigues? Or would I choose the path of Father Garrpe? Does stepping on an image of Christ really count as apostasy if I am privately and fervently professing His name? Living in the United States, where religious freedom is embedded in our Constitution, I never thought about these questions before. But now that I have, it has forced me to examine just how deep my faith is and just how much I would be willing to do in the name of the One who has given me everything.

Dr. Darin Lenz

Associate Professor of History

Fresno Pacific University

Having taught the novel *Silence* by Shusaku Endo for nearly a decade to undergraduate students, I have come to appreciate the multiple ways we read, understand, and critique this modern classic of world literature. Endo's characters are powerful, and they move us in profoundly important ways. *Silence* illuminates the idealist, the realist, and the traitor, like Kichijiro, that we all confront in our everyday lives. Maybe we hope to see ourselves as fearless and faithful martyrs, but often find that skepticism and betrayal are easier to live than suffering. As an historian I find in the three priests a compelling portrait of Christian missions – those who died of health problems, like Juan de Santa Marta, after traveling to or upon arrival in a foreign land, those like Francisco Garrpe who stayed true to the faith and paid a price as cultural outsiders and often died as martyrs, or those like Sebastian Rodrigues who accommodated their understanding of Christianity to the dominant culture in order to survive and gain influence. The world we live in today continues to wrestle with these same scenarios. We still marvel at heroes of the faith who refuse to falter regardless of the cost, we are troubled by those who betray the faith, but more importantly we, too, are marked by a world that fears silence and refuses to hear God speak in ways that do not conform to our cultural expectations. *Silence* has much to say about Christianity and our everyday lives if we are willing to listen.

D. Michael Lindsay

President

Gordon College

As one of the most thought-provoking novels to be made into a film, *Silence* demonstrates that even during dark periods of church history, there is good work to be done. While many situations look bleak, throughout this novel and the contemporary world,

the importance of sharing our faith does not fade. To be a missionary is to fully know what it means to leave everything behind and follow Christ. More than ever, as Christians try to reach every corner of the world and deliver the Good News, we must reflect on the past, and see how we can learn from the work of those who came before us.

Matt Maher

Musician

Faith is a gift that comes from God, but it is quickly rooted in the memories and experiences of our humanity. Those memories and experiences are companions that keep us company and offer commentary on the long, slow walk through the unknown. But what happens when memories grow blurry? What happens when you can't hold onto memories, because God wants you to hold onto Him? To me this was a central point of crisis for Father Rodrigues, when what he's perceived has carried him, unravels and fades, and he is left with nothing.

What I love so much about *Silence* is that it beckons the believer as prophet not first to proclamation, but to reflect and ask the question, 'what have I made an idol of within myself?' to the point of even asking, 'have I made an idol out of my own desire for persecution?' In the case of Father Rodrigues, was he more in love with the idea of dying for his faith than he was with the notion of following Jesus wherever He sent, even to the point of his own humiliation? Should we consider his experience in the story of *Silence* as a metaphor for a powerful reflection on western culture? Perhaps we've lost our place of cultural privilege that we've held for so long because we've been chasing what we've turned into idols rather than Christ Himself. Perhaps, for such a time as this, Father Rodrigues's character is a personification of an American Christianity, wandering in the wilderness, straining to hear once again the beautiful voice of God. He wonders why God is silent, and in that contemplation learns he must be willing to surrender everything to Jesus, including his own notion of how Jesus desires the believer to stand for Him, and when he desires them to kneel. For it is at the point of total abandonment that the persecuted Priest doesn't see the beautiful image of Jesus that wooed his heart to the priesthood. Rather, He hears the permissive voice of the crucified Christ saying, "I am with you, even unto the end of the age." This is a reminder of the Gospel, not just Jesus saying, "I died for you," but also, "I died with you," so that our death is now with Him, especially the death of our pride.

Frederica Mathewes-Green

Author of *The Illumined Heart*, *Facing East*, and *First Fruits of Prayer*

Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* has particular resonances for Eastern Orthodox Christians because at its core is a question about iconoclasm. In the 8th and 9th century the Eastern Church went through violent controversy, as the state tried to outlaw visual images

of Christ and other biblical or church-historical figures. A monk named Stephen was arrested and hauled before the emperor, and commanded to put his foot on a painting of Christ; this would demonstrate that he agreed that it was, after all, nothing but wood and paint. Instead, Stephen held up a coin bearing the image of the emperor. What if someone trampled on *this* face? he asked. He threw it down and stepped on it. St. Stephen the New Martyr was dragged to death through the streets of the city.

At the core of *Silence* is a visual image of Christ. It's not a particularly good one, not well made, but in it the lead character recognizes the face of the Lord he has loved all his life. Can he do as his tormenters ask, and trample it underfoot? Can he do that, if the bargain is that it will free his tortured parishioners, whom he hears endlessly screaming? Surely such an action is simple to do, surely it is forgivable, yet his heart revolts from the deed. And though he keeps praying for guidance, it seems God is silent.

This heart-wrenching story brings us face to face with the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ's willingness to suffer for us, and the mysterious darkness that dwells in the human heart. It's a story that is powerful in written form, and promises to be only more so as a film. May *Silence* speak aloud in our trashy, silly culture, and remind us of the things that have eternal meaning.

Carl Moeller

CEO

Biblica, The International Bible Society

In our digital media saturated age, we often miss the simple impact that a profoundly good book can make on our lives. Of course, there are many books that entertain; many that inform; and even many that qualify as good – but a great book is rare. It is even more rare that a book alone can challenge some of our deepest beliefs and make a profound impression; reshaping our view of the world, faith, and humanity.

Shusaku Endo's *Silence* is one of these rare great books.

It entertains at a historically accurate level, but also introduces timeless issues of the nature of faith, constancy, love, and loss. What can we say of the deep sadness that produces a paradoxical sense of gaining new perspectives? *Silence* brings the reader not only to a place of appreciation for the unimaginable suffering of the Christian faithful in 17th century Japan, but also to seeing the fear and hatred of those who persecuted them. It does not shy away from the reality of God's emotional distance and inaccessibility to His most passionate followers, and His often-apparent indifference to the triumph of evil. Ironically, it also evidences the endurance of belief in the experience of apostasy. *Silence* asks the questions, "Is not the ultimate example of Christ to sacrifice all for the sake of the beloved? Could not faith itself be sacrificed in order to save others from suffering? And is that not an example of Christ-like love?"

Silence fundamentally and ultimately affirmed my faith – and my belief that sometimes the greatest obstacle to our following Christ is a shallow faith that has not seen the deep water of doubt.

Masako Nakagawa

Associate Professor of Japanese Studies

Institute for Global Interdisciplinary Studies, Villanova University

Silence (*Chinmoku*, 1966), Shusaku Endo's most important novel, is a story of Father Rodrigues who made an illegal entry to Tokugawa Japan in the seventeenth century. The Father was eventually arrested and obliged to renegade. When the Father was forced to trample the portrait of Jesus (*fumi-e*), he finally heard Jesus's voice saying, "I forgive you." Until then God had remained silent. The two Japanese peasants, who had refused to step on the portrait, were drowned in the sea as their punishment. Like the sea, God was silent. According to Shintoism the sea was *kami* (a deity). He also noticed that sometimes Japanese Christians appeared to revere Virgin Mary more than Jesus as if they saw a Buddhist goddess of mercy in her. Rodrigues' former teacher Ferreira warned him that the Japanese cannot think of a supreme existence that transcends nature and humanity. If they don't, then what meaning is there in missionary work? After reading the novel, some fundamental questions come to the reader's mind:

Could or should the Japanese truly adopt Christianity?

Did Rodrigues betray God when he stepped on the *fumi-e*?

The students' responses to these two questions are equally split between "yes" and "no." Endo's *Silence* questions and challenges one's faith at a deep level. The novel is of great importance to today's increasingly diversified society and to the world we all have to share in harmony.

David Neff

Former Editor-in-Chief

Christianity Today

Shusaku Endo takes the shine off of martyrdom.

Read the 2nd-century account of bishop Polycarp's death. In the face of persecution, he is witty, unflappable, and in control. His burned flesh smells more like perfume than like, well, burned flesh. As he dies a dove ascends from his chest to the heavens. That is the traditional picture of the martyr's triumph.

By way of contrast, Endo's Father Rodrigues is plagued by mood swings and doubts. He desperately longs for a clear word from the Lord that would embolden him in his purpose. Joan of Arc heard such voices, we are told. So did Polycarp. The early martyrs

Stephen and Perpetua saw heavenly visions. But Rodriguez sees nothing and hears only silence – except for the groans of those who are tortured because he stubbornly chooses to keep the faith.

This landscape of confusion and terror is, most likely, the true terrain on which most martyrdom plays out. In our time, martyrdom comes to those who unwittingly stand in the way of the bloody expansionism of Boko Haram or the Islamic State. Unlike Polycarp – and unlike Endo’s Rodrigues – there is no extended contest of will and wit with public officials. Today’s martyrs are simply rounded up and shot.

The ironic thing about Endo’s dismal picture is that it helps those of us who aren’t particularly saintly or heroic see what our own martyrdom might be like. Without the heroic scenarios of warrior Joan or nursing Perpetua, we can see our own potential for faithfulness or failure more clearly.

Harold Netland

Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Intercultural Studies

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

While living in Japan in the 1980s I was repeatedly asked by Japanese what I thought of Shusaku Endo’s *Silence*, surely one of the great works of twentieth century literature. Although less than one percent of Japanese identify as Christian, a novel that is full of Christian themes and allusions gripped the attention of many Japanese. During the past two decades I have used *Silence* in classes with seminary students in the U.S., probing the theological, ethical, and missiological issues it raises.

But I’ve noticed a difference in the ways Japanese Christians and American Christians read Endo’s haunting work. American Christians are captivated by the theological issues of suffering, God’s apparent silence, martyrdom, and forgiveness. But they often miss what many Japanese see as a central question pressed by Endo: Can one be authentically Japanese and Christian? While appreciating the richness of these other theological and ethical issues, many Japanese Christians have understood Endo to be challenging their identity as fully Christian and authentically Japanese. The apostate priest Ferreira says, “The one thing I know is that our religion does not take root in this country.... This country is a more terrible swamp than you can imagine. Whenever you plant a sampling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves yellow and wither.” Can the gospel of Jesus take root in Japan? Or must either the gospel or Japanese culture change?

The beauty of the gospel of Jesus is that although it can become “at home” in any culture (including Japanese) it cannot be domesticated by any culture. It challenges and undermines every culture. Endo raises enduring questions about Christian identity – not only for Japanese Christians, but for all disciples of Jesus, including American Christians.

Dr. David Nordmann

Associate Professor of History, Coordinator of Asian Studies

Coe College

Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* is one of the most valuable educational texts I have encountered in close to twenty years of teaching American students about Japan. Not only does Endo introduce Japan's Christian Century to readers in a colorful and exciting manner, he provides keen revelations to outsiders into the Japanese modes of thought, both then and today. Most importantly however is the novel's universality. All of us, whether Christian, Buddhist, non-religious or of any other faith, have the same struggles as Father Rodrigues. We strive to do good, but are disappointed by the hostility of a world that is at times cruel, and by a God's seeming silence when we plead for rescue. Yet even as we dare to challenge God we are confronted by our shame in failing to love the Kichijiros in our lives....those who need us most but from whom we withdraw in the selfish hope of loving, and being loved by, those who might bring us glory, rather than obscurity.

Jennifer Ochstein

Assistant Professor of Writing

Bethel College

Shusaku Endo's *Silence* infiltrated and invaded my tidy theological boxes. It is the one novel I return to time and again as a reminder of human brokenness and God's response: overwhelming mercy. While that mercy is too often perceived as God's silence in the face of suffering, this novel teaches us something about the ways in which we act upon one another and the bitterness that can well up within us when we misperceive God's mercy as silence. Like the relentless sea that "surged up the dark shore with monotonous roar, and with monotonous roar receded" (58), we are apt to see the constancy of God's mercy as God's unwillingness to act to assuage the suffering of the most vulnerable. Like Ferreira, we turn our backs on what seems like inexorable cruelty. But once we realize that we are the unyielding ones, rejecting God's mercy, refusing to accept God's grace – only then are we willing, like Rodrigues, to apostatize our faith in ourselves. Ultimately, Peter was able to accept Christ's forgiveness for his denial. Judas could not. It is the human condition to reject God's love in favor of our own way. This novel overturned my understanding of God's mercy. I've never been the same since. Now, when I teach this novel in the classroom, I use it as an invitation to rethink our assumptions about God's grace, our sin, and what it means to be a human being created in God's image. More and more, this novel reminds me that God doesn't want me to be a tiny version of God. He wants me to be the human being he created me to be.

Dr. Michael Oh

Executive Director, CEO

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

There is a temptation both in anger and frustration to lash out against Shusaku Endo's *Silence*, to defend the faith by challenging the historical events and the people who lived them. Yet to do so is to misunderstand the questions raised by Endo as well as to miss the opportunity to consider ways to more deeply understand the gospel and more faithfully advance the cause of the gospel both in the Land of the Rising Sun and around the world. Many Christians tend to have an understanding of the gospel that is considerably culturally insulated. The value of *Silence* is more in raising questions than in providing answers. But the questions it poses can help to unanchor us from some unhealthy assumptions. The questions hold value in themselves. If handled honestly and well, it will, by the grace and help of God, not leave us faithless but instead more faith-filled and faithful.

Mark Rodgers

Principal, The Clapham Group

President, Cave Pictures

What do we idolize? Can we make our own piety an idol? Can we love loving God more than God? The pilgrim's journey is one of denial. Jesus' way was the Via Dolorosa. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (John 13:16) Jesus condescended Himself to become man, and denied Himself to embrace the cross. He was rejected by us, abandoned by His friends and cried out from the cross on which they nailed Him: "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) His obedience was met with silence. But it was the ultimate expression of love, dying to self to save us sinners. Rodrigues went to Japan expecting his martyrdom. Instead he embraced his cross of denial. And the cock crowed three times. He wept, but perhaps he finally loved Jesus fully. Silence was his Via Dolorosa. What do we love more than God?

Anne C. Rose

Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies

Penn State University

Silence is one of the great novels of world literature. It speaks to anyone who has ever come to doubt familiar truths, felt abandoned, and struggled to rearrange disturbing experiences in a new consoling and humane pattern. It is historical – based on the true story of early Jesuit missionaries who traveled to Japan at a time when the country's rulers officially closed their society to outsiders. It is theological – asking why God permits the faithful to suffer. As a work of imagination, however, its most important quality is

psychological – presenting events from the viewpoint of the main character, Father Sebastian Rodrigues.

For readers to appreciate and weigh the meaning of *Silence*, it is helpful to separate Father Rodrigues's impressions (or misimpressions) from the events unfolding around him. Endo introduces so many theatrical tricks that it seems he is giving us clues to understand Rodrigues better than Rodrigues understands himself. As a personality, Rodrigues is clearly not identical to his companion, Father Garrpe: Rodrigues is as dreamy and changeable as Garrpe is forthright and unquestioning. There are also multiple costume changes: out of the clothing of a Catholic priest, into the rough garment of a Japanese peasant, and finally into the robe of a Buddhist monk. At the same time, we lose Rodrigues's direct voice: the story begins as his letters home to his Jesuit superior and ends as mere rumors about the priests' fate passed along by Dutch merchants.

As a teacher, I ask students at every point: what do you think is really going on, outside Rodrigues's intense and variable perceptions, emotions, and judgments? Not only does this question encourage readers to find some grounding in a complex narrative, but also provides a platform to answer the book's final question: is Rodrigues a weak apostate who has thrown away his faith, or has he painfully discovered a truer Christianity?

Philip Ryken

President

Wheaton College

Endo's *Silence* has a message for the church in every culture.

The novel's main character – Father Sebastian Rodrigues, a Portuguese priest who goes on mission to Japan – follows in the footsteps of Jesus. He is despised and rejected, until finally he is betrayed and confronted with the choice to lay down his life for the sheep of his spiritual flock.

As he makes this spiritual pilgrimage, Father Rodrigues moves from idealism to realism. His vain ambition for missionary glory is chastised by disappointment, failure, and excruciating pain. At the same time, he moves from seeing the face of Jesus in perfect beauty to seeing it disfigured by suffering.

The story of Father Rodrigues mirrors the calling of the church in a fallen world. As we move from expected triumph to the suffering that comes through experience, we desperately need a theology of the cross. We need to see the face of a Savior who is not only triumphant and exalted, but also crucified and humiliated.

This is the authentic Jesus that every culture needs, and that the church needs in every culture: a rejected Christ who suffered for us and knows our weakness. Only such a

Christ is able to understand our pain and enable us to persevere to the very end, no matter how great the cost.

Andrew Staron

Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies
Wheeling Jesuit University

There seems to be little mercy in *Silence* – not for the Christians of Japan, not for the Jesuit missionaries, and not for Fr. Rodrigues. Even the voice of Christ, when and if Rodrigues actually hears it – leads Fr. Rodrigues to his dishonorable end: a life hidden and silent. Yet the *book itself* can be a mercy – particularly understood through the words of James Keenan, S.J., who defines mercy as “the willingness to enter the chaos of others.” The mercy of the book is that it can invite readers to consider the possibility that God is not a reward for the strong or the virtuous. God is not won through sacrifice, earned through work, or compelled into our chaos through our righteousness. God simply does not work that way. If we listen for God’s necessary response to our faithfulness and goodness, we will hear only silence.

But the book also opens the possibility that neither is God necessarily absent from those who are broken, nor even from those who fail and turn away from God. Where it might seem that God is silent, the book deftly invites its readers to imagine another possibility: that God is present in the people on our right and left, especially in those who are suffering, marginalized, and vulnerable. It’s not incidental that the only word of significance that appears more often in the book than variations of “silence” is “face.” If God’s silence teaches that *God is not earned*, so the face of Christ – visible and loved in and through the face of each person, no matter how broken and sinful – teaches *how to look for a God* who promises to always already be with us in the midst of our chaos.

Karen Swallow Prior, Ph.D.

Professor of English
Liberty University

What would it take for you to renounce your faith? When does humility before God turn into pride in that humility? What would you give up in order to save others from great suffering? What do you do when the God in whom you live, and move, and have your being seems to offer you only silence?

Set in a place and time far removed from readers today, *Silence* forces us to wrestle with these universal questions in our own place and time. Rendering the Christian faith strange, *Silence* makes it familiar again.

By shrouding the deep faith of one devout priest with mystery, suffering, doubt, love, and shame, Shusaku Endo reveals the essence of Christianity: the Lord is not silent. Indeed, as Father Rodrigues comes to realize about the Christ in whom he has placed his complete trust,

Many centuries ago, that man tasted with his dried and swollen tongue all the suffering that I now endure, he reflected. And this sense of suffering shared softly eased his mind and heart more than the sweetest water.

With words that move like poetry, probe like philosophy, and beseech like prayer, *Silence* is at once the most troubling and most comforting story of our age, and of all ages.

Joshua C. Thurow

Associate Professor of Philosophy

University of Texas at San Antonio

Conflicting Loves, Unresolved

Endo's *Silence* paints a vivid picture of a man, Fr. Sebastian Rodrigues, whose two fundamental loves are put at odds: his love of Christ – his savior whom he serves as a priest – and his love of the Japanese Christians he has determined to serve. Love of God and love of neighbor as oneself constitute Jesus's two greatest commandments (Mt. 22: 37-40). So, a tension in these loves amounts to nothing less than a tension in Rodrigues' Christian faith. On the one hand Rodrigues can recant his faith by stepping on an icon of Jesus' face – a representation of the one he loves most and is most fiercely committed to – or he can refuse to recant, in which case his captors will continue to torture and kill Japanese lay Christians. The former choice would seem to undermine his love of God; the latter his love of neighbor.

Endo will allow us no easy resolution of this dilemma. Some people could step on the icon as an empty gesture, maintaining their faith all the while. But, Rodrigues' personal spirituality is so centered on visions of the face of Christ that to step on his image is tantamount to denying love of him. And the denial wouldn't end there. Ferreira – Rodrigues' mentor – stepped on the icon and then was forced to live under house arrest and write a refutation of Christianity. The same fate awaits Rodrigues should he follow his mentor in apostasy.

Rodrigues makes a choice, and readers will debate whether it was the right one. Allowing such a debate is one of Endo's gifts to his readers, for we all have many loves which inevitably come into conflict, and sometimes there is no easy resolution. Rodrigues' dilemma is not just a Christian or religious dilemma, but a human dilemma.

Nikki Toyama-Szeto

Vice President, Director IJM Institute and Global Prayer

International Justice Mission

Co-author of *More Than Serving Tea, Asian American Women on Expectations, Leadership, and Faith*

Endo's *Silence* takes us into the reality of a 17th Century Japan – a place St. Francis called fertile ground for the Gospel, but also where it was facing significant persecution. In addition to asking questions about faithfulness, betrayal, self-denial and love – there is an interesting question about the foreignness of Christianity, as embodied by the Jesuits. In an interesting twist, the Jesuits take on the names, clothes, culture (and wives) of the Japanese when they outwardly leave their faith. They leave their Portuguese and Catholic identities, and take on a Japanese one. And it is a familiar, but complex dynamic. This dynamic of bringing an ancient spirituality into modern times – of shedding, and taking on, of belonging, and leaving, of inhabiting two worlds, misunderstood and judged – is in some ways familiar for those who profess to follow a Jesus who walked on this earth 2000 years ago. I found myself surprisingly shocked at the way Endo disrupted my view of following God and caused me to re-think, with some humility, how I integrate my faith into today's key issues.”

Kyle Vitale

Research Associate and Project Manager

Folger Shakespeare Library

Some of the richest passages in Western literature describe the face and voice of the beloved. Solomon observes in the Song of Songs, “thou has dove's eyes . . . let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.” Lord Byron muses in “She Walks in Beauty” that “all that's best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes.” Lines and colors that texture the beloved's face, with tones and echoes that create their voice, beautifully realize our commitment and love for them.

Yet throughout Shusaku Endo's *Silence*, missionaries in the dangerous conditions of seventeenth-century Japan grapple with an invisible and silent God. As Sebastian Rodrigues traverses the insect-ridden countryside, this “sickening” silence challenges his faith. He narrates early in the novel, “I am always fascinated by the face of Christ just like a man fascinated by the face of his beloved,” imagining that face to be heroic like himself. But when his mission leads to peasants tortured on stakes, Sebastian feels the absence of Christ's face; when women and children are hung over a reeking pit because Sebastian refuses to apostatize, God's silence overwhelms; through physical and psychological torture, Sebastian desperately searches for the warmth of perfect human affection offered by the gospel of Christ.

Silence explores the hard, but comforting truth that the Christian God promises His presence amidst pain, having paradoxically suffered and conquered guiltiness without erasing suffering itself. This truth leads Sebastian to discover how God's voice and face are always

already present in struggles and pain shared with others. The novel offers surprising answers to questions of pain through the moving portrayal of a man who finds Christ quietly abiding in his suffering from the very beginning.

Pamela D. Winfield

Associate Professor of Religious Studies

Elon University

Great Faith, Great Doubt: The Cultural Impact of *Silence*

“[Artists] can reveal new facets of human flourishing even in the midst of tragedy and horror, pointing toward hope and meaning.”

Makoto Fujimura

Silence, like all great art, reminds us of our humanity.

On the one hand, the inspiring idealism of the Jesuit missionary Fr. Rodrigues, and the resilient faith of his persecuted converts in 17th century Japan, exposes the raw power and devastating beauty of religious conviction.

On the other hand, the unrelenting brutality and detachment of political functionaries, and the deafening silence of God in response to the cries of His faithful, reveals the fundamental crack in the edifice of ideologies that we construct for ourselves.

Most surprisingly, when Fr. Rodrigues inevitably falls through that crack like a Graham Greene tragic hero, *Silence* shows human weakness in a redemptive light, recasts his resignation into a transformative, life-affirming choice, and elevates Rodrigues' apostasy into Christ-like compassion.

As the great Zen masters of China and Japan once maintained, one needs both great faith and great doubt in order to achieve great awakening. And as Shusaku Endo's contemporary, the Catholic theologian Thomas Merton, wrote in his Prayer of Doubt, “I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.” This combination of faith and doubt, positioned at the very apex and nadir of our selves, compels each and every reader – and viewer of this extraordinary film – to confront the cracks in our own ideological edifices. Ideally, like Rodrigues in the closing passage of the novel, we may break through to a greater understanding beyond binaries, to a very Zen-like place where “There are neither the strong nor the weak. Can anyone say that the weak do not suffer more than the strong?...Go in peace.”

Dr. Norio Yamaguchi

Research Fellow

Tokyo Christian University

When I first heard that Martin Scorsese was making a movie based on Endo's classical novel *Silence*, the combination of Scorsese and this novel made some sense to me. In my late teenage years, his celebrated but controversial movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* left a deep impression on me. It posed several critical questions with no easy answers. I experienced a similar feeling after reading *Silence*. Indeed, ever since I read the surprising ending of this novel in my high school days, some unresolved questions have always been on my mind: did Jesus really say so? Was this simply a self-justification made by a remorseful priest, as Inoue suggested? But if Jesus never said such things, what would be the implication of this? In the time of persecution, can only the "strong," who maintain faith and confession at any cost, be saved, as Kichijiro complained? Behind the vivid description of each character facing a critical situation, I can see Endo's struggle with the questions of what Christianity is all about, and who Jesus is. Although Christianity remains a very minor religion in Japan, this novel has resonated with a great number of non-Christians in this country for several decades. This fact testifies to the universal power of this unique and evocative novel.

Philip Yancey

Author of *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*, and *Vanishing Grace*

Why did Endo express his own deeply felt faith through a story of betrayal? How easily we forget that the disciples who also betrayed their master founded the church. At his moment of greatest need, Jesus' disciples fled in the darkness. The boldest of the lot, Peter, was the very one who cursed and denied him three times before the cock crowed. It was for traitors that Jesus died.

Endo centers his work on the experiences of failure and shame because these leave the most lasting impact on a person's life. Jesus' most poignant legacy was his undying love, even for – *especially* for – those who betrayed him. When Judas led a lynch mob into the garden, Jesus addressed him as "Friend." On Calvary, while stretched out naked in the posture of ultimate disgrace, Jesus roused himself to cry out for his tormentors, "Father, forgive them."

For More Information Visit
www.SilenceTheBook.com