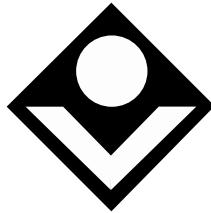

LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Edited by Van C. Gessel
and Daniel K. Muhlestein



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

This special issue of *Literature and Belief* celebrates the art and collaboration and friendship of three remarkable individuals: Endō Shūsaku, Martin Scorsese, and Van C. Gessel. Endō is the most important Japanese Christian writer of modern times, and his novel *Silence* is the centerpiece of a distinguished career that includes a 1994 nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Scorsese is a filmmaker, actor, and historian whose films have been nominated for more than eighty Academy Awards. And Gessel—professor, scholar, and translator *extraordinaire*—provides the connective tissue between the other two, translating eight of Endō's books into English and serving as the literary advisor for Scorsese's film adaptation of *Silence*.

The issue is informally divided into three sections, each having its unique style, insights, and reading pleasures. The first three essays in the issue—excluding the initial brief introduction to Endō and *Silence*—are written by authors who knew Endō well, and in “*Silence* as My Traveling Companion: My Journeys with Endō, Rodrigues, and Martin Scorsese,” “Endō Shūsaku and the Film Adaptation of *Silence*,” and “Thoughts on *Silence*: the Novel and the Film,” Gessel, Katō Muneya, and Yamane Michihiro write extended tributes to Endō's life and work—tributes that are equal parts scholarship, reflection, and celebration. The three essays embody an approach to scholarship that is distinctly—though not uniquely—Japanese in organization, subject matter, and style.

The next two essays constitute the second informal section of the issue. In “Approaching *Silence* and Navigating *Deep River*: A Buddhist Reflection on Friendship, Joy, and Gratitude in Collaborative Scholarship,” Mark Dennis both continues the theme of friendship evident in the first three essays and frames it within a version of Buddhist Autoethnography that is likely to be somewhat more familiar to most western readers. Dennis's essay is followed by Mark Williams's “The ‘Formality’ of the *fumie*?: A Reconsideration of the Role of the *fumie* Scene in *Silence*.” Williams's essay is—for lack of a better phrase—the most traditionally “western” of the essays in the issue,

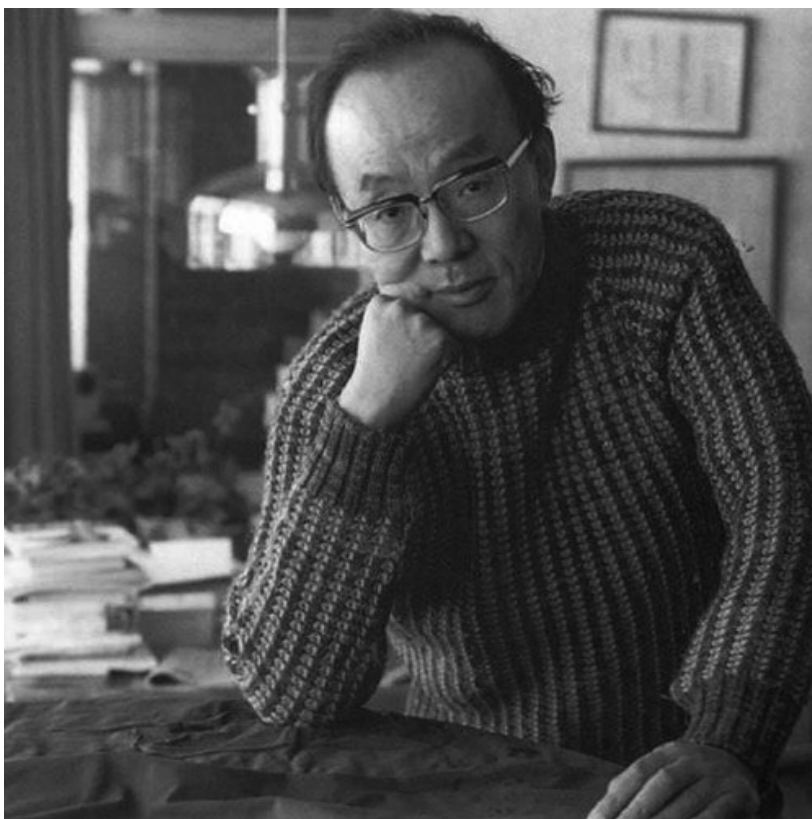
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an essay that focuses almost entirely on the most critical—and controversial—moment in *Silence*. In *Silence*, a Portuguese missionary in Japan steps on a *fumie*—an image of Christ—in order to spare the lives of the Japanese Christians who will be killed if he refuses to do so. What that act means—and does not mean—is so central to our understanding of the novel that we have chosen to reprint Williams's seminal essay on the controversy in full here.

The final informal section of the issue includes two interviews that shed considerable light onto both *Silence* as a novel and the process by which the novel was adapted for the screen. Darren J. N. Middleton's "An Interview with Van C. Gessel, Literary Consultant on Martin Scorsese's Film Adaptation of *Silence*" and the republication of extended excerpts of Fr Antonio Spadaro's interview with Scorsese in "Martin Scorsese on *Silence*, Grace, and Salvation: An Interview" give us unique insight into the novel and the film alike.

I am grateful for our contributors, for our translators, and for the authors and editors who graciously allowed us to reprint Williams's book chapter and the interview with Scorsese. And I am particularly grateful for Van C. Gessel, without whose generosity, connections, expertise, and hard work this issue would not be possible. Thank you, my friend.

—Daniel K. Muhlestein



Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996)

Endō Shūsaku and *Silence*

Van C. Gessel
Brigham Young University

Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996) was the most important Japanese Christian writer of the twentieth century. His readership in Japan extended far beyond the small numbers of the domestic Christian population, primarily because in addition to his writings on Christian themes, he also wrote popular entertainment novels (which explains why he was sometimes called the “Japanese Graham Greene”) and humorous essays. In total, he published nearly two hundred books, including forty-five novels and seventeen short story collections. He served as president of the Japan P.E.N. Club, and in 1995 he was awarded the highest honor given to Japanese citizens: the Bunka Kunshō (Order of Culture), which recognizes outstanding lifetime contributions in the arts, sciences, and education.

Christian belief was not something Endō chose for himself. After his parents divorced, his mother took her two sons to Kobe, where she converted to Catholicism and encouraged her boys to follow her lead. Baptized at the age of eleven to please his mother, he would later compare Christianity to a suit of ill-fitting Western clothing in which his mother had dressed him. His literary undertakings, he wrote, were an attempt to re-tailor those foreign clothes so that they would fit his Japanese body.

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It was not until he began studying French literature at the university that Endō began to give serious consideration to the religion that had been imposed on him. He often remarked that, had it not been for his feelings of love, duty, and even guilt toward his mother, he would have cast off the alien wardrobe. But his interest was piqued, and in 1950, with sponsorship from a French Catholic priest, Endō was among the first Japanese allowed to travel overseas after the defeat of Japan in World War II. He studied French Catholic writers in Lyon and began to write essays about the tensions between West and East, European and Japanese Christianity, and the prejudice he encountered as a Japanese in France. Stricken with tuberculosis, he cut his studies short and returned to Japan, where in 1955 he wrote his first work of fiction, *Shiroi hito* (*White Men*), which won him the Akutagawa Prize for promising new writers. This was followed by *Kiiroi hito* (*Yellow Men*), in which the struggle to maintain faith—or even a modicum of humanity—in a brutal world emerges as a theme that would continue throughout his career.

That theme is the chief concern of Endō's first major novel, *Umi to dokuyaku* (*The Sea and Poison*), in which he peers into the conscience of Japanese doctors during World War II who seemed to feel no remorse as they performed a vivisection on a captured American pilot. Two years later, as though he felt a need for a release valve to give him a break from such painful explorations, Endō wrote his first humorous novel, *Obakasan* (*Wonderful Fool*), about the exploits of a naïve, bumbling Frenchman who comes to Japan and tries to counteract cynicism and hatred through the simple force of love.

During a visit to Europe in 1960, Endō suffered a relapse of his lung disease and, after returning to Japan, he was hospitalized for almost three years and endured three major surgeries, the last of which removed all of one diseased lung. His experiences with intense pain, his fear of probable death from the operations, his pleas to be kept alive so that he could continue with his work, and his research into the period of intense persecution and torture of Japanese Christians in the early seventeenth century—all this served to prepare him to write his best-known novel, *Chinmoku* (*Silence*), published in Japan in 1966 and translated into English as *Silence* in

1969. *Silence*—which is the focus of this special issue of *Literature and Belief*—was selected by Harper Books as one of the one hundred most profound spiritual books of the twentieth century. It stands alongside works by some of the true spiritual titans of the recent past.¹

Silence embodies Endō's deep empathy for those weak of faith. The novel also depicts Christ as a forgiving, almost maternal Being, a depiction that finds its fullest symbolic expression in the *fumie*, an iconographic representation of Christ and the Virgin that the early Japanese Christians were forced to trample on to declare the renunciation of their faith. These thematic and imagistic tropes constitute the theological and aesthetic heart of *Silence*, and they are so central to Endō's vision of life that he continued to use them throughout the remainder of his writing career.

In his next major historical novel, *Samurai* (published as *The Samurai* in English in 1982), Endō displays the full range of his authorial gifts in telling the story of two characters—one a low-ranking Japanese samurai, the other an ambitious European Catholic priest—who are crushed and abandoned by the very institutions they serve—the Japanese feudal order and the Catholic Church—as political winds shift dramatically when anti-Christian edicts are enforced in Japan. Both characters have only the eternal companionship of Christ to keep them from utter despair and to give them hope for a better life after death.

Endō devoted the final years of his career to writing biographies of major Christian figures in the early years of Catholic missionary work in Japan and to writing historical novels set primarily in the same period. By contrast, his last major novel, *Fukai kawa* (published as *Deep River* in English in 1993), is a contemporary work set

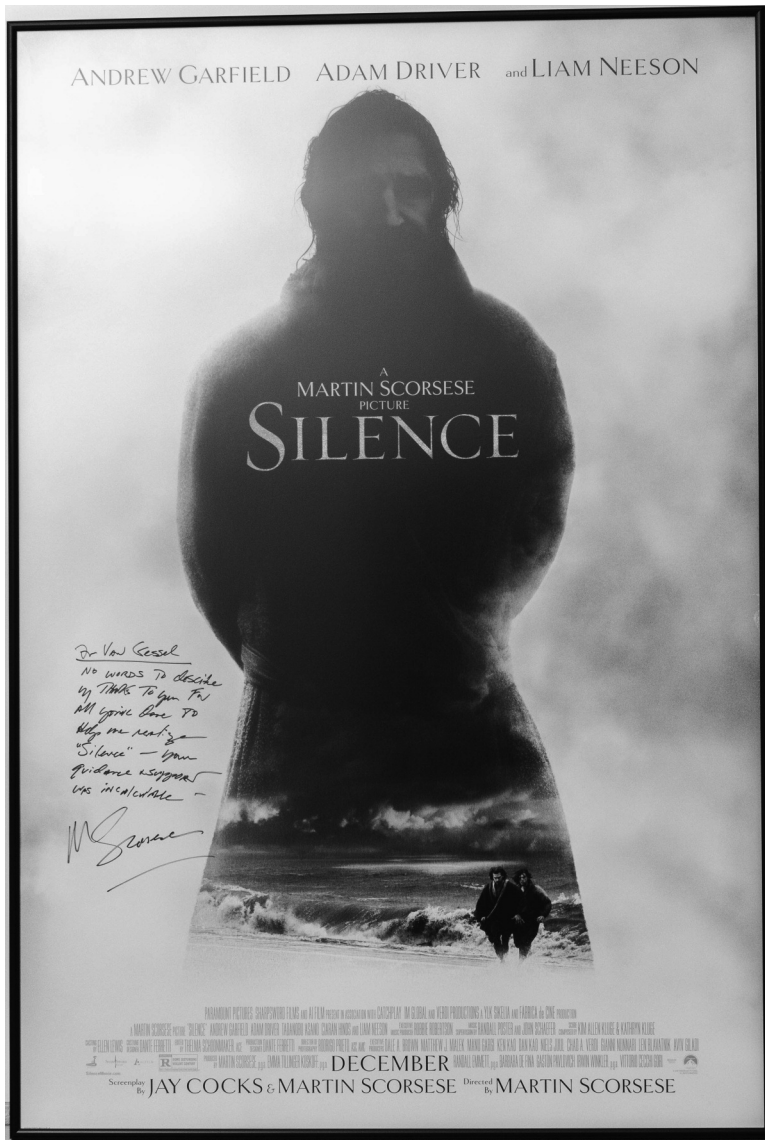
¹The selection was announced in November of 1999. Phillip Zaleski, the editor of the Best Spiritual Writing series, obtained nominations from a variety of writers of spiritually oriented works. The list included works by such figures as Gandhi, C. S. Lewis, Viktor Frankl, G. K. Chesterton, J. R. R. Tolkien, Elie Wiesel, Graham Greene, Mother Teresa, T. S. Eliot, Pope John XXIII, Tagore, Martin Buber, Thomas Merton, and D. T. Suzuki.

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beside the River Ganges, where Japanese pilgrims gather in search of the headwaters of Asian spirituality; by this point in Endō's thinking, the truths that can be found in every religious tradition flow together to carry suffering humankind into the next life.

During the last three years of his life, Endō endured a variety of health challenges that greatly curtailed his writing. But the reputation he built as the leading Japanese Christian writer of his day, particularly through *Silence*, *The Samurai*, and *Deep River*, has assured him a prominent place among the great Christian thinkers of the modern age.





This movie poster of *Silence* includes Scorsese's handwritten and signed message of thanks to Gessel: "No words to describe my thanks to you for all you've done to help me realize 'Silence'—Your guidance & support was incalculable. M. Scorsese."

Silence as My Traveling Companion: My Journeys with Endō, Rodrigues, and Martin Scorsese

Van C. Gessel
Brigham Young University

If life is a series of “journeys,” then the finest of all journeys are obviously those we undertake with a traveling companion by our side. As the Japanese proverb so succinctly states: 旅は道連れ 世は情け (tabi wa michizure, yo wa nasake), which means something like, “Best of all when traveling is to have a companion; best of all in life is kindness.” And as the greatest of the haiku poets, Matsuo Bashō, wrote at the opening of his 1694 travel account, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*:

月日は百代の過客にして、行きかふ年もまた旅人なり。舟
の上に生涯をうかべ、馬の口とらえて老をむかふるものは
、日々旅にして旅を栖とす。

In Donald Keene’s translation, “The months and days are the travelers of eternity. The years that come and go are also voyagers. Those who float away their lives on ships or who grow old leading horses are forever journeying, and their homes are wherever their travels take them” (363).

The years that have come and gone on my voyage have been enriched by my reading and pondering of Japanese literature, which

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during my floating on the seas of time became my academic home. In fact, my introduction to modern Japanese fiction came nearly fifty years ago, when I was in my early twenties. It began shortly after my return from my two-year Christian proselytizing mission in Japan, which I served on behalf of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While in Japan, I picked up a Japanese novel titled *Silence*, written by the Catholic author Endō Shūsaku.

I read *Silence* in English translation, of course, never suspecting that within a few short years I would meet the author and ultimately become his official (the English word he used was “constant”) translator. I was moved by the power of *Silence*, and I had no difficulty relating to its characters and themes, particularly since it dealt with the trials and frustrations of a missionary serving in Japan.

My association with Endō Shūsaku, both personal and professional, spanned a period of just over two decades. I found him to be a man whose extraordinary compassion for the weak and the clumsy among us equaled his abilities as a writer. I learned much from my association with him about the things that truly matter in this life, and that in fact matter greatly even after this life—and those are all things that have to do with the ways in which we treat one another, the ways in which we lift and support one another, and the ways in which we love one another free of judgment or selfish interest.

Before I discuss the novel itself, I first want to consider the sometimes perplexing subject of translation—particularly translation from Japanese. A good deal of my scholarly work has involved literary translation. I am deeply grateful that I am employed at a university where the College of Humanities clearly states in its document on scholarly expectations that “a new translation . . . of a literary work . . . may demand highly developed scholarly skills and have a lasting impact in the field” (Brigham Young University College of Humanities 2.4.2.10). To date, I have completed translations of six novels and two story collections by Endō Shūsaku, I have translated a handful of stories by other writers, and I have been co-editor for two anthologies of modern Japanese literature in English translation.

I express my profound gratitude for the labors of a handful of my colleagues who have translated some of the greatest modern Japanese

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novels, each of which I can highly recommend. One of the best is a translation by Edwin McClellan of the first masterpiece of modern literature in Japan, Natsume Sōseki's powerful—and painful—novel, *Kokoro*. The book captures the loneliness of being an isolated individual in modern society, a topic very much on the minds of the Japanese people in the early years of the twentieth century, when their country was still experiencing the whiplash of rapid modernization. One line from the book has haunted me since I first read it: “You see, loneliness is the price we have to pay for being born in this modern age, so full of freedom, independence, and our own egotistical selves” (30). It might well be said that one of the central themes of the modern Japanese novel is the search for something—anything—to assuage the pain of loneliness many have felt since Japan encountered the Western concept of the independent, restraint-free individual. One of their most agonizing discoveries is that the frantic search for self has so often resulted in a severing of the ties to family and community that had sustained their society for centuries.

I can also give two thumbs up to *The Makioka Sisters*, by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and translated by Edward Seidensticker; *Black Rain*, by Ibuse Masuji, translated by John Bester; *The Waiting Years*, by Enchi Fumiko, also translated by John Bester; and more recently, Ogawa Yōko's delightful novel, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, rendered in English by Stephen Snyder.

How are such translators and translations regarded? And why do I and others like me translate? Most of us, far from seeing our names on best-seller lists, seldom even see our names on the covers of the books we have translated. More often than not, on those rare occasions when a reviewer even bothers to mention that the work is actually a translation—though seldom deigning to mention the name of the translator—it is usually the case that the admission comes so that the reviewer, who almost never reads Japanese, can complain that the translation could not possibly be as good as the original work. It occurs to me that a translator from Japanese shares the status of a second husband: there is no way on earth or in heaven that you can ever match up to the brilliance and quality of the original.

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Translators over the ages and across various cultures have been called “echoes” (Benjamin 76), “counterfeiter[s]” (Seidensticker 15), “reflection[s] of a very dim shadow” (Macadam 754), and a “cannibalism” (Gavronsky 59). One postwar Japanese author wrote to a translator: “I judge that you are a parasite fattening off of Japanese literature.” To quote an esteemed colleague who does quite a bit of literary translation from Japanese:

Generally, reviews ignore the translator’s efforts altogether, discussing the work as if it had been in English all along. Occasionally a translation will be acknowledged with “reads well” or “rough in places.” At worst, critics engage in the smug, nitpicking kind of criticism that Gregory Rabassa described as “poring over both texts in search of warts and hairs.” (Copeland 432)

My own experiences as a translator confirm the essentially masochistic tendencies that obviously beset anyone who even attempts to learn the Japanese language and which are present in abundance in those who inflict the title of “translator from the Japanese” on themselves. It did not take me long after I began doing translating to realize that I shared much in common with Alan Jay Lerner, the librettist and lyricist for *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*, who described his discipline as “a minor art, ranking somewhere between woodcarving and photography.”¹ I came to recognize very early on, as I too whittled away at the original Japanese texts to create some kind of image of a Japanese literary work for a Western audience, that I had better not be basing my self-worth off of some hopeless desire for critical acclaim of my work. It is the rare and blessed translator who has the word “elegant” or “fluid” pinned onto his or her breast. One is more likely to encounter bizarre appellations such as “serviceable,” or a label once slapped on me that really left me baffled:

¹Lerner made this observation during a live presentation on 12 December 1971 as part of the “Lyrics and Lyricists” series sponsored by the YMHA in New York City. An edited recording of the evening was issued in 1977 by DRG Records.

“sympathetic.” I am still trying to figure out exactly how I was able to convey my sympathies for a text through the medium of translation. Odds are that after laboring day and night over a literary translation for as much as two years, the critical response which greets that labor of love will be condensed into that most petrifying of all judgmental jabs: “wooden.” No wonder I can relate to Lerner’s description of his art form as akin to “wood-carving.”

Even though translation these days has taken on some of the characteristics of a business, it is a business controlled by publishers and agents and, to a large degree, by a small handful of Japanese authors themselves, if they have the clout of a Nobel Prize—as in the case of Ōe Kenzaburō—or a string of best-selling works that somehow catch fire in the West, as with the current lusterless Golden Boy of contemporary Japanese literature, Murakami Haruki, whose books in English translation have, inexplicably, sold almost three million copies, proving beyond any doubt that quantity is by no means a synonym for quality. But many contemporary writers are highly conscious of the financial end of things, and only in very rare instances do they stand up in defense of the pecuniary interests of their translators. One gentleman in Murakami’s stable of translators publicly remarked that his royalty checks have amounted to around two hundred dollars per year (Chambers et al. 6). This seems to be a universal phenomenon: in a recent book titled *Found in Translation*, Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetzsche note,

The person who translates the bestselling literary masterpieces would probably earn more working on a factory assembly line. Yes, it might be surprising, but the people who translate the ingredients on the packaging for your toilet paper earn more than those who translate the works of the greatest poets. (94)

None of us does it for the financial rewards.

The efforts of translators almost never result in the conversion of large numbers of readers to Japanese literature. The size of the reading audience in the English-speaking world for modern and contemporary Japanese literature continues to shrink. And the imbalance

in the passing of information between Japan and the United States is shocking: a recent estimate suggests that for every thirty-five or forty books translated from English into Japanese, one is translated from Japanese into English (Chambers et al. 14).

I must also make it clear that we who translate from Japanese have, so far, gained virtually nothing from advances in machine translation. Although the story is probably apocryphal, the following example is not too exaggerated when it comes to the challenge of having mindless electronic circuits attempt to convert Japanese into English. It is said that a machine translation by a Russian computer tried to tackle the biblical declaration: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." And what did the machine produce? "The vodka is strong, but the meat is rotten" (Polizzotti 47).

Edward Seidensticker, translator not only of *The Makioka Sisters* but also of *The Tale of Genji*, admitted: "[Translation is] a situation requiring a choice between equally undesirable alternatives" (qtd. in Copeland 432). Much earlier, the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer lamented: "Not every word in one language has an exact equivalent in another. . . . A library of translations resembles a gallery with reproductions of paintings" (32–33). And I do love John Dryden's image for the impossible assignment of the translator; he said, "'Tis much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs" (18).

Is there any point in listing out some of the great crimes of translation that have been committed in the rendering of Japanese fiction? I am always wary of such an undertaking: I am convinced that every time I point out an error that I have uncovered in someone else's translation, in some parallel universe another translator is simultaneously exposing all the flaws in my work. And so it would not be politic here to note that there are published translations from Japanese which somehow cannot distinguish between the biblical character Jacob and the heavenly deity Jehovah; two of my all-time favorites are the Japanese newspaper headline from 1950 that the translator rendered as "A Record-Breaking 38 Degrees" instead of "Troops Surge Across the 38th Parallel" and a story about a boy complaining to his mother that his "pants hurt" because the translator dyslexically read "omutsu" (diapers) instead of "otsumu" (head). And "even Homer

sometimes nods.”² One truly brilliant translator who, perhaps because of tired eyes from reading too many kanji, missed the dot on top of a Japanese phonetic character and consequently translated a sentence as “He raised his head like a sea urchin” (uni ウニ) instead of “He raised his head like an alligator” (wani ワニ). I could point out some of these gaffes, but that would not be kind, so I will refrain. . . .

Why, then, do we devote so much time and energy to literary translation, despite every indication that venturing into the landscape is tantamount to skipping across a minefield? I suppose my own translation activities are driven by something of a proselytizing impulse. When I have a thoroughly satisfying and paradigm-altering experience through reading a work of Japanese literature, I want others to have the same kind of opportunity made available to them. So I don my pedantic preacher robes, tuck the literary scriptural text under my arm, and do my sermonizing at the keyboard as I convert Japanese words into English counterparts, essentially “baptizing” the text into an English-language religion where hopefully it will not be viewed as too heretically alien.

Edith Grossman, one of the great translators of our day, had this to say:

Translation . . . [has] the crucial capacity to ease and make more meaningful our relationships to those with whom we may not have had a connection before. Translation always helps us to know, to see from a different angle, to attribute new value to what once may have been unfamiliar. (x)

She has pinpointed here what I think is the most valuable of the fruits of translation: Both translator and reader gain a better understanding—and I hope greater empathy—for those who are unlike themselves. We come to see more of the great and beautiful diversity of the peoples and cultures that God, in league with humankind, has

²I had never heard this aphorism until I looked in a Japanese-English dictionary for something equivalent to “Even monkeys sometimes fall from trees.”

created. And surely this is one of the ways we can learn to love the Other.

As many before me have done, I danced somewhat blindly into literary translation from Japanese. I was so moved by my initial reading of Endō's *Silence* that I eventually decided to pursue a graduate degree in modern Japanese literature. Over time, I acquired enough skill in the written language that I could make my way through some of Endō's works in the original Japanese. During my first year of graduate study at Columbia University, I wrote him what was essentially a fan letter, telling him how much I admired a couple of the books I had read and telling him that someday I would like to translate something. I of course did not expect a reply; and yet, I soon was in receipt of a handwritten letter from him telling me that I should proceed with the translation of one of the books I had mentioned and giving me the name of his publisher in London. I eventually overcame the shock of such an offer; the novel I translated, titled *When I Whistle*, was published the same year I completed my Ph.D.

That was the beginning of a long and, for me at least, very rewarding relationship and a career of translation. I have always felt that my many different encounters with Endō, the opportunities I had to discuss his writings with him, the ease with which I was able to send him lists of questions that I encountered in the texts (and which, I can now reveal, he sometimes answered with "I have no idea"), enriched the work that I was trying to do as a translator. Endō was also kind enough on one occasion—likely after he had had too much to drink—to tell me that I understood his novels better than anyone else in the West. I know that the personal relationship, the accessibility, and the opportunity to observe him trying to live by some of the principles he espoused in his writing greatly increased and enhanced my desire to study his work carefully and to translate diligently. I wish I could claim that the result was flawless, un-wooden translations, but, sadly, space limitations once again prevent me from cataloging all my errors of interpretation and phraseology.

I think of my role as being something of a go-between: a *nakōdo*, as the Japanese would say, in my written translations of Endō's works. But I have also had the incredible experience of working twice as an inter-

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mediary between the original Japanese text of *Silence* and two major adaptations of it—first, as literary advisor to the Milwaukee Repertory Theater for a stage version produced in 1995 and recently as literary advisor to Martin Scorsese as he prepared his film adaptation of the work.

As I turn now to a consideration of the novel itself, I will begin with a very brief synopsis for those who have not read the book. The novel is set in the early seventeenth century, when the Japanese government has decided to use violent force to eradicate Christianity. A young Jesuit priest named Sebastian Rodrigues learns that his beloved mentor, Father Ferreira, who has been laboring in Japan as a missionary for many years, has cracked under the intense torture and apostatized. Unable to believe that Ferreira could ever deny his faith, Rodrigues and a companion leave Portugal and steal into Japan in search of their mentor. They encounter a group of Japanese Christians who are practicing their faith in secret, and they minister to them. The two missionaries split up, and both are eventually captured by the Japanese authorities. The priest who accompanied Rodrigues dies trying to save some Japanese Christians who are being drowned in the ocean by the authorities. Left all alone, Rodrigues is subjected to a variety of psychological torments, the cruelest of which is having to watch helplessly while captured Japanese Christians are tortured and killed. The Japanese officials tell him that these peasants will be spared their pain and released if he will simply renounce his own faith. Rodrigues must decide: either maintain his identity as a priest or perform a painful act of love that will save others.

As one of the few scholars in the United States who study Japanese literature, I can relate to the sense of isolation that Rodrigues felt in such a foreign land, and when I read or ponder the novel, the priest almost begins to feel like a companion in solitude. The book also continues to educate me about Japan and its amazingly resilient citizens, about the attitudes of its people toward religion and spirituality, and about its culture, especially an aspect of Japanese culture that Sir George Sansom explained in the following words: “The power and prestige of a foreign culture seem as if they would overwhelm and transform Japan, but always there is a hard, non-absorbent core of

individual character, which resists and in its turn works upon the invading influence" (15). It also teaches me about the nature of faith, especially faith in Christ; and I think it is fair to say that my travels in the company of this novel have also had a profound effect on my own view of Christ, in particular the fathomless depths of His mercy and grace.

Aside from sensing that he is my partner in isolation, another reason I can so easily relate to the Western protagonist in *Silence*, the young Jesuit priest, Rodrigues, is that he goes to Japan with such vibrant determination and confidence in the importance of his mission—as did I. As a result, he is initially less concerned with ministering to the underground Japanese Christians who will be tortured and executed if they are discovered and more concerned with the blessings and glory that will surely be his if he performs his ecclesiastical duties well. It was, I must admit, a bit too easy for me to relate to him and his attitudes as a missionary. Over the decades as I have read and reread Rodrigues's story, I have observed and even felt empathetic identification with his own struggles against ego, with faith, and seeking to grasp the true character of the holy Man he worships and wishes to serve.

The mode of narration in the novel is essentially cinematic—which may partially explain why Martin Scorsese felt it would make a spectacular movie (which it did). The first half of the novel—the section in which Rodrigues is totally caught up in himself—is told by Rodrigues in letters sent back to Rome. We hear only his voice, and we see only what he sees through his own inward-facing eyes. Certainly he feels pity for the Japanese Christians, peasants who must live double lives, concealing the vital part of themselves that is their faith. But pity is not the same as compassion. Rodrigues sees himself less as one who stands by the side of these innocent sufferers than as one who expounds to them from loftier heights.

But there is a major shift in perspective after Rodrigues is captured by the Japanese authorities. The narrative camera pulls back and the voice shifts to third person. Rodrigues is no longer in charge, and we no longer see events in the story through his eyes. In a sense, he is no longer an individuated character: he is referred to only as "the priest." During his incarceration, he is forced to watch—helpless—as one

after another his missionary companion and then many of the Japanese Christians from his flock are brutally tortured and killed. He is furthermore tempted and tried when he finally meets up with Ferreira, the mentor priest he came to Japan to find, who has indeed forsworn his faith and now tries to entice Rodrigues to do the same.

In the early stages of this torment, Rodrigues fully expects that God will intervene in response to the fervent prayers he and the hidden Christians offer, that He will thunder from the heavens that this brutal persecution must stop. At the very least, Rodrigues insists that God accept the dying martyrs into His glory with the trumps of angels and dazzling white rays of light from His throne. But when none of that happens, when the priest realizes that martyrdom is nothing more than a wretched, pathetic end to the lives of miserable people while the merciless sea continues to pound heedlessly against the shore, Rodrigues begins to demand that God vocally respond to their pleas for succor. But, of course, all is silent.

Beaten down from having to witness all these deaths and from what seems to him God's irksomely stubborn silence, Rodrigues is scarcely prepared to handle the Japanese magistrate's cruelest tactic. He tells Rodrigues that the Japanese Christians being tortured will be set free if he, as an official representative of the church, will step on an image of Christ known as a *fumie*—literally, a picture designed to be trodden upon. Such an act will signify his own apostasy, which the authorities are convinced will cause numerous Japanese peasants to similarly abandon their faith.

As Katō Muneya's essay in this issue, "Endō Shūsaku and the Film Adaptation of *Silence*," makes clear, Endō was frustrated throughout his life that calling the novel *Silence* made it far too easy to conclude that he was writing primarily about the silence of God. Over the years, many readers and critics around the globe have gleefully leapt to the conclusion that the novel represents the agonized cries of despair as suffering humans come to doubt and even angrily reject God for remaining silent amid their trials—perhaps, indeed, because God does not exist.

It is not difficult to imagine why such an interpretation of *Silence* would quickly attain the status of established fact in our day. If in past

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centuries world societies have experienced an Age of Enlightenment or an Age of Reason, or even an Age of Belief, what could we call the times in which we live—especially the decades following World War II, Vietnam, Watergate, the killing fields? Is ours an Age of Doubt, perhaps even an Age of Anxiety? As men's and women's hearts increasingly fail them, could we be living in an Age of Despair? In a country such as Japan, there is little in their cultural and religious traditions that encourages an individual to ponder the relationship between Man and God. Rather, it is Nature, as the repository of a higher essence, that has repeatedly—almost incessantly—been apostrophized in Japanese verse; Japanese poets regularly turn their gaze toward natural phenomena that might mirror the subtle swings of their private emotions. The line of vision for the Japanese is primarily horizontal, between the individual and the Other, or between the individual and the natural environment. Seldom is their gaze directed vertically toward an inhabited heaven.

But, come to think of it, can't the same thing be said about Western civilization today?

Amidst all the noisome chatter about the meaning of silence in the novel, here is what Endō had to say on the subject:

Because I titled the novel *Silence*, both readers and critics in Japan have mistakenly concluded that I was writing about God's silence. And though I've responded, "No, God does speak," many people persist in misreading the novel as a depiction of the silence of God. Consequently, they overlook the moment in the novel when God does speak, that part which is most important to me. . . . Ultimately I wanted to write that from within the silence there comes a voice . . . that a voice emerges through the silence.³

³In 1992, Endō helped produce a video and an accompanying essay collection titled *Chinmoku no koe* (*The Voice in the Silence*) and published by Purejidento Sha. In the video, given the separate title *Haha naru mono* (*Mothers*), Endō makes the statement quoted here, which I have translated into English.

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What is that voice, and what does it say? When a desperate, beaten-down Rodrigues is brought by his apostate mentor to the edge of the *fumie* image and told that if Christ were there, He would have stepped on His own face in order to save the suffering Japanese Christians, Rodrigues weakly lifts his foot. And in that moment of his greatest agony, the Christ in the image speaks to him and says: "It's all right to trample. Go ahead and step on me. I know better than anyone else how your foot aches. It's all right to trample. I was born into this world to be trampled upon by you and by all of mankind; I bore my cross so that I could share in your pain."⁴

I am compelled to point out here that the translator of *Silence* into English grossly mistranslated this most critical portion of the novel. He renders the compassionate, understanding words of Christ in the imperative ("Trample! Trample!"), as though it is an angry command from an offended God. Nothing could be further from the loving, forgiving words of a motherly Christ who understands human weakness and wishes to help lighten the weight of the priest's suffering and guilt.

The voice of Christ in this passage is really an affirmation that the passion of Rodrigues consists of a gradual smoothing down of the sharp corners of his selfish ego and his overly confident Eurocentrism. The man who stands with his foot poised to grind into the face of "the most beautiful thing in his life, . . . what he has believed most pure, . . . what is filled with the ideals and the dreams of man" (Endō, *Silence* 183)⁵ has himself been "silenced"; the voice he has yearned so long to hear is no longer a voice echoing his own desires and aspirations and ambitions. His unrelenting torture by the Japanese authorities, culminating in his realization that others are suffering because of his stubborn willfulness, has finally been of sufficient intensity to convince him that he has been wrong in caring first and

⁴This is my retranslation of the words spoken by the voice from the *fumie*; page 183 of William Johnston's published translation may be consulted for comparison.

⁵Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations from *Silence* here and on page 23 are taken from the Johnston translation.

foremost about himself. What I am arguing, then, is that it is not God who is silent in this novel. Rather, it is Rodrigues who is reduced to silence and taught, thanks to his tribulations, that the way to emulate Christ is not to shout His words to (or at) others but to quietly perform His acts of compassion for others, forgetting Self and its incessant, high-decibel demands. In this moment of his greatest extremity, Rodrigues finally understands that if he wishes to be like Christ, he, too, must share in the pain of others, walk beside them through their personal valleys of the shadow of death, and be with them always as a companion in suffering. It is in Rodrigues's realization that he is not alone in his suffering, that he has in Christ an eternal companion who will never desert him, that Endō comes the closest to providing a solution to the agonizing human dilemma I mentioned earlier in the quotation from Natsume Sōseki's novel, that "loneliness is the price we have to pay for being born in this modern age" (30). Rodrigues is no longer alone once he realizes that he will never suffer alone, or that his torment is without meaning if he does not learn to salve the physical and emotional scars of others. As C. S. Lewis wrote about the power of literature: "Literary experience heals the wound . . . of individuality" (140). "The wound . . . of individuality." Isn't that a fabulous phrase!

After about twenty years of using *Silence* in my literature classes at Columbia, Notre Dame, UC Berkeley, and finally Brigham Young University, I had basically come to the conclusion that my association with the novel and with Father Rodrigues would go no further. How wrong I was! This novel has stayed with me constantly, taking on new forms and meanings and continuing to shape my beliefs in a divine being who will also never leave my side.

In 1993, I was contacted by the artistic director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater. In collaboration with a theater company in Japan, they were planning to produce a stage adaptation of *Silence*. They had hired a brilliant American playwright named Steven Dietz to write the script, but he had never been to Japan and knew no Japanese. I was invited to join the production company as literary advisor and thus embark on a new journey in company with the

novel, with Endō, and with Rodrigues. I traveled to Japan with three other members of the production company: author Steven, director Joe Hanreddy, and scenic designer Kent Dorsey. Our team set out on an unforgettable tour of Christian-related sites—partly unforgettable because this was during a blisteringly hot, humid two weeks in mid-July in the Nagasaki area. We saw virtually every Christian site—even if it was just a small pile of rocks—in western Japan. We also met and discussed the project with Endō. I spent countless hours with Steven Dietz, helping him get a grasp on Japanese culture, the history of Christianity in Japan in the seventeenth century, and especially key passages in the novel that might not have come through crystal-clear in the English translation. The resulting play, which opened in Milwaukee on 10 September 1995 and then played in Tokyo, with a revival in both Japan and across the United States (including two sold-out performances at my own institution, BYU), was a masterful, powerful revisioning of the novel. It received the Yomiuri Shimbun Award (the Japanese equivalent of a Tony award).⁶

After the U.S. tour was completed, I once again settled into a complacent, somewhat exhausted feeling that *Silence*, Rodrigues, and I had permanently removed our traveling shoes and could finally relax in our rocking chairs (basking in the sun and pondering our lives?). When will I learn?!

An additional six years passed before I was rocked from my rocking chair and primed for another journey. On 15 June 2011, I innocently opened an email from a woman called Marianne Bower, whom I did not know. She identified herself as research assistant for a film director named Martin Scorsese, a name I most certainly recognized as one of the most dedicated, artistic, and gritty film directors of the last forty years. Marianne inquired whether I would be willing to provide some help as a consultant now that Mr. Scorsese was beginning work on his adaptation of *Silence*. It is possible I waited a full five seconds before shooting back an enthusiastically positive response.

⁶The complete script of Steven Dietz's adaptation of *Silence* is included in *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel*, pp. 279–395.

My excitement about setting off on another voyage in league with *Silence* was premature, however. Scarcely a month after the initial email exchange with Marianne, she vanished from my radar screen and went into strict radio . . . umm . . . silence. I did not hear a word from her again for a little over two years. I just sat there, my traveling shoes all laced up, waiting for the project to be revived. And revived it was, with a passion. For a solid two years beginning in September of 2013, scarcely a week elapsed without some sort of electronic exchange or phone conversation with Marianne, relaying to me questions from Mr. Scorsese and conveying my responses back to him, just as any good go-between (translator?) would do. Over the course of those many months, Marianne and I exchanged literally hundreds of email conversations about *Silence*.

The contents of the emails ranged from the trivial (“The English translation says there’s a moth flying around the candle; can you check and see if it really says ‘moth’ in the Japanese original?”) to the deepest levels of meaning and interpretation. Before long, perhaps because Mr. Scorsese had learned to trust me as a consultant, he began through Marianne to ask probing questions about the deeper meanings of the Japanese text. Once he was convinced that I was equally committed to having his film be a faithful interpretation of *Silence* and that I was, in fact, able to read Endō’s original Japanese text, we forged a unique long-distance, second-hand relationship that I hope helped him to make his film what it is: a staggeringly powerful examination of the challenges that beset those who attempt to maintain faith in a world of callous pragmatism and brutality. The greatest personal reward I received for my work as a literary consultant on the film was a large signed poster of the film which hangs in my campus office; it bears an inscription from Mr. Scorsese: “No words to describe my thanks to you for all you’ve done to help me realize ‘Silence’—your guidance and support was incalculable.” How does one put that on an academic résumé?

It was very moving to me that Mr. Scorsese was so determined to be faithful to the original Japanese novel. He could easily have just used the flawed English translation and adapted it to suit his own artistic purposes. I cannot fully explain why he was so determined to

capture the essence of Endō's novel. But I can venture an educated guess that the image of a loving, forgiving Christ in the book spoke very directly to Mr. Scorsese's own personal faith. And I am quite certain that the same thing that happened to me and so many other people when they first met Endō also happened to the great film director. There was a certain charming boyishness about Endō, a kind of smiling impishness that made it very easy to be drawn into his circle of influence.⁷ Once you were part of that circle, there were frequent opportunities to observe the profoundly thoughtful, movingly considerate, and deeply committed author beneath the carefree surface.

My lengthiest and most intense interchanges with Mr. Scorsese had to do with the truly critical moment in the story, that moment when a beaten-down Rodrigues is brought before the *fumie* and urged by the Japanese officials and his own apostate mentor to grind his foot into the face of Christ. Rodrigues's agony is beyond description, and of course he has all but given up on God breaking His silence from the heavens. But as he tearfully lifts his foot to step, the Christ in the bronze image does, in fact, speak. Given that the title of Endō's work is *Silence*, the moment when God finally does speak can only be described as extraordinary drama. But Mr. Scorsese had been unduly influenced by the gross mistranslation in the English version of the book, which, as I mentioned earlier, has the voice of God from the *fumie* shout at Rodrigues: "Trample! Trample!" (183). That of course gives the mistaken impression that God is actually frustrated with Rodrigues and angry at him for being so weak. And that is precisely the opposite of what Endō's text in Japanese conveys. As I quoted above in my own translation of the text, the voice of Christ speaks to Rodrigues in a soft, gentle voice: "It's all right to trample. Go ahead and step on me. . . . I was born into this world to be trampled upon by you and by all of mankind; I bore my cross so that I could share in your pain." Over the course of many discussions about this passage, Mr. Scorsese and Jay Cocks, who coauthored the screenplay, caught the essence of what the novel so beautifully expresses in the Japanese

⁷Katō's "Endō Shūsaku and the Film Adaptation of *Silence*" in this issue also touches on this aspect of Endō's personality.

original. If I contributed nothing else to the film adaptation, I am very grateful I was able to convey that meaning to Mr. Scorsese.



In late September of 2016, three months before the film premiered, Mr. Scorsese flew me out to his office in New York to screen an almost-final cut of the film. I sat alone in his personal screening room and watched with a pounding heart.

When the film ended, Marianne came in to get my reaction, but for a time I was speechless with emotion. After I was finally able to mutter a few remarks, she escorted me into Mr. Scorsese's office, where I sat and chatted with him and the film's editor, Thelma Schoonmaker, for about an hour. I can summarize what I said to him about the movie in just one sentence: "From all I know about Mr. Endō from studying his works and from knowing him personally, I think I can confidently say that he would be very pleased with this film."

And how was this extraordinary film received? The movie critics for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Rolling Stone*, among others, pronounced it Scorsese's masterpiece. Critic Sasha Stone waxed rhapsodic:

This is the work of a master in total control of his awesome power to bring his visions to life onscreen. There is no one like him. He has no equal. . . . In an era where much of Hollywood cinema is designed to pull audiences in by dazzling us with proven formulas of preawareness, comfy branding, and computer-generated visual extravaganzas, Scorsese's *Silence* is a reminder of the once great institution of the American film epic.

It has been called the most powerful film about faith ever made. I might note here that Japanese audiences and critics—including those

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who were closest to Endō—speak rapturously about the film’s faithfulness to the novel and its on-target depictions of life in seventeenth century Japan. Endō’s only child, a son named Ryūnosuke, who is also the executor of his father’s literary estate, has expressed his own enthusiastic approval for the film and suggested that his father would be standing on his feet applauding Mr. Scorsese’s spot-on adaptation.

Critics aside, how did we as audiences in the United States respond? With an estimated film budget of \$46 million, the U.S. box office took in a pathetic \$7 million. Seventy percent of its grosses came from outside the United States, but all told, the movie scarcely made back half its costs. How terribly sad—tragic, even. Can movie audiences today really only get worked up about exploding cars, superhero sagas, digital dinosaurs, and fifty shades of something I do not want to know anything about? What does that say about our society? We can gleefully sit through 140 minutes of a movie about a virtual reality video game but cannot bring ourselves to spend 160 minutes in quiet contemplation of what it means to believe in something higher than ourselves and to commit all that we have to our beliefs? In spite of this initially disappointing reaction to the film, I can confidently predict that at some date in the future, Mr. Scorsese’s film adaptation of *Silence* will be widely acknowledged as his masterpiece and as a classic of world cinema.

As I look back on the forty-year journey that has been my career as a teacher and translator, I am fully convinced that I could not have had better traveling companions than one of the twentieth century’s finest authors, Endō Shūsaku, and his extraordinary novel, *Silence*. My journeys with Endō taught me that his lifelong project was not to demonstrate the inability or unwillingness of God to communicate with His creations, but, quite to the contrary, Endō’s focus was on the repeated and varied attempts God makes to transmit His will by breaking down the walls that human beings create through their own selfish and willful attitudes and behaviors. And that a loving, forgiving Christ walks beside us in our triumphs and our trials, lifting us up when we fall and urging us to continue forward. I had the choice opportunity to observe Endō living what he wrote—I

have known few individuals as eager to offer support to the underdog, encouragement to the downtrodden, and a few moments of sheer enjoyment to the lonely and despondent.

I am likewise grateful for my walk alongside Father Rodrigues, the proud priest who learns true humility when he discovers a compassionate Christ who will always be beside him, beside each of us. And finally, my unexpected but remarkably rewarding journey with Martin Scorsese, a brilliant creative artist who also chose to listen silently to the persistent pleadings of a voice from the wilderness of Utah who wanted nothing more than a film that would faithfully portray the struggle of faith as Endō originally wrote it.

Has my journey with this captivating novel finally come to an end? Experience has taught me that I had better not get too comfortable in my rocking chair, that I had best keep my walking shoes tied, and that, just as the Japanese proverb I quoted at the outset says, “Best of all when traveling is to have a companion; best of all in life is kindness.”

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IMAGICA Imaging Center,
which hosted advance screenings of *Deep River* and *Silence*

Endō Shūsaku and the Film Adaptation of *Silence*

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The last movie Endō Shūsaku saw during his lifetime was an advance screening of the film *Deep River* (directed by Kumai Kei), based on Endō's novel of the same name. The screening took place on 24 February 1995 at the IMAGICA Imaging Center located at Gotanda, Tokyo. Endō was almost seventy-two years old at the time. For two years he had been undergoing peritoneal dialysis due to a worsening of his kidney disease.

When the screening was over, I asked him what he thought of the film, but he did not say a word; he merely nodded his head once. But in the car as he was returning to his home, he suddenly said softly and with admiration, "That scene was magnificent."

The scene he was referring to takes place after one of the protagonists of the film, a man named Ōtsu—a former Catholic priest who is living in India after being rejected in European Christian society—finishes another day of carrying the dead bodies of Indian pilgrims to the cremation pyres beside the River Ganges and returns to his lodgings, which are carved out of stone. Ōtsu crouches on the floor and says his prayers before stretching out on his bed. At this point the camera is situated near the ceiling. From that position directly above Ōtsu, the camera captures him as he clutches his knees and

tries to fall asleep. Gradually his body starts to shake and he begins to emit wordless groans.

Although the film *Deep River* is a faithful adaptation of the original book, this scene depicting Ōtsu's agony does not appear in the novel. One can imagine Endō—who frequently said that his goal was “to depict human sorrow”—approving of this scene because Ōtsu's moaning was “precisely what [he] wanted to express” in the novel. A filmed image can have just this sort of effect and impact; I was able to experience that impact once again, some twenty years later, during a private screening at the same IMAGICA Imaging Center—this time a private screening of Martin Scorsese's film adaptation of Endō's novel *Silence*.

Turning back the clock . . . 1991, New York City

The final three years of Endō's life, culminating with his death at the age of seventy-three, were spent in a cruel battle against illness, so this 1991 trip to New York was perhaps his “final journey.” In May of that year, when he was sixty-eight years old, Endō traveled to Cleveland, Ohio, where he spoke at John Carroll University at a symposium about his writings. In a subsequent ceremony, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree. I was among several of Endō's associates who accompanied him on that trip.

Throughout this visit, Endō, who stood five feet nine inches tall and weighed 132 pounds, enjoyed excellent health and stayed up drinking liquor well into the night. At restaurants and in the hotel bar he would mimic the movements of an ant eater or try to imitate the voice of a young kabuki actor he knew, constantly exhibiting his perpetual wish to play the charming host. Three days later, we traveled from Cleveland to New York City. He told us his reason for going to New York was “to take Miss Matsuzaka to lunch to celebrate her upcoming marriage.” The well-known actress Matsuzaka Keiko was planning to marry a guitarist who lived in New York, so she spent a lot of time there. The lunch was held at a restaurant called “Windows on the World” on the 107th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center complex. Looking back, I realize that was the location of the 9/11 Twin Towers disaster exactly ten years later.

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Checking my planner, I confirmed that on the day following the luncheon, Endō, accompanied only by his translator-cum-secretary, slipped quietly out of the hotel around noon. When he returned about two hours later, he casually confided to me, “I just met with Martin Scorsese. He’s going to make a film version of *Silence*.”

I am fairly sure his meeting with Mr. Scorsese had already been arranged before we left Tokyo, but it was typical of Endō to claim that his reason for visiting New York was not to meet with the film director but rather to have lunch with an actress. Still, it did not take me long to begin worrying what kind of film adaptation this renowned director would make of *Silence*, particularly since the author of the original work himself had once grumbled, “Far too many people have misread my novel.”

When he was in his sixties, Endō reflected back on *Silence* in a video with an accompanying book entitled *The Voice in the Silence*. By then, more than twenty years had passed since the publication of *Silence*, but in this video he revisited Nagasaki, which is the setting for the novel, and expressed feelings he had never spoken of publicly before. Of greatest interest, perhaps, are his mention of two regrets that he had after the novel was published.

The first was, “If I’d published it today, I wouldn’t have given it that title.”

It is widely known that the original title he gave the manuscript of the novel was *Hinata no nioi* (*The Scent of a Sunny Place*). He explained that this title referred to the smell of loneliness experienced by an apostate priest whose life has ended up directly opposite to what he had expected. But the publisher, claiming that “it will never sell with a title like that,” asked Endō to change the title to *Silence*, and ultimately he agreed. As a result, however, many readers concluded that the theme of the novel was “the silence of God.” The statement in the novel, “Lord, why are you silent? Why are you always silent . . . !?” was all that stood out to them (98), and they gave virtually no consideration to the passage near the end of the novel in which Rodrigues says: “But Our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day would have spoken of him” (204).

Endō's second regret involved the issue of the "apostasy" of the main character, Rodrigues. While it is true that he placed his foot on an image of Christ known as a *fumie*, that act in itself does not mean that he abandoned his faith. Evidence for this can be found at the end of Chapter Eight where it says, "The priest placed his foot on the *fumie*. Dawn broke. And far in the distance the cock crew" (183), along with the information contained in the "Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence," which follows the final chapter (205–12). Very few readers grasped the significance of these passages. "A cock crowed" echoes Peter's denial of Christ in the Bible, and just as Peter initially disavowed his Master but ultimately went on to establish the Church in Rome, the crowing of the cock in the novel intimates that Rodrigues did not abandon his faith. The "Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence" points out that Okada San'emō (the Japanese name given to Rodrigues), who has presumably apostatized, was forced to write oaths disavowing his faith. Another scene notes that a "Christian amulet" is discovered hidden in Kichijirō's clothing, confirming that Kichijirō, even though he had committed betrayal after betrayal, had regained his faith (207–08). Many readers, however, skipped over these excerpts from the officer's diary due to their antiquated style and impenetrability, assuming that they were an appended list of sources consulted for the novel.

Endō remarks in the video, "I chose this video format in the hope that I could now have more readers understand what I was trying to say in my novel." How, then, did Martin Scorsese handle these issues? Another problem—which Van C. Gessel discusses in detail in "*Silence as My Traveling Companion: My Journeys with Endō, Rodrigues, and Martin Scorsese*"—is that the words Rodrigues hears Christ speak from the *fumie*, "It's all right to step on me," are rendered in the published English translation in the imperative—"Trample!"—(183) and I wondered how Mr. Scorsese would resolve that problem with the translation. But I had to wait a long while for a resolution to my concerns: after Endō's meeting with the director, I saw no announcements of a date when shooting of the film would begin, and before I knew it, more than twenty years had slipped by.

Late one night, gazing up at the window of a hospital room

Endō was in good health around the time he met Mr. Scorsese in New York. He was extremely busy with his work, simultaneously publishing several historical novels in serialized form while also serializing essays in newspapers. Additionally, he was beginning to make preparations for what would be his final serious novel, *Deep River*.

In 1992, the year after Endō met with Mr. Scorsese, however, he began to experience problems with the functioning of his kidneys. He was hospitalized for tests and informed that he would have to begin dialysis. At that time, he wrote in his notebook, “I want to write a novel infused with the sorrows of humanity. If I can’t do that, I won’t be able to say my prayers” (recorded in *Diary of the Writing of Deep River*).

Endō’s life was an endless succession of illnesses. In his teens he suffered a lung hemorrhage, and in his twenties while he was studying in France he developed tuberculosis. When the tuberculosis returned in his late thirties, he spent an extended amount of time in the hospital and underwent three surgeries. Even after he recovered from those maladies, he was besieged successively by hepatitis, diabetes, and prostatitis.

. . . I remember one experience. Shortly before we went to New York, Endō came up with the idea to stage “A Night of Fashion Shows and Song.” He invited some housewives and students that he knew and had them put on their best outfits; after some impromptu instructions, they paraded from the stage down a runway. Narration was provided by a foreign designer who identified himself by announcing, “My name is Pierre Jardin, and I’ve come here from France.” The spectators could not hold back the chuckles as Mr. “Jardin” began speaking in a blend of Japanese and English. (He was in fact a British friend of Endō’s.)

As I rode in a taxi with Endō back to our homes after that evening of merriment, we were passing by a certain train station when he said to the driver, “Could you stop here for a moment?” We got out and stood at the edge of the sidewalk while he gazed at something on the other side of the road. We had stopped in front of the hospital

ward of the Keiō University Medical Center. It was past the lights-out hour of 9:00 p.m., and not a single light shone through the windows of the sickrooms. But Endō seemed to be leaning forward, peering intently toward those darkened windows. He stood that way only a short time, less than five minutes, I think. I am confident that particular ward was the place where Endō had spent the long years of his own hospitalization many years earlier. But I did not feel as though that was the reason he was staring fixedly at those windows. Even now, patients lay on the other side of those darkened windows, forced to spend each agonizing day in those sickrooms. I surmised that Endō was comparing his own experiences to their current lives.

When we got back in the taxi, all that Endō said—in a voice clearly no longer clouded by intoxication—was, “But we still had a lot of fun tonight, didn’t we?”

A deeply moving story—Of “Sorrow” and “Mother”

I have sometimes wondered why Endō’s novels have been able to attract so many readers, given that they deal with themes relating to God and faith. Perhaps one reason is that many of his writings have protagonists who are weaklings, such as Kichijirō in *Silence*. Possibly some young people who experienced defeat in the student uprisings in Japan in the 1960s¹ saw themselves in the characters of Rodrigues and Kichijirō, who were forced against their will to trample on the *fumie*. Others may have felt redeemed when they detected a mother’s tenderness in the person of Jesus, who pardons those who have betrayed others. But is that all there is to it? At some point, I came to believe that Endō’s literature has this impact because it contains something

¹Left-wing student organizations led ultimately unsuccessful protests in Japan in the 1960s in opposition to proposed revisions in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and against the use of United States bases in Japan to pursue the war in Vietnam. Ironically, *Silence* in Japan became a best-selling novel thanks in large part to young leftist activists who read it as a metaphor for the suppression of anti-militarist protests leading up to the Second World War.

fundamentally vital—an element in his stories that reaches beyond time and place to move the hearts of men and women generally.

In most cases, novels are born from personal circumstances, not from ideas or logic. In Endō's case, many critics have pointed to the fact that he was often ill or that his feelings of guilt toward his mother had a powerful influence on his works. There is also the fact that Endō in his youth was an inferior student in school—a problem child. Once when his teacher ordered him to stand up and read from his textbook, he stood up but didn't utter a sound. When the teacher demanded to know why he was not reading, he answered, "Cuz I'm reading it to myself."

There was discord in Endō's home when he was a youth. His father, who had been sent to Dalian, Manchuria, by his work, began a love affair with a young woman, and when Endō was ten, his parents divorced. Returning to Japan with his mother and his elder brother, Endō was raised by his mother in Kobe. While there, his mother was converted to Christianity, and at her encouragement both of her sons also became Catholic. They were baptized not because they believed in God but because their mother had told them they needed to believe. Endō did as he was asked because the request came from his mother, whom he pitied because she had been abandoned by his father.

Endō remained a lackadaisical student through his middle and high school years, but after spending three years out of school due to failure in successive college entrance exams, he was finally admitted into Keiō Gijuku University in Tokyo. Because his mother was not able to cover their tuition and living expenses, her two sons decided to live with their father in Tokyo. Obviously that was the sensible thing to do. When the two young men sat around the dinner table with the father who had abandoned their mother on one side and his new wife (who had been his lover in Dalian) on the other, they surely must have pictured their mother sitting all by herself at her dinner table in Kobe.

Endō the failing student completely transformed after his encounter with French literature at the university. The Christianity that had been thrust upon him by his mother now became a central

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theme for his life, and after graduation from Keiō University he went to Lyon to study modern Catholic literature. When he returned to Japan, he began writing novels, and within two years he was awarded the Akutagawa Prize, the gateway to success in Japan's literary world, and embarked on a career as a writer.

By that time, however, his mother was no longer alive. Not long after his return from studying in France, toward the end of the year he turned thirty, his mother suddenly died from a brain hemorrhage. She was fifty-eight years old. Endō felt ashamed that he had lost his mother without ever doing anything to prove to her that he wanted to be a good son. Even when he set out on a trip to take his wife and son to a hot springs resort after he received the Akutagawa Prize, he was still tormented by feelings of remorse, commenting, "I was never able to do anything like this for my mother. How can I be so extravagant now?"

Not long after Endō's death, several photographs were found tucked inside one of the books from his personal library that had been donated to the Machida Municipal Literary Museum. They were photographs of his mother taken shortly after she passed away. It is not clear who took the photos, but in them his mother's face is clearly twisted in agony. They might remind one of the painting by Hans Holbein the Younger, "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb," which is held in the collection at the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Switzerland. The painting depicts the horribly abused corpse of Jesus, about which Dostoevsky wrote in his novel, *The Idiot*, "A man could even lose his faith from that painting" (218).



2

²This image is available at commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Body_of_the_Dead_Christ_in_the_Tomb,_and_a_detail,_by_Hans_Holbein_the_Younger.jpg#/media/File:Hans_Holbein_d._J._003.jpg.

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It well may be that, seeing these photographs, Endō once again merged the images of Jesus and his mother in his mind. He certainly felt guilty that his mother died in such anguish, and that guilt could have led him to conceal the photographs in a far corner of a book-case, inside a book that would likely never be examined by anyone. Thereafter he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the writing of novels. In place of the photographs he hid away, he framed a picture of his mother in her younger days, smiling and holding her violin.



3

He kept that photo on his writing desk; when he traveled he put it in his travel case; in summer he placed it next to the dining table in his mountain cottage; and during his hospitalization he always kept it beside his pillow.

The final scene of the film says everything

Silence could be described as the novel that was born from the three years that Endō spent in the hospital when he was in his late thirties. It was through this novel that he came to know a loving God who, when necessary, would give him permission to step on an image of God, and in it he encountered a voice that would say, in

³Image supplied courtesy of Van C. Gessel.

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effect, “I know the pain in your foot as you step.” Even though the novel was criticized by the Church, and even though some said that what he was writing about was not Christianity but instead Endōism, as an author he never left the side of the weak and of those who are suffering. In scenes such as these, one can almost feel that a single tear is about to fall from Jesus’ eye.

For no particular reason, this reminds me of the statue of Ashura—one of the most popular Buddhist images in Japan—that is presently held in the Kōfukuji Temple in Nara.⁴



5

This statue has three faces and six arms; the face at the front powerfully expresses deep penitence and grief. It is said that long ago,

⁴The Ashura (or Asura) are a class of demigods in Buddhist cosmology that are controlled by their emotions and are constantly at war. This statue of Ashura dates from 734.

⁵This image is available at commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kofukuji_Ashura_2.jpg.

Empress Kōmyō had the statue made because of the death of her child that had not even reached the age of one. Echoing her grief, deep puffy bags have been carved beneath both eyes of the image. Imperceptible tears have almost reached the point of spilling out from the lower eyelids.

If there are in fact such things as “characteristics of a story” that have the ability to move readers irrespective of time or place, then surely one such characteristic is boundless empathy for human sorrow. Such empathy can ultimately produce a single ray of light that will shine upon those in extreme pain and those who suffer. Such a light calls to mind the gaze that God directs toward humankind. One could also imagine a single shining thread that stretches between God and humanity. All of which is to say that Rodrigues did not abandon his faith and that God was not silent. Those who suffer are held in the arms of God because of their intense pain, and in His embrace they are able to look upon this precious light.

The final scene of the film version of *Silence* is extraordinarily beautiful precisely because it conveys this theme so powerfully. In that last scene, the coffin containing Rodrigues’s corpse is being conveyed to the spot where his body will be burned; the palms of his hands hold a crudely made crucifix secretly placed there by his Japanese wife (originally the wife of a man who had been executed for his crimes). Rodrigues holds that crucifix in his hands as he is consumed by the flames. This, too, is a scene that is not found in the original novel, but Scorsese, who remained exceedingly faithful to the book, was able to utilize the unique capabilities of the film medium to bring the very essence of *Silence* to the screen.

As the lights came up in the screening room, I recalled the words that Endō had muttered many years earlier after he viewed the film adaptation of *Deep River*. And I am convinced now that Endō Shūsaku would have uttered the same words of affirmation at the end of this film adaptation of *Silence*: “That scene was magnificent.”

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Image Taken from
Martin Scorsese's Film Adaptation of *Silence*

Thoughts on *Silence*: the Novel and the Film

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I will propose in this essay that in creating his film adaptation of Endō Shūsaku's novel, *Silence*, Martin Scorsese read deeply between the lines of the novel. Endō sometimes used the Japanese word, *neishi*, which means a foundation stone. In order to display large rocks in a Japanese garden so that they elicit feelings of both tension and beauty, a gardener must begin by burying a stone deep in the earth, invisible to the eye, like roots that reach deep into the ground. A rock merely plopped down on top of the ground exhibits no sense of tension. The beauty produced by tension becomes apparent only when an unseen foundation stone lies below, providing support to the exposed rock. There are foundation stones in Endō's novel, *Silence*, and I think we can say that in his own original way, Scorsese excavated down to the deepest level of those foundation stones to produce his film adaptation.

Although I have read the novel scores of times, the film, which was released fifty years after the original publication of *Silence* in Japan, allowed me to experience the world of the novel with a fresh set of emotions. Scorsese scrutinized the text painstakingly. Over the course of more than twenty years, he probed between the lines

of the novel, examining both the English translation and the original Japanese text. The story of the novel evidently contains elements that overlap with some of the themes of Scorsese's own life. Why else would he go to such lengths to delve into the deepest meanings of the original text? At the age of fifteen, after meeting a priest he came to greatly admire, Scorsese entered a seminary with the intention of becoming a priest himself. But he came to the realization that one does not take on holy orders simply from a wish to become a priest, that it must be a calling from God, so he dropped out of the seminary in the first year. But he is clearly a man drawn to what is holy. His fascination with the kind of person a man of the cloth ought to be is one of the core themes of his faith.

Endō was baptized at his mother's encouragement when he was twelve years old, and for a time he gave serious consideration to becoming a priest himself; this was at a time when he faithfully attended Mass every morning. Like Scorsese, Endō was fascinated with what a clergyman should be like—a fascination that expresses itself in his art. When Endō wrote *Silence*, he had just barely survived the last of three surgeries that saved him from a likely death from pulmonary tuberculosis. That brush with death inspired him to want the novel he was working on to be a summation of all that he had experienced up to that point in his life. He commented that his attention was not fixed on his readers as he wrote, but that he was driven solely by the feeling that it would not matter if he died if he could succeed in writing what he so earnestly wanted to write. His views about faith and the feelings that he infused into *Silence* overlap with the themes in Scorsese's film adaptation of the novel.

Perhaps, in a similar manner, Scorsese felt he had to make this movie before he died, setting aside concerns about whether it would appeal to his audience. Consequently, even though for moviegoers seeking only entertainment, a two hour and forty minute movie might be too long to become popular, I think it is fair to suggest that Scorsese felt he had to make this film the way he did, and that he was able to realize his aims.

The personal significance of this movie to Scorsese was in turn communicated to the actors, who had great respect for their director,

and within the expanse of Scorsese's grand vision, they managed to surpass any individual shortcomings, which helped them relish the opportunity they had to participate in the world of this film. Kubozuka Yōsuke, who played the role of Kichijirō, even remarked that he could now give up acting after completing his work on this movie.

What impacted me most forcefully when I saw the film was the fact that as the end credits rolled, all that could be heard were the sounds of nature. Nothing but the sounds of nature—the sound of the wind, the cries of insects, the screeches of cicadas, the claps of thunder as rain began to fall—filled the quiet space as the credits advanced. Reflecting back on the film as it concluded in this manner, those sounds underscored my impression that I had just witnessed the extraordinary drama of a foreign priest who comes to the humid climate of Japan, where he meets the Christ who was alive in the hearts of peasants living in that climate. There were many scenes of falling rain and the crashing of waves in the film, and depictions of nature appear very frequently in the novel as well. When the film opens and the title “Silence” appears on the screen, the only sound is the cry of insects in the darkness, and throughout the film, background music is extremely restrained so that the various characters who appear are enveloped in a womb-like space by the sounds of nature, giving the sense that the characters in this drama are being observed from a viewpoint far above them. I felt all of this as I watched the end credits, and I was left with the feeling that I had just watched a truly profound movie.

At the end of the novel in the original Japanese there is a section titled “Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence” (204–12).¹ It is composed in a premodern documentary style that blends Chinese writing with Japanese readings of the characters. Endō lamented the fact that many readers skipped this section, considering it nothing more than an appendix. Until very recently, this section has been left out of the Korean translation of the novel, and in the English

¹“Christian Residence” is a euphemism for the location in the capital city of Edo, where captured foreign priests were imprisoned for violating the ban on Christianity in this period.

translation it actually appears under the title “Appendix.” In this section, Endō highlights the names *Okada San’emon* (the Japanese name given to Rodrigues) and *Kichijirō* to emphasize that they are mentioned in this diary. Some readers have concluded that the story ends without Kichijirō attaining salvation, but in the diary Kichijirō is shown serving as an attendant and servant to Rodrigues. Rodrigues has taught Kichijirō about the Christ he encountered through his experience at the *fumie*, a motherly Christ filled with love and forgiveness. Kichijirō embraces that image as the focus of his own faith and in turn transmits it to the others who are imprisoned in the Christian Residence, thereby creating a secret community of faith. This is evident from the fact that those in the Christian Residence end up confessing, one after another, that they are Christians.

This cluster of events is related offhandedly in the diary, making it a challenge to interpret properly. Scorsese clearly understood the importance of what is described, however, and he includes a scene as the film ends in which Rodrigues after his death is given a Buddhist posthumous name and a Buddhist funeral, but since very few readers of the novel made it all the way to the end of the “Appendix,” many who saw the film have commented, “Scorsese added a lot at the end, didn’t he?” In fact, however, the diary that concludes the book states very clearly that Rodrigues was given a Buddhist funeral and a posthumous name. A careful reader and thoughtful film director, Scorsese included a section of the novel in the film that even we Japanese readers often overlook.

When Endō was writing *Silence*, he invited Father Inoue Yōji² to accompany him to Nagasaki while he gathered materials at locations where the novel takes place. He asked Father Inoue to go with him to function as though he were the priest for a man whose faith was as weak as that of Kichijirō. Endō later observed that by the time he wrote the novel, he had himself stopped passing judgment on others, and that generosity of spirit is embodied in the resulting text. Many historical characters appear in *Silence*, but as Endō

²Father Inoue (1927–2014) had a significant impact on Endō’s thinking about Christ and Christianity in Japan.

searched the hearts of those who were considered good and others who were regarded as evil, he discovered great and unexpected depths in each of them, producing what he would later call a “drama of the spirit” or “the questions of the spirit.” Exploring the relationship between God and man, Endō found he could not declare that every martyr was righteous and every apostate darkly evil. Seen through the eyes of God, the relationship between God and a man is a holy realm that no outsider can penetrate or pass judgment upon. When a person is understood and appreciated in such detail, it becomes impossible to judge him or her. No outsider has the ability to declare what is right and what is wrong for another individual.

There is much conflict between religions in the world today. If a person has a certain set of beliefs, should he or she be intolerant of another person who believes something different? Conversely, does having faith mean that one automatically becomes tolerant toward another’s beliefs? Dealing as they do with the struggles of the human soul, both the novel *Silence* and its film adaptation depict ways in which one can eventually develop a faith that inclines a person toward tolerance.

In the film, Rodrigues in his final days is depicted as though he is a believer in Buddhism when he dies. In addition to the aforementioned “Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence,” the novel includes the journal of a Dutch trader named Jonassen (190–97). But Mr. Scorsese must have felt that dividing the narration into two voices at this point would be too confusing, so the Dutch trader relates the story by himself in the film. In any case, because Rodrigues’s final days are described by an outsider, that second-hand description makes it seem as though Rodrigues died as a Buddhist. But no outsider can truly understand what was taking place within Rodrigues’s spirit.

God, however, can. And perhaps even Rodrigues’s wife. At the end of the film, Rodrigues is cremated in a Buddhist ceremony, but something truly startling is portrayed in that scene. Rodrigues’s corpse inside the coffin has been set ablaze, but we are shown that clutched in the palm of his hand is a tiny, roughhewn wooden crucifix—a crucifix he had earlier received from the Japanese martyr, Mokichi. This we see from God’s point of view.

The person who placed that crucifix in the casket, unnoticed by anyone, was the wife who had been given to Rodrigues. She understood her husband's faith. This moment in the film represents the greatest difference between it and the earlier film version of *Silence* directed in 1971 by Shinoda Masahiro. In Scorsese's version, the wife is called Rin, and she and their child are shown paying their final respects to Rodrigues and participating in the funeral scene. This reminded me of a short story titled "Servants," included in Endō's story collection, *Haha naru mono*, which deals with the final days of Father Giovanni Battista Sidotti.³ In the Christian Residence, Father Sidotti was served by an elderly couple named Chōkichi and Haru, the same couple who had earlier served Father Ciara (the historical model for the character Rodrigues). In Endō's story, these two confess their belief in Christianity, hinting that even while confined in the Christian Residence, Sidotti was able to influence those around him and transmit his faith to them. This is the dramatic episode related in Endō's story, "Servants."

Scorsese caught the vision of that drama and presented it in the final scene of *Silence*. As a European priest, Rodrigues had come to Japan declaring his teachings from a position of self-importance. Young priests like him often came to Japan bringing the dogma they had been taught in their seminaries—transmitting those teachings from a lofty height, confident that their faith was absolute truth. Once they came face-to-face with harsh reality, however, matters did not usually proceed the way they had been taught in seminary, and with that reality staring him in the face, Rodrigues himself ends up being tutored by the impoverished Christians of Japan. Rather than giving something to them, he learned from their lives, and ultimately he was the one who grew in understanding.

³Father Sidotti (1668–1714), an Italian priest, was likely the last Catholic clergyman to attempt to steal into Japan (in 1708) under the ban on Christianity. He was arrested almost immediately and imprisoned until his death. His interviews with a Japanese scholar provided much information about European civilization and culture.

After his downfall, Rodrigues realizes that he is a weakling no different from Kichijirō, and he proceeds to teach Kichijirō about the motherly Christ he has encountered since coming to Japan. Through this process, he becomes one of the “hidden Christians” in the spiritual climate of Japan. Outwardly, he is forced time and again to write out oaths of apostasy. He vows to the Japanese officials that he has abandoned the faith—in part, perhaps, to protect his wife and child—and consequently he cannot openly declare his true beliefs. Instead, for a long while, even to the end of his life, he carefully held onto the simple wooden crucifix that the Japanese Christian peasant Mokichi had so lovingly protected. That crucifix is perhaps a symbol of what Rodrigues had received spiritually from the Japanese believers. And does it not also represent the face of Christ that had taken root in the spiritual climate of Japan? Rodrigues held onto the crucifix, accepting it to himself amidst the flames that engulfed his corpse. To me, that final scene gives ultimate expression to the themes of *Silence* that Scorsese discerned between the lines of the novel.

Silence is written from Rodrigues’s point of view. It starts out with letters from Rodrigues, but even when he is no longer able to send letters back to Rome, the narrative is still seen through his eyes; this is a fundamental difference between the book and the movie. Perhaps the greatest difference, though, is that in the film, Kichijirō is not as filthy and loathsome and disgustingly off-putting as he is in the novel. We see more of his unique humanity, and perhaps to many viewers he even comes across as a good person. On the other hand, in the book we can only see him through Rodrigues’s eyes. He appears as a grimy good-for-nothing to Rodrigues, who cannot bring himself to believe that someone so despicable could be of the same faith as himself. But in the film, the actor Kubozuka Yōsuke attempts to convey the drama enacted in the depths of Kichijirō’s soul, giving the impression that like Scorsese, Kubozuka, too, has plumbed the character’s soul through reading between the lines of the book. No matter how base and weak and dirty Kichijirō may appear, there is a holiness within individuals such as he. He behaves as he does not out of maliciousness but because he cannot help himself. There is an

honesty to him and, in the final analysis, a kind of innocence. Kubozuka recognized these qualities in Kichijirō, and reportedly when he played the character that way, Scorsese told him to “show even more childlike innocence.”

It seems, however, that Scorsese did not initially think of Kichijirō in the way that Kubozuka portrayed the character, feeling that it differed from the Kichijirō he had come to know in the novel. But as he studied Kubozuka’s performance, he began to be convinced that perhaps this was the real Kichijirō. And in fact, if we look carefully at the Kichijirō of the novel, we can identify passages in which he does seem to possess a childlike innocence. For example, there is the scene in which Kichijirō stands stock-still in the rain outside Rodrigues’s cell, shouting “Father! Father!” (121). The human side of Rodrigues makes him want to just leave the filthy wretch standing in the rain. But the description in the novel at this point is, “The entreating voice continued like that of a child pleading with its mother” (121). That is actually all that is said in the novel, but it does convey the sense that the desperate, entreating cries of Kichijirō are like those of an infant seeking out its mother, without whom it has nowhere to go, no way to go on living. It also says in the novel that Kichijirō is the “dirtiest of men” (123). When Kichijirō is placed in the cell with the other Japanese Christians, we observe him through the eyes of Rodrigues, who warns the other Japanese Christians, “Be careful of this fellow” (122). When Kichijirō comes near him, Rodrigues is disgusted by his stench. But we must not forget the drama being played out in Kichijirō’s soul, which is clearly depicted in the movie. I think the same is true of other characters in the story. It is true of Ferreira and true of Lord Inoue the Inquisitor as well as Mokichi and Ichizō, none of whom are seen in the film through Rodrigues’s eyes, but rather as actors in their own individual dramas of the soul.

The last issue I would like to address is the claim that Japan is a “mud swamp,” a topic that has been misunderstood by those who have read the novel and—I assume—also by many who have seen the film. Some people are persuaded that Endō is asserting that Christianity cannot take root in Japan. There are also those who single out just

one part of the movie and claim that the message is that a monotheistic religion is ultimately unsuited to Japanese sensibilities. Endō has in fact expressed in the novel the many varied challenges of his own life, whether it be the conflict he sensed between the Asian concept of gods and the Christian belief in one God or his perplexing experiences as a student in France.⁴ There is no basis for insisting that the enormous Western tree called monotheism cannot grow in the swamps of Japan, because the simple wooden crucifix that Rodrigues received from a wretched Japanese peasant is itself the very image of the faith that has taken root and lives in the hearts of the Japanese, something that Rodrigues understands when he accepts the crucifix. It is problematic to pick out a few words that appear midway through the novel and suggest that it is what Endō himself believes.

Scorsese premiered the film for a group of Jesuits at the Vatican in Rome. I do not know whether Pope Francis has seen the movie himself, but when he was a young man he wanted to be sent to Japan as a missionary, and he read the novel *Silence*. Perusing reports of the film's premiere in Rome, I get the feeling that there are themes in *Silence* that overlap with what Pope Francis has been saying.

There was a report at the time of the screening at the Vatican that a priest laboring in Asia expressed to Scorsese his view that, while the tortures inflicted upon the Japanese Christians were obvious acts of violence, in fact the contention by the European missionaries who journeyed to Japan that their form of Christianity was the one and only universal truth was also a form of violence, a kind of ideological aggression. Rodrigues declares that the teachings of his church are the only universal truth, and is not that also a type of violence? In addition, the Japanese who accepted the Christian teachings went on to commit acts of destruction themselves,⁵ so the

⁴During his studies in France between 1950 and 1953, Endō experienced feelings of isolation and prejudice and struggled with the apparent incompatibility of polytheistic Asian religions and monotheistic Christianity.

⁵Some of the Japanese converts were powerful warlords who took it upon themselves to have Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines in their domains destroyed.

scenes in which violence is perpetrated by the officials in response to violence by the Christians can also be construed as scenes of persecution. This problem of violence in reaction to violence is something that the Inquisitor, Lord Inoue, takes into consideration. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the first Japanese ruler to persecute the Christians, issued an order to expel the missionaries; that edict notes the fact that the priests were encouraging the destruction of Shintō and Buddhist images.⁶ Because the issue of violence brought to the forefront in *Silence* is depicted with a greater degree of realism in the movie than in the book, the film challenges the viewers to consider these issues of the relationship between religion and violence.

Of all the scenes in the novel, the one that sparked the greatest curiosity was how Scorsese would portray Rodrigues stepping on the *fumie*—a picture of Christ designed to be trodden upon. Unlike the way it is described in the novel, in the film Rodrigues's cell is placed in the yard outside. The pitch-black cell in the novel is located inside the magistrate's office, emphasizing the isolation and fear that Rodrigues is experiencing, but the way this is handled in the film does not convey the same atmosphere, since it moves quickly to the *fumie* scene. Also, in the novel the white light of dawn comes pouring into the darkness as Ferreira leads Rodrigues down the faintly lit corridor toward the *fumie*. Rodrigues in the film emerges from his cell and goes to the yard outside, where he at once steps on the image. In that *fumie* scene, we must carefully examine the English translation of the Japanese words "*fumu ga ii*" spoken by the voice of the Christ in the *fumie*. This is rendered in the published English translation of the novel in a very forceful tone of command with the words "Trample! Trample!" (183). But that strong imperative does not convey the image of a maternal Christ that Endō intended. Thanks to the fact that one of the leading Endō scholars in the United States, Van C. Gessel, served as literary consultant for Mr.

⁶The edict to expel the Catholic missionaries was issued in 1587, but with few exceptions the priests remained in Japan, and Hideyoshi's desire to continue trade with Portugal rendered the edict essentially toothless.

Scorsese, in the film this phrase is translated more along the lines of “It’s all right. Step on me.”

As he is about to step on the image, Rodrigues hears not a command but the voice of Christ in tones of motherly forgiveness. In the film, after Rodrigues places his foot on the image, his body literally “falls.” He then clutches the *fumie* to his breast. This is not apostasy, but what in Japanese is called “korobu,” meaning both to literally fall down and to fall away from the church. But those who fall will stand up again. Underpinning this scene in the novel is chapter twenty-two of the Gospel of St. Luke, in which—to render the Japanese translation in English—Jesus says, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art again standing upon thy feet, strengthen thy brethren” (22.32). At the Last Supper, when Jesus tells Peter that “thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (22.34), He also says—as noted above—“when thou art again standing upon thy feet.” In other words, Jesus is acknowledging that Peter will fall. He understands more than anyone that Peter will fall because of human weakness, but He also states He will pray that Peter’s faith will not fail. Falling is not the same as losing one’s faith. There may be cases in which a person falls and then loses their faith, but it can also be the case that through falling, one is awakened to one’s true faith. Once that happens, such a person can strengthen others. Peter responds “I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death” (22.33), but Jesus says, “The cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (22.34). And that is precisely what happens. Three times Peter declares “I know him not” (22.57–60), after which the cock crows, and as Luke records, “And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” (22.61). Then Peter weeps bitterly. What is therefore depicted in the Bible is the drama of Jesus’ disciples falling, but after they rise to their feet once again, they are able to become authentic ministering apostles.

In the case of Rodrigues, after completing his studies at the seminary he was able to labor for a long while without falling, but after he is beaten down both physically and emotionally, he steps on the *fumie*, the cock crows, and the dawn comes. In the midst of his torment and

trials, he comes to discover not the God he had been taught about in seminary, but his own personal “Lord.” That is the story told in *Silence*.

Something that struck me as unusual was the fact that the *fumie* is not soiled. No matter how dirty the sandals that had walked along extremely muddy roads before stepping on the *fumie*, the image is not soiled whenever it appears on the screen. I thought perhaps that was an expression of Scorsese’s faith. All are accepted, no matter how filthy, no matter what has been done to them. It felt as though what was being suggested by the unsullied image was the fact that Jesus Himself was a holy personage who could never be soiled.

Another thing I had difficulty understanding in the film was having Rodrigues repeat Jesus’ words, “That thou doest, do quickly” to Kichijirō very early in the story. It is hard for that statement to be understood in Japan if it is not presented specifically as what Jesus said to Judas Iscariot at the Last Supper. These words were the section in the Bible that aroused Endō’s greatest interest. The chapter in the Gospel of St. John that describes the Last Supper opens with the statement that Jesus “loved [His disciples] unto the end” (13.1) and concludes with Jesus saying to Judas, “That thou doest, do quickly” (13.27), at which point Judas disappears into the darkness. What was in Jesus’ mind as He spoke those words? If He meant that Judas alone had fallen outside the scope of His love, then one must wonder whether Judas was the only one excluded from the love that Jesus declared He would feel toward His disciples “unto the end.”

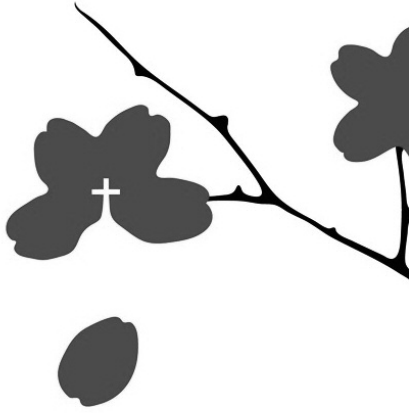
Endō was greatly troubled by this question. If in fact that is the way that Jesus loves, then it could mean that Endō himself was also a Judas. But in *Silence*, Jesus does not thrust Rodrigues away, but rather says something akin to “Do quickly,” which to Endō had the same meaning as “It’s all right to step.” “It’s all right if that’s all you’re able to do.” I think that when Endō came to understand that Jesus’ words to Judas were spoken with a look of love and forgiveness, he himself felt forgiven.

When Jesus attempts to wash Peter’s feet at the Last Supper, Peter demurs, saying, “Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13.8).

To which Jesus responds, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13.8). When Peter replies, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13.9), Jesus admonishes him with words to the effect that “No, it is enough. It is sufficient to wash only the filthy parts.” Jesus touches our dirtiest parts, accepts them, and purifies them. Both Endō’s novel and the film adaptation portray the beginnings of a true relationship with Jesus when first He acknowledges our filthiness. That perception captures the messages of the Gospels. That is the message that lies between the lines of the novel, the part of *Silence* that is not visible on the surface but that undergirds the work like a foundation stone. What I find most significant about this film adaptation is the fact that, through focusing on the same themes of faith that inhabit Endō’s work, Scorsese has created a movie that altogether captures what lies at the very foundation of the novel.

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Approaching *Silence*

New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Classic Novel

Edited by Mark W. Dennis and Darren J.N. Middleton

B L O O M S B U R Y

Approaching *Silence* and Navigating *Deep River*: A Buddhist Reflection on Friendship, Joy, and Gratitude in Collaborative Scholarship

Mark Dennis
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The Master said:

To study and at due times practice what one has studied, is this not a pleasure?

When friends come from distant places, is this not joy?

—*The Analects of Confucius* (Eno)

This essay addresses the literary art of the Japanese novelist Shūsaku Endō through the lens of friendship and collaboration as well as pleasure, joy, and gratitude—qualities that may not spring immediately to mind when thinking of literary analysis and academic work. I focus on Endō's novels *Silence* and *Deep River*, which are the subject of anthologies I have co-edited with my Texas Christian University colleague and close friend Darren J. N. Middleton. The former, published in 2015, is titled *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel* and the latter, slated for publication in spring of 2020, is titled *Navigating Deep River: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Final Novel*. *Deep River*, the subject of the second anthology, was translated by Van C. Gessel, who is a close friend and mentor to

Darren and me and is serving as editor of this special edition of *Literature and Belief*. Van not only contributed chapters to both volumes but also played a crucial role in moving them to publication. I offer short biographies of each of us below.

This essay is written in the style of a Buddhism-inflected autoethnography that uses Buddhist teachings to engage these literary works not simply as static objects of dispassionate, objective analysis, but as complex and interdependent “things” capable of generating both meaning and experience, including the *pleasure* we three have derived from *practicing* what we have studied, but also the *joy* we have experienced when we have come together as *friends* from *distant places* for a common purpose—our love of Endō’s richly evocative stories. Thus, rather than placing the novels in their historical contexts, engaging in a traditional form of literary analysis, and so on, this essay reflects instead on these relationships forged through our collaborative work while also considering its broader significance—common elements of autoethnography.

I. BUDDHIST AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is a type of scholarly study drawing on personal experience to investigate the relationships that exist among an academic group and the significance of its work. I witnessed the power of this genre of academic writing when I read “The Box” by my TCU Religion Department friend and colleague Santiago Piñón, Jr.; his piece offers a heart-wrenching autoethnographic account of wrestling with intense grief after the still-born birth of his twins, whose lifeless bodies were returned to their parents in an unremarkable box—thus, the title, “The Box.” He describes the grief experienced by Cicero, Augustine, and Schleiermacher over losing a child, writing: “In all three examples, we see men, regardless of their philosophical and religious views, overcome with grief at the loss of a child. Even so, the grief of these losses and countless others remains conspicuously absent from most academic work.” He wrote in this style to challenge the “discourse of scholar as inquiring subject that has been imposed on us from now antiquated and deeply flawed views of academic work.”

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In this way, Santiago's article was meant to help readers understand the human element of scholarship that is often ignored or misunderstood by those outside, and even by some inside, academia, and that has been increasingly devalued in what in their recent book, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber argue is part of the ongoing "corporatization" of American institutions of higher education. They lament a shifting academic culture wherein "our work has changed due to the rise in contractual positions, expanding class sizes, increased use of technology, downloading of clerical tasks onto faculty, and the shift to managerialism—all part of the corporatization of the university" (3). Some proponents of this business-oriented model have engaged in harsh critiques of the Humanities, which have been the subject of a steady stream of negative articles. The fact that you are reading a journal like this one suggests this bleak assessment likely comes as no surprise. I return to these concerns in the conclusion.

This genre fits well into a Buddhist interpretive framework since it asks the autoethnographer to reflect upon the *auto*, or "self," in relation to others, which is a central concern of Buddhist teachings. Those teachings seek to undercut the apparent stability of the "things" we find in the phenomenal world, whether novels like *Silence* or *Deep River*, our two anthologies about those novels, or our sense of a substantial and enduring self, whether we impute it to Endō, his characters, or to the anthologies' contributors. In a well-known dialogue between King Milinda and the Buddhist philosopher Nāgasena, the latter argues that what we perceive as an enduring self is, in fact, just a constantly shifting amalgamation of five aggregates, arising in one concatenation, only to be quickly remade as causes and conditions shift. This Buddhist teaching played a central role in my chapter in *Approaching Silence* where I drew on Darren's use of the literary critic George Steiner's image of the "pilot fish." I wrote:

This chapter interprets Shūsaku Endō's novel *Silence* through the lens of Buddhist thought, focusing first on the story and then on the text, the story's "vehicle." Both sections draw from

an observation made by my co-editor Darren J. N. Middleton whose chapter in this volume compares the fiction of Shūsaku Endō and Graham Greene. In describing his own efforts to understand their work, Middleton borrows the image of the pilot fish from the literary critic George Steiner, who states that the function of the critic is to act like the “pilot fish, those strange tiny creatures, which go out in front of the real thing, the great shark or the great whale, warning, saying to the people, ‘It’s coming.’” But Middleton wonders what precisely is the “real thing” in Greene’s or Endō’s work, asking “What signifies the ‘it’ that is ‘coming’?” Uncertain about the referents of these terms, he concludes that the fiction of both novelists “opens out to many readings and diverse meanings—to those who construe it humanistically, as locating the enormous within the everyday, and to those, like me, who read it theologically, as gesturing toward transcendence. No, I am not sure of the ‘real thing’ in Endō’s and Greene’s work. But I suspect that reading defies stasis.” (159)

A bit later, I added:

But Middleton’s comments about the “real thing” (hereafter, *real thing*) raise other questions about Endō’s text of the sort commonly taken up by Buddhist thinkers. Nāgasena, for example, would share Middleton’s uncertainty about this phrase since it suggests the existence of some singular and stable thing. Indeed, Nāgasena engages in a well-known dialogue with King Milinda about such *real things* in which he uses the king’s chariot—one sort of vehicle—to illustrate the Buddhist teachings of emptiness and interdependence. That is, because any thing—whether a chariot, a person, or a text—lacks an unchanging foundation or identity, it exists only in dependence on other things. To initiate their investigation of Milinda’s chariot, Nāgasena declares: “This chariot is a mere sound. But what is the real chariot?” (160)

A chariot, text, or person is thus described as being “dependently co-arisen” and so “interdependent” upon both its component parts

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but also on what is perceived to be outside it. Thus, we can never exist in selfsame isolation; rather, we are all inevitably in a state of perpetual “interdependence” not only with other human beings but also the other forms of sentient life and inanimate objects that appear in our natural and built environments. I tried to express this fluidity of self and my interdependence with others in another section of my chapter as follows:

My appreciation of *Silence* has evolved as I have, for varied purposes, returned to the *text* again and again. For me, it has served not only as a course reading and a subject of scholarship, but also as a source of entertainment and spiritual reflection, a source of friendship and community. And while my academic training in Buddhist Studies, Japanese literature, and post-structuralist thought has naturally influenced my interpretation of *Silence*, it has also evolved through my ongoing engagement with the text through workshops and presentations, discussion and writing, and through co-editing this anthology. . . .

As one reader of *Silence*, my perception of the text’s meaning and value is thus complex and shifting, depending on those who populate the various communities that have been crucial to my intellectual and spiritual development. Indeed, in an attempt to recognize in writing this interdependence, I have structured this chapter as an imagined dialogue with my friend and co-editor who has helped shape my understanding of *Silence*, which we both recognize, in our own ways, as a “classic novel” that is worthy of study and reflection, but also worthy of the public’s attention and recognition. But I have also tried to instantiate interdependence by recognizing the work of other contributors to this volume, who offer their own readings of the climactic scene, the significance of Kichijiro, and the face of Christ. Their divergent readings suggest the elusiveness of the “great shark,” and thus the difficulties of our discovering the *real thing*.

While this interdependent and dialogic approach to reading, interpretation, and writing naturally highlights my connections to these individuals and communities, it is also meant to disperse the

locus of what appears as a singular interpretive agency—shifting it away from the persuasive ontological force we naturally impute to an individual's name and, more broadly, to words themselves. Through the lens of Buddhist thought, although these words can be taken as my words, in important ways they are not mine since they emerge only through my dependence on the ideas and compassion of my teachers and colleagues, family and friends.

This Buddhistic approach to interpretation, which focuses on the dynamism and multivalence of *things* and *selves*, calls us to remain open to alternative ways of reading and engaging a *text*. (180–81).

As suggested in this second extended quotation, I tried to express my own interdependence by imagining the anthology as a dialogue with Darren and by placing my ideas in conversation with those of Van and the other contributors, thereby focusing on the text serving mainly as a generator of meaning. Here, however, I reverse my perspective on interdependence and focus instead on what I have described in the final sentence as “alternative ways of reading and engaging a text.” That is, I investigate how these works of Endō have also been a wellspring of friendship and community—terms that appear three times each in the quotation just above—that I have experienced while practicing, to return to Confucius, what I have studied, especially in the context of the joy I have experienced when we have come together as friends from distant places.

II. *SILENCE AND DEEP RIVER*

Silence (*Chinmoku*) was published in 1966 and translated by William Johnston in 1969; the novel thrust Endō onto the Japanese literary stage, garnering him several awards, including the 1966 Tanizaki Prize for Literature. He was awarded the Japanese Order of Culture in 1994 and in the same year was nominated for but did not win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Briefly, *Silence* tells the moving story of the troubled discipleship of the Portuguese Jesuit priest Fr. Sebastian Rodrigues, who travels to Japan in the seventeenth century

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with his friend and fellow Jesuit priest, Fr. Francisco Garppe.¹ They undertake the risky journey to discover the truth about a dark and implausible rumor: that is, word had reached their seminary in Lisbon that Fr. Christóvão Ferreira, their mentor and a man of a majestic, unshakeable faith, had apostatized while being tortured, as had many other native and non-native Christians in Japan. Their torture was occasioned by a brutal crackdown on the faith ordered by the country's military ruler, who feared that the Christian missionaries had come to pave the way for the colonial ambitions of the Portuguese, Spanish, and other European powers. This cruel treatment led many Christians to go underground, to hide their faith. They are thus remembered as the *kakure kirishitan*, or the "hidden Christians." And it was to minister to these Christians while also discovering the truth about their mentor that the two priests snuck into Japan, where they faced an almost certain death.

Late in the novel, Fr. Rodrigues discovers that his mentor had, in fact, waved his hand to signal his apostasy, but it had not been out of weakness or cowardice; rather, he had done so to save the lives of Japanese Christians whose torture would end if he would deny his faith. Although the young priest harshly criticizes his teacher for his act, Fr. Rodrigues soon finds himself in the same heart-wrenching predicament. In the novel's most dramatic scene, the young priest is thrust before a *fumie*, an image of Christ carved onto a piece of wood, and given the same horrible choice: step on the *fumie* and save the lives of the Japanese Christians enduring intense suffering, or hold on to that faith and watch them die slow and excruciating deaths. As he looks down upon the *fumie*, he sees not the beautiful face of Christ with bright blue eyes he had imagined again and again in his mind's eye; instead, he sees a face filled with suffering and exhaustion gazing back up at him. But as he looks down upon the image, he suddenly hears the gentle voice of Christ urging him to step forward. He does so as the cock crows in the distance.

¹The spelling of the priest's name varies somewhat, depending on medium and translation.

In 1993, near the end of his life, Endō published *Deep River* (*Fukai Kawa*), which was translated into English by Van the following year. The novel tells the story of Japanese pilgrims who travel in the 1980s to north India's sacred city Varanasi and its famed section of the Ganges, looking for spiritual solace as each tries to deal with intense suffering. One character, a businessman, is bereaved by the death of his wife whom he had ignored during their marriage; a second, a former Japanese soldier, seeks to cope with lingering trauma he first experienced while fleeing with comrades, many of whom perished horribly on the so-called "Highway of Death" in the Burmese jungles during World War II; and yet a third, a housewife, hopes to escape a loveless marriage and find spiritual meaning by immersing herself metaphysically in India's rich spiritual traditions and bodily in the healing waters of the sacred river. The last figure, Mitsuko, hopes also to reconnect with Ōtsu, a former lover who has failed as a Catholic priest because of his ecumenical, *panentheistic* religious ideas that Darren discusses in his chapter. Ōtsu plays the role of a Christ-like figure who helps the outcastes of Varanasi carry corpses to the burning *ghats* along the Ganges. In an interview in *Image*, Van describes this touching character as follows: "I think the image of Ōtsu, a disenfranchised Catholic priest who dresses in the robes of a Hindu ascetic and carries the bodies of the dying to their final resting place in the River Ganges, is one of Endō's most affecting creations." *Deep River's* drama takes place against the backdrop of the assassination of India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards and the subsequent Hindu-Sikh religious violence, which consumes Ōtsu and leaves him at novel's end hovering in the liminal space between life and death.

Although Endō was a prolific writer, he selected these two novels to be interred in his coffin when he was buried in the Tokyo area after his death on 29 September 1996 due to complications from hepatitis. Darren and I thus describe our anthologies as "bookends" to his career, which represent distinct periods in the novelist's intellectual and spiritual development, particularly his evolving understanding of his Catholic faith, which he famously described as ill-fitting clothing. In the same *Image* interview, Van summarizes that evolution in the following exchange with the interviewer:

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Image: In many of his novels, Endō has grappled with the problem of translating western Christianity into Japanese culture. When you look at the body of his work as a whole, from *Silence* to later works like *Deep River*, do you see a progression or evolution there?
VG: There is certainly an evolution in his thinking about the relationship between western Christianity and the spiritual traditions of Japan. *Silence* represents his first major attempt to create an image of Christ that could be accepted by Japanese readers: a motherly figure who always walks beside his followers, sharing in their pain and never abandoning them.

Later, he adds: “And of course, in *Deep River*, Endō opens up his vision to include Asian religions that offer comfort to the afflicted through deified images of a suffering Mother.”

As argued by several contributors to our anthologies, Endō’s attempts to grapple with these and other issues related to his Christian faith and Japanese identity are reflected in the travails of the novels’ characters who are separated by hundreds of years and thousands of miles but are united by the human emotions of pain and doubt, uncertainty and struggle, and all seem propelled by a deep spiritual yearning forward, either across the ocean from Portugal to Japan in the seventeenth century, or from Japan to India and its deep river Ganges in the twentieth century. In creating these compelling stories from his fertile imagination, Endō set in motion a horizon of interpretive and other forms of textual engagement that have played out through their multifaceted “workings”—a term Endō used to describe not the existence but the activity of God, which we revisit below. Those “workings” naturally include the academic study and other sorts of scholarly activities—conference panels, church presentations, film screenings, classroom visits, and so on—described below, but they also include the friendships that are central to this essay.

III. CHRONOLOGY

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, but grew up in Madison, Wisconsin. I completed an undergraduate degree in business finance in 1984

and worked for two years in the business world before discovering that it was not my passion. Having been introduced to meditation by friends in a Boston-based mutual fund, I decided to leave that world behind and travel to Tokyo, Japan, to study Zen Buddhism. I arrived in August 1987 and supported myself teaching English but spent much time attending Zen retreats at a temple in Kamakura, not too far from Tokyo. While living in Japan, I also traveled widely in Asia, visiting China, Thailand, Singapore, and other countries, including India. After about five years in Tokyo, I moved to a Hindu ashram in south India, where I lived for about two years. I worked as a gardener on the ashram but had the chance to go on Hindu pilgrimages and attend other religious events. Having experienced these two very different cultures that are central to *Silence* and *Deep River*, I returned to the United States in 1995 to pursue a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies, which I completed in 2006 with a specialization in early Japanese Buddhism and a Ph.D. minor in Japanese literature.

I was introduced to *Silence* while I was teaching at Gustavus Adolphus College (2003–2007), a small liberal arts college in Minnesota located approximately seventy miles southwest of the Twin Cities. The college is part of the liberal, Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America (ELCA) tradition. I was hired in the Department of Religion while still a graduate student for a four-year replacement position for John Cha, the department's scholar of Buddhism, who had been asked to supervise and reinvigorate the college's study abroad program.

Although I mainly taught courses on Buddhism and World Religions, I was invited to teach an East Asian history course because the professor who taught it had left and there was insufficient time to find a replacement. I agreed, in part, because I could get help from my younger brother Joe, who completed his doctoral work on Chinese history and had taught an East Asian history course in the University of Minnesota's History Department. At the time, he was teaching at Davidson College in North Carolina but has since moved on to the University of Wisconsin. I mentioned that I wanted to include one or two literary works in the course, and he recommended Endō's *Silence*, which he had first read as a teaching assistant in the East Asian history course and had then used successfully in his own courses.

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Soon after arriving at TCU in 2007, I developed a close friendship with Darren, who is the Religion Department's specialist in literature and theology and holds the department's named professorship. He was born in Nottingham, England, and he abandoned a promising cricket career as a swing-bowler to pursue a B.A. in Religious Studies at the University of Manchester. He went on to complete an M.Phil at the University of Oxford in Modern Christian Doctrine and a Ph.D. in Literature and Theology at the University of Glasgow, completing his doctoral work on the literary art of the Greek novelist Nikos Kazantzakis. The novelist's *The Last Temptation of Christ* served as the subject of a 2005 anthology Darren edited that includes a chapter titled "On Reappreciating Kazantzakis" penned by the filmmaker Martin Scorsese reflecting on his controversial adaptation of the novel for the silver screen. In addition to that volume, Darren has written and co-edited more than ten books besides our two Endō anthologies and has several other books that are in varying stages of development. His wide-ranging scholarly and teaching interests include Rastafari Studies, religion and the arts, and comparative literature and theology, with a special interest in the Catholic novel. His interest in Catholic fiction naturally led him to the novels of Graham Greene and Shūsaku Endō—two of the twentieth century's most prominent Catholic novelists who are, as noted above, the subject of his *Approaching Silence* chapter. Darren converted in 2013 from the Baptist tradition to Roman Catholicism and, after his conversion, has been invited to give talks on *Silence* at local Catholic churches and groups, including the University of Texas-Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

As our friendship developed, we came to realize that we both taught *Silence* in our classes but from quite different perspectives. In "Jesus in Fiction and Film" and other classes, he helped students to read the novel as a masterwork of Catholic fiction and to think deeply about the theological and missiological questions raised in the story. I taught it as a powerful piece of historical fiction and focused on cultural alterity in the context of Japanese religious history, including the influx of missionaries on the archipelago and the work of proselytizing in the context of colonial ambitions. It fit well in my

“World Religions” and “Religion and Violence” courses at an ecumenical Christian-affiliated university in which many, but certainly not all, students are members of diverse Christian denominations that include the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), TCU’s historical Christian affiliation.

Darren and I sat down recently to reflect upon the origin and evolution of these projects and, in doing so, realized that a few details, especially some dates, remain a bit fuzzy. We recalled that some time in late 2007, after discovering this shared interest in *Silence*, we discussed offering joint presentations on the novel, which was especially exciting because we knew Martin Scorsese had purchased the rights to the film *Silence* in 1991 and had been talking seriously about getting started filming. The director had received a copy of *Silence* from Archbishop Paul Moore, who had promised to send it to him in a conversation following a screening of Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ* for a group of clergy. In 1989, two years before purchasing the film rights, Scorsese read it cover-to-cover while riding the bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto.

In summer 2008, we started making presentations on the novel on campus and in the local area. Our first, and perhaps most memorable, presentation on *Silence* took place over three Sundays in summer 2008 at the Acton United Methodist Church in Granbury, Texas, which is located about thirty miles southwest of Fort Worth. I had been invited to speak at the church on Buddhism and so had established a friendship with a couple who were involved in planning the church’s programming. When Darren and I arrived in the church parking lot, we were accosted by a man in a rather large pickup truck with a thick Texas accent selling CDs of Christian and Bluegrass cover songs that he had performed and produced. Sticking his head out the window, he wondered if we might be interested in owning one or two for the eminently reasonable price of five dollars each. When we explained, in our British and Midwestern accents, that we had come from Fort Worth to talk to a Sunday school class about a book on Portuguese Jesuit priests who had traveled to seventeenth century Japan to find their mentor and minister to the hidden Christians, he seemed mildly puzzled but remained friendly and

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chatty nonetheless, never letting our talk of such transcendent matters dim his hopes of making a sale. Although we rebuffed his sales pitch, we now regret doing so because an audio recording would have been a wonderful memento of the start of what we have taken to lightheartedly call the *Silence* “dog-and-pony” show.

As with our classes, our presentations at Acton United Methodist and elsewhere reflected our distinct training: Darren addressed the novel’s theological underpinnings, which naturally intrigued our church audiences. He would interpret *Silence* through the lens of the Catholic novel, often holding it up in comparison to *The Power and the Glory* and other works of fiction by Graham Greene. Those underpinnings include the divergent possible interpretations of the dramatic scene described above in which Fr. Rodrigues, having heard the voice of Christ, steps forward upon the exhausted face of Christ on the *fumie* to signal what the priest’s Japanese interpreter tells him is just a “formality.” But had Christ actually spoken to the priest through what Darren describes as a process of “mediated immediacy”? Or was this, as one contributor to *Approaching Silence* argues in a controversial interpretation, the voice of Satan tempting the priest? These fraught theological issues naturally led to wonderful questions that Darren patiently and clearly answered.

Following Darren, I would discuss the relevant era in Japanese religious history, including the period of military rule led by the *shoguns* and the onset of a long era of international isolation. I would review the reasons the government cracked down on the European Christian missionaries and Japanese converts. I would also address the development of the hidden Christians and the fascinating ways in which they attempted to conceal their faith: building secret rooms, adapting Christian prayers to sound like Buddhist chants, and displaying images that resembled Buddhist bodhisattvas that they had imbued with Christian meanings. For instance, Avalokiteśvara (Kannon), the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, was merged with the image of the Virgin Mary and became known as Maria Kannon. These discussions also included the derivation of the term *fumie* and the unfortunate English translation of Endō’s original Japanese for the crucial *fumie* scene. As Van observes in his chapter in the *Silence* anthology,

Endō's Japanese phrasing does not mean the "Trample! Trample!" that appears in the translation, but is instead "a tender expression of Christ's empathy for the priest's pain, a loving admonition that 'It is all right to trample'" (38, en. 10). I would also address Endō's curiously flat depiction of a small number of faceless and hostile Buddhist monks who harass the priest after he was betrayed to the authorities by the weak and duplicitous Kichijiro.

Darren and I would invariably conclude our presentations on *Silence* with a statement about our excitement over Scorsese's forthcoming filmic adaptation of the novel, which, we would tell the audience, he was about to start filming and would be released "soon." But "soon" turned out to be almost eight years, with its limited release in the United States not until 23 December 2016 and its general release on 13 January 2017. Our "dog-and-pony" show included presentations at other churches, including TCU's affiliate University Christian Church, on campus, on the radio, and in other venues.

Since those presentations had been well received and since we had discovered the joy of collaborating, we decided to work together on an anthology dedicated to *Silence*. To this end, we wrote to prominent scholars of Japanese literature, including Dennis Washburn (Dartmouth College), Mark Williams (then at Leeds University but now at International Christian University in Tokyo), and Van (Brigham Young University), who is well-known as the translator and interpreter of many of Endō's novels. Van was a close friend of Endō—and of Endō's family—until the novelist's death, and Van served as one of the co-editors of *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature* and as the author of other scholarly works.

Van was born in Compton, California, and was raised in Salt Lake City. Although he grew up in a Protestant tradition, he mentions an important spiritual event in a May 2010 article appearing in *FairMormon*. Reflecting on his spiritual life, he writes,

In my early teen years, I became a casual, infrequent reader of the New Testament, primarily the Gospels. From my reading and the preaching I was hearing on Sundays, I came up with two simple demands of God: that He be universally fair to all of

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His children, and that He love and actually care about each of us and our lives.

But Van was profoundly troubled by a sermon he had heard in a Protestant church condemning to eternal damnation those who had not heard the Gospel, contradicting those two simple demands.

This experience set in motion Van's eventual conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in the early 1970s, he fulfilled a two-year Christian proselyting mission to Japan. After returning to the United States, Van completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Utah with a major in Political Science, and then an M.A., M.Phil, and Ph.D. in Japanese Language and Literature from Columbia University. Since then he has held academic positions at several universities, a journey he describes as follows: "After receiving my Ph.D. in Japanese literature, we embarked on a journey of wanderings through the academic wilderness, beginning with a year of teaching at my alma mater, Columbia University, followed by two years at Notre Dame, eight at UC Berkeley, and now just over twenty years at Brigham Young University." During his tenure at BYU, he has served as chair of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and as the dean of the College of Humanities. For the past five years, he has worked closely with us on our Endō scholarship.

Despite our being no more than unfamiliar names in an email that appeared out of the blue, Van spent many hours helping us move *Approaching Silence* forward. For instance, he both secured permission from his close friend and University of Texas-Austin playwright Steven Dietz to include in the anthology the latter's script for *Silence* and spent many additional hours helping us reformat the script to fit the publisher's style guidelines. Published in February 2015, *Approaching Silence* includes essays from fifteen scholars divided into five sections addressing the novel's background, religious elements, Endō's theology, pedagogy, and "later adaptations," which includes Dietz's script and an afterword by Martin Scorsese describing his interest in the novel. In his contribution, Scorsese writes:

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How do I translate the last pages of the novel, as abstract as *Moby-Dick* or *The Idiot*, into images and actions? So how do I film these interior sensations and realizations and emotions? How do I make the mystery of faith, and of the ways of God, cinematically present? The answer is in making the movie—going to Taiwan, working with the actors and the cameraman and the production designer, shooting, and then putting it together in the editing room, adding a frame here and taking one out there, mixing the sound, timing the color, and deciding that it's finished. But on another level, the answer lies with the cinema itself, and its way of pointing us toward what we cannot see. (398)

Although we had exchanged many emails with Van, we had never met him in person. In fact, our first face-to-face meeting was at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), which was held in Seattle, Washington, in March 2016. Darren and I had organized a roundtable discussion of Endō's novel titled "Approaching Fifty Years of *Silence*: An Interdisciplinary Discussion of Shūsaku Endō's Classic Novel." We quickly discovered that despite his prominent position in the field, Van has a great sense of humor and zest for life, coupled with a generous spirit. At the conference, we enjoyed getting to speak in person with Van and his former student Mark Williams, who also contributed to both anthologies. After the roundtable, the panelists were joined by Van's wife, Elizabeth, and my brother Joe. We happily wandered aimlessly about Seattle's harbor area in search of a restaurant before finally coming across a yakisoba restaurant—a staple Japanese noodle dish that is one of my favorites. I had the pleasure of sitting across from Elizabeth, who humorously set me straight on several important matters regarding her affable husband.

Later, Darren and I were able to secure funding from our university to bring Van, Steven, and Maeri Megumi, a scholar of Japanese literature at St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas, to TCU in conjunction with a special advance campus screening of Scorsese's film. A representative of Paramount, the film's distributor, brought a copy of the film, which had not yet been released on DVD. We were

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able to secure special permission from Paramount because Van had served as a script consultant with Scorsese. The advance screening was an electrifying event, with the hall overflowing with more than two hundred excited viewers. Paramount's security over the DVD was tight because of concerns that someone might surreptitiously make a black market copy. Thus, the Paramount representative brought the DVD all the way from Paramount's Dallas office and never let it out of her sight.

After dinner and a brief introduction of the film, the Paramount representative inserted the DVD into the drive, but it would not work. Nothing. Just a blank screen and a few hundred eager, but somewhat puzzled, faces gazing back at her. She spent the next forty-five minutes in frantic conversations with the home office, trying all manner of fixes, none of which seemed to work. So we quickly had to formulate and put into action Plan B: we would invite the gregarious and expansive Van, who had agreed to take questions after the screening, to educate and entertain the crowd! With no preparation and absolutely no hesitation, he strode up to the front of the room and talked about his training as an Endō scholar, his interest in the novel, and his work on the film. He then graciously answered many questions, several of which addressed his work with Martin Scorsese. Van spoke for almost an hour, during which he regaled the audience with wonderful anecdotes about working with the famed director, who, he reassured us, is kind, genuine, and curious (Scorsese asked us to send him the manuscript of *Approaching Silence* before writing his afterword). During his remarks, Van also discussed Scorsese's precision and devotion to literary and historical accuracy.

During his informal talk, Van recalled a detailed back-and-forth with one of Scorsese's assistants about a particular scene in the novel. Did Endō's Japanese text state clearly that it was a moth or some other sort of insect, the director wanted to know? Van reiterated his impression of Scorsese's curiosity, diligence, and devotion to authenticity in other ways, recalling that the director had even had his production crew secure and ship native plants from Japan to Taiwan, where most of the filming was done, to remain true to the landscape

of Nagasaki and its environs. After taking additional questions about the musical score and other elements of the film, we were all relieved when the Paramount representative was able to get the film to play by streaming it directly from the company's website. After the nearly three-hour film had finished, Van returned to center stage and took questions for at least another thirty minutes. It was a wonderful event that was followed up by class visits as well as a second screening and roundtable discussion at the regional meeting of the South-west Commission on Religious Studies, which includes our academic association: The American Academy of Religion. After this visit, we have continued to collaborate with Van on other Endō-related work, some of which I describe below.

IV. ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF READING AND ENGAGING A TEXT

This synopsis of our work together on Endō's literary art illustrates the qualities described above in my title and the quotation from the *Analects*—that is, the pleasure of study and the joy of friendship. In this next section, I shift focus from a description of the scholarly process, a key autoethnographic element, to using three Buddhist teachings—interdependence, selflessness, and loving-kindness—to examine the title's third quality: gratitude for these friendships. As I mentioned above, Buddhist teachings on interdependence and selflessness aim to free us from our ingrained habits of mind and so enable us to see that what may appear to us as independent, stable, and selfsame entities are, in fact, complex and constantly shifting mixtures of elements that arise through particular causes and conditions. This sort of thinking is helpful here because we often have in our minds common assumptions about texts, whether sacred texts like the Bible or The Book of Mormon, works of fiction like *Silence* and *Deep River*, or anthologies like *Approaching Silence* and *Navigating Deep River*. But those assumptions can blind us to “alternative ways of reading and engaging a text,” including the human element of scholarship that is hinted at in the dedication page and that will serve as our point of entry to take up the third Buddhist teaching mentioned above: *metta*, or loving-kindness.

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As an example of this tendency, most readers of *Silence* would likely assume the “text” includes the material described above: the apostasy of Fr. Ferreira, Kichijiro’s betrayal of Fr. Rodrigues, the dramatic *fumie* scene, and so on, while the cover, one type of paratext, conveys the text’s central theme, a particular relationship, or, perhaps, a key event. The dedication page, another sort of paratext, expresses the author’s or editors’ gratitude to someone for their love and support, their kindnesses and goodwill. As such, it would seem clear to most readers how to distinguish the text from this ancillary material. I offer the following as a lighthearted illustration of this distinction, which honors the Indian setting of *Deep River* and Indian cuisine, which Darren and I fervently esteem. That is, the sweet gulab jamun and crunchy papadum, both served before the meal, are examples of Indian culinary “paratexts,” as they serve particular functions in relation to the main meal, or “text,” whether that text comes to our table steaming hot as a tikka masala, saag paneer, or a fine dal. Indeed, the gulab jamun, the sweet eaten before the main meal, plays an important digestive role in traditional Indian cuisine that prepares the diner to dive into the main meal, just as the cover and the dedication page prepare the reader to dig into the text.

For instance, most readers would identify the striking cover of the Taplinger edition of *Silence* as ancillary to Endō’s text because the latter clearly preceded the former. Endō wrote his text, it was translated into English by William Johnston, and then the cover was created and added to create a bound book. The reverse is nonsensical: that is, the artist would have had no reason to draw the cover had Endō not first created his text. The Taplinger cover depicts Jesus drawn in bright red against a white background with his head tilted down and to the right while his face remains obscured. He appears crucified on a gray cross fashioned from the Chinese character that makes up the second part of the compound Japanese word *chin-moku*, or “silence.” Indeed, readers can, with little effort, find quite different covers on other editions, whether Japanese or English, despite each serving as a visual gateway into the same text. But despite its apparently ancillary position, I argue in *Approaching Silence*

that the cover plays a crucial, though often unrecognized, role in shaping how we approach *Silence*, to recall our anthology's title; that is, how we "read and engage" it, or, to return to the Indian food metaphor, *digest* it. Naturally, once a reader has completed the novel, the cover's significance will often take on greater clarity. The cover is thus a significant part of the process by which the author's text appears to us as an interdependent "thing." Edward Said observes in this regard:

The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. Whether a text is preserved or put aside for a period, whether it is on a library shelf or not, whether it is considered dangerous or not: these matters have to do with a text's being in the world, which is a more complicated matter than the private process of reading. The same implications are undoubtedly true of critics in their capacities as readers and writers in the world.

Likewise, the equally striking cover of *Approaching Silence* was designed by the artist Hugh Cowling, who chose a color palette similar to the Taplinger cover. He uses lots of white space but substitutes maroon for the Taplinger's bright red and black for its gray scale to depict a single branch of a cherry tree, a classic symbol of Japanese culture. In the middle bottom section of one of the branch's three cherry blossoms, he has hidden a tiny cross, which is simply white space excised from the cherry blossom's maroon. Hugh has also designed the cover of the *Deep River* anthology that preserves the same stylistic sensibility so that readers can see how the anthologies serve as our "bookends" to Endō's novelistic "bookends," but he has substituted the vibrant color palette of Indian culture, using a deep orange, vivid turquoise, and bright red for the cover's top section. Below that he has drawn passengers in a boat propelled forward by the stroke of a single oarsman as they slowly *navigate* the massive Ganges, depicted in a pale salmon color, which takes them downstream toward spiritual enlightenment. The oarsman and passengers

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are dwarfed by the river, a massive sun, and Varanasi's architectural wonders.

These covers, beautifully executed, are dense with meaning that far exceeds my brief description; they lead us into the main story while also influencing how we will *digest* it. For instance, the Christian cross hidden inside one of the cherry petals signals to careful readers before they even open the book that there may be a Christian element; even so, it seems trivial given its relative size. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear to them that Hugh is gesturing toward the Japanese Christians' attempts to *hide* their faith amidst the dominant symbols of Japanese culture. And on the *Deep River* cover, the passengers are dwarfed by the river, cityscape, and red sun, suggesting, perhaps, a silencing of the ego-self as they search for spiritual enlightenment.

And while the rich symbolism of these covers comes into greater relief once readers have completed the works, such is not the case with the dedication page, which will serve as our point of departure for examining gratitude. Unlike the cover, which naturally captures our attention, many readers likely skip over the dedication, or give it just a cursory reading. Even so, they are especially valuable in autoethnographies because they are tied to the human relationships that are a crucial part of the scholarly process, whether the grief experienced by Santiago and his wife at the loss of their twins, or, as is the focus here: joy, pleasure, and gratitude. Indeed, expressing gratitude, the third quality in my title, is a key part of a Buddhist meditation practice called *metta*, or loving-kindness. In that practice we often express gratitude to our teachers and mentors, family and friends, and even to all other sentient beings. This practice is meant to strengthen our sense of connection, or interdependence, with them and thereby to slowly diminish, even if in a small way, the strong pull of our ego-selves that are a key driver of craving and suffering according to Buddhist thought.

As examples, Darren and I dedicated *Approaching Silence* to family and friends with a mix of emotions, writing: "In honor of Betsy, who introduced Darren to Shūsaku Endō's literary art and Barbara Dennis, Mark's mother, and in memory of Tom Lecture, uncle, explorer, magician and Noya Bejarano, sweet and gentle in

her short life.” This dedication honored Darren’s wife Betsy and my mother Barbara, but also mourned the passing of my Uncle Tom and little Noya, the baby girl of my close friend Shalmit. And we dedicate *Navigating Deep River* to Van, expressing our gratitude for his mentorship, inspiration, and the joy he has brought into our lives from, what is for us living in Texas, the distant land of Provo, Utah. We write: “For Van C. Gessel, translator, literary critic, mentor, friend, and recent recipient of one of the highest non-Japanese civilian honors. With abiding affection.”

V. “VAN THE MAN”

This dedication was meant to capture the many ways—several of which were described above—Van has selflessly and graciously helped us move these projects forward but also, in so doing, was meant to help us develop as scholars of Endō’s literary art. Although space precludes a lengthy narrative of Van’s many kindnesses, I offer here just a few more examples of his generous spirit, examples that illustrate why we both feel such deep gratitude toward him.

In a recent conversation reminiscing on how these projects evolved, Darren mentioned he had actually come to *Silence* through Betsy’s recommendation, after having read Van’s translation of *Deep River*. He then commented, “Van came into my life earlier than *Silence*. So Van is like the pilot fish, here announcing that something is coming. And he was right; something was coming!” As I described above, Darren wrote to Van out of the blue and recalls his genuine enthusiasm for moving forward with the *Silence* anthology. In reflecting on this sequence of events, Darren compared the spirit of Van’s warm response to the similarly kind response Darren had received when he wrote to invite Martin Scorsese to submit an essay reflecting on his filmic adaptation of *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Darren recounted all manner of conversations with Van, many via email, and in them he reiterates my comments about Van’s being unusually generous with his time and energy, describing him as “very humble and funny, exceedingly sharp.” And as we indicate in the dedication, Van has served as a mentor to us both, albeit in slightly

different ways. In our recent conversation, we both compared him to the wonderful mentors we had in our graduate school careers. For Darren, that mentor is Peter Bien, now emeritus professor of comparative literature at Dartmouth College who, like Van, completed his doctoral work at Columbia University, in Peter's case in the Comparative Literature program. Darren told me, "Peter and Van are the scholarly equivalent of spiritual masters because they have that rare gift of mentorship without assuming this position of superiority and telling me how it needs to be, or how I need to think. They kind of encouraged, in particular, the theological readings that I've tried to do [of Kazantzakis, Greene, and Endō]."

Van has also served as a mentor to me, although I lack the training to engage in the sorts of nuanced theological conversations he and Darren have shared over Endō's work, including interpretations of the Book of Job, which was central to Van's chapter in the *Deep River* anthology. But Van and I have both lived for extended periods in Japan and share a deep respect for the Japanese people and their rich cultural traditions, to which our careers are closely linked. It is a land that has brought us not only Endō's wonderful literary art but also the Zen tradition and its austere yet sublime temples where I trained in meditation, and even the culinary delights, like the yakisoba noodles we ate when we came together in Seattle as friends from distant places. The way Van has treated me reminds me very much of Charles Hallisey, my own graduate school advisor, who is brilliant, kind, and spared no effort to help me and my fellow graduate students succeed.

Darren also turned to Van for help with his chapter in *Navigating Deep River* because he was exploring how Endō's reading of John Hick, a theologian and philosopher of religion, may have influenced the novel's ecumenical spirit. Knowing Van had access to an online listing of the collection of books housed in Endō's library at the time of his death, Darren asked Van if he could send along the names of all the theologians Endō had been reading in the years leading up to his death. Van gathered the information and offered useful suggestions on how to work with it, going back and forth with Darren on how he might separate Endō's own theological ideas from those he may have borrowed from Hick and from the other theologians appearing on the

list. Darren recalled, “Van was instructive and selfless; I said, ‘Let me give you credit for certain elements [in my chapter].’” Van replied, “You don’t need to do that; it’s your work. I’m just happy to help.” Darren concluded from this and other similar interactions, “He’s a wonderfully generous individual.”

Later, Darren and I co-wrote a chapter titled “The Global Afterlives of *Silence*” that will appear in *Scorsese and Religion*, which will be published by Brill in late 2019. Darren focused on the English-language reviews of Scorsese’s film while my charge was to examine the response of Japanese critics. As Darren had done with *Deep River*, I wrote to Van and asked if he could send me relevant materials since he had served as a script consultant on the film and had ready access to Scorsese’s team. He forwarded my request to one of the filmmaker’s assistants and was able to quickly assemble and send along a massive trove of invaluable Japanese-language materials, illustrating again his kindness and desire to promote our success. Darren and I could, if space permitted, add many other such examples of Van’s selflessness and generous spirit.

Based on these experiences with Van, we are not surprised that he has been entrusted with several high-level leadership positions in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints nor that he recently received such a high honor from the Japanese government (Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon) for his substantial contributions to Endō studies and to Japanese literature and for his unflagging promotion of greater understanding in the English-speaking world of Japanese culture. Even so, while we are deeply grateful for his generous help and respect these prestigious titles and awards, we have taken to calling him, with *abiding affection*, “Van the Man.” And so it is always a joy when he appears in our world, even if via the flat medium of email. But this joy is especially great when we have had the chance to meet with Van in person.

VI. WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

As I turn now to reflect upon the broader significance of these projects, I begin by placing our work in the context of a rapidly

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shifting landscape in American higher education, where this sort of scholarship is being devalued in an emerging “corporate model.” Before the TCU Religion Department’s planning retreat in August 2018, Sage Elwell, our incoming chair, asked Darren, our colleagues, and me to read Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber’s *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* mentioned above. The book, which resonated with me, makes an impassioned plea for us, as academics, to resist this corporate model, or “corporate university,” which seems to be taking over higher education (according to a spate of recent articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other sources). For instance, in “Holding On to What Makes Us Human: Defending the Humanities in a Skills-obsessed University,” L. D. Burnett considers the effects of this shift “as it relates to the fate and future of the university as an institution or even as an idea. Policy makers and the public view the purpose of college as purely vocational, and see humanistic inquiry—the study of literature, the arts, history, anthropology, philosophy—as a waste of time and money.”

Berg and Seeber, Burnett, and others paint a depressing picture wherein academics work in institutions where they find themselves harried by a snowballing administrative work load, and, for the rapidly increasing number of Ph.D.s whose employment is insecure, oftentimes demeaning treatment and unconscionably low pay. These articles describe joyless environments where our scholarly work seems to be becoming increasingly ancillary to the core mission of institutions of higher education. They argue that these trends, which seem particularly acute in the Humanities, have increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and isolation among faculty, seeming to replicate similar tendencies among our students.

Berg and Seeber argue, moreover, that this shift has also brought with it many things that we, as academics, find incompatible with serious critical inquiry: for instance, the privileging of speed and quantity over considered reflection and quality, and the reductionist binaries of assessment and an extolling of quantification that are part of the business world whence the model derives its key tenets. The “time is money” metaphor animates this push in higher education, and it seems relentless and unforgiving. *The Slow Professor* puts

forth a call for us to resist these attacks by fundamentally rethinking how we present and defend the value of the sort of work I have described here. And in this extended quotation, Burnett makes an ardent appeal on how to do so:

We must not concede to the actuarial ethos of the corporatized university that reduces all discussions of value to questions of profit and loss. Economic arguments for the value of a humanistic education will not save the humanities, and we should stop making them. The value of the humanities as the heart of a university education does not lie primarily in “transferrable skills” nor in the “critical thinking” that employers presumably want. Instead, a core education in the humanities gives students the intellectual space to grapple with questions of enduring importance. The value of knowing how humankind has tackled those questions and taking part in that endeavor can never be measured in dollars and cents alone. . . . We must insist on the importance of sustaining other values besides the purely pecuniary. That is the ground upon which we must stand to defend the place of the humanities in higher education, to defend the opportunity for our students to grapple with ideas and questions of enduring value. If that ground at the very heart of the university is lost, whatever still remains will hardly be worth keeping, whether or not we ourselves are by some miracle still standing.

This assault on the Humanities offers an opportunity here to engage in the process they describe by focusing on the broader significance of our work as part of the autoethnographic process. To this end, I return to the chapter Darren and I wrote on Scorsese’s film in which we quote Katō Muneya, a Japanese writer who maintained a close teacher-student relationship with Endō for some thirty years. In an interview about his impressions of the film, Katō recalls that Endō, his teacher and mentor, had been fascinated by the “workings” of the divine in people’s lives, stating: “Endō would say repeatedly it is not God’s existence but, rather, his workings, and so, rather than being concerned with God’s existence or non-existence, he focused

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on the ways in which God would appear through people's lives. I think that this was brought out splendidly in the film."

Here, we can use this term "workings"—which Buddhists would describe as the causal chain of interdependence—to consider the broader significance of our Endō scholarship that can be traced back not to a divine source but to the novelist's wonderfully creative mind. Naturally, he could not have imagined how the interpretive horizon of his literary art would unfold as he struggled with illness at the end of his life that we, looking back some two decades later, can see more clearly. Van's many translations, a substantial body of scholarly literature in Japanese and English dedicated to his literary art, including *Approaching Silence* and *Navigating Deep River*, but also the novels' other modes of existence that have become important parts of their robust "afterlives"—including Steven Dietz's play and Martin Scorsese's film—are all part of this expanding horizon. But these "workings" also offer helpful material for resisting these attacks, especially in light of Burnett's comment about grappling "with ideas and questions of enduring value," which are tied closely to the relationship between *literature* and *belief*.

In a panel on the TCU campus devoted to the varieties of Christian contemplative practices, Darren spoke about the contemplative practices he uses to lead him to a deeper understanding of his faith in Christ. He talked about how regular trips to Kentucky for a one-week silent retreat at Thomas Merton's Abbey of Gethsemani enable him to contemplate more deeply his spiritual life. He also described opening up the Bible and reading the passage that appeared before him, and then trying to visualize immersing himself into that Biblical scene. But he also spoke eloquently about the power of *Silence*, *Deep River*, and other religious literature to lead engaged and reflective readers to deeper levels of spiritual reflection and understanding, an observation he reiterated in our recent conversation about working with Van on the two anthologies.

As an example of the power of religious literature, he told me that he would characterize *Silence* as a sort of "Fifth Gospel" because "it's led to a real kind of crystalizing, or focalizing, of what I consider the essence of the Christian story to be." In so doing, he

recognized the many useful ways of entering into and contemplating the Christian story, including through pondering the theological works of the kind Endō was reading. Even so, he argues that Christians, each of whom is a theologian to varying degrees, should read religious novels like *Silence* for their profound revelatory effects because:

the flesh and blood description of the Christian story is concretized or instantiated in a character. [If we consider] the whole ethics of reading, you give yourself over and you surrender to this world that is created for you by the novelist. You roam around [in that world] if the novelist is talented enough to pull you into it; you roam around it and observe the characters and almost feel yourself befriending those characters, and seeing things through their eyes and maybe seeing things through the eyes of other characters as well. But you come back to yourself at the end of the novel, maybe invigorated, certainly, if it's a good piece of fiction, which I think *Silence* is obviously. You return with a kind of enlarged or broadened sympathy or empathy, and certainly a heightened consideration of the lives others lead. I don't know any other more simple and yet profound way of describing the Christian story apart from than to say that it is about enlarged sympathy and heightened consideration of other people, and if that's not one definition of *kenosis*, I don't what is.

Just as Darren describes here, we have, together with our wonderful collaborators, been transformed by traveling in our mind's eye with the fascinating but often troubled characters Endō has bequeathed us. That is, we have roamed around in the world created by a talented novelist. For instance, when reading *Silence*, we have imagined the agony of Fr. Rodrigues's painful decision to step upon the face of Christ—rendered in slow-motion brilliance by Scorsese—and have wondered, perhaps, if “Kichijiro is me,” as Endō famously pronounced about his servile Judas-like character. Or in *Deep River*, we have admired Ōtsu for emulating the life of his beloved Christ with childlike innocence and wonderful simplicity,

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and felt the searing pain of Kiguchi, the former Japanese soldier as he remembers the horrible deaths of comrades in the Burmese jungles and now, decades later, stands on the banks of the sacred river intoning the Pure Land sūtras to comfort their departed souls. But reading Endō has transformed us—has “worked” on us—in many other ways. As discussed at length above, we have experienced the joy of coming together as friends from afar but have also pondered, through the filters of our individual academic training, life experience, and religious affiliations, how these novels teach us about transcendence and emptying our small selves of the ego. In this way, they have helped us develop what Darren describes as “an enlarged sympathy and heightened consideration for other people,” whether we understand that process through the kenotic love of Christ, the compassionate selflessness of Buddhism, or in some other way. In our conversation, Darren framed this observation in the context of the “bookends” theme mentioned already, telling me:

This is why I think these two books are great bookends, because Van told us that *Silence* is about the silencing of Rodrigues’s ego. As difficult as it is to silence your own ego in a very ego-driven world, that’s the challenge of the Christian story and the challenge of that novel. And the challenge of *Deep River* is for the Christian story to realize it’s not the only story, it’s got to silence some of that triumphalism and it’s got to silence some of that particularism.

The “work” of these novels has thereby shaped us as individual scholars who are also converts, wanderers, and pilgrims, traveling to Japan and India, to Greece and Ghana, and to many other places beyond as embodied beings but who have also been brought together as friends from distant places by Endō’s wonderful imagination. But these novels have also “worked” their magic on our students who have likewise grappled with the sufferings of the individual characters and debated in my classes whether, for instance, Fr. Rodrigues has, by stepping upon the face of Christ, performed an “authentic” Christian act in light of William Cavanaugh’s comments about the

“paradox of the cross”: to love the poor and dispossessed, even the despicable and evil. Cavanaugh argues:

In effect, *Silence* asks if there is only one kind of martyrdom. Could one sacrifice not only one’s body, but one’s very moral integrity for the sake of others? . . . But Endō suggests that a deeper martyrdom may await Rodrigues—the death of his very self as a Christian and as a moral person. This suggests that the standard concept of heroic virtue is radically effaced by the logic of God’s kenosis, by God’s self-emptying to take the form of a slave, as Paul puts it in Philippians. In *Silence*, Endō provocatively pushes basic Christian logic, already paradoxical, to a more extreme conclusion. If it is true, as many Christian martyrs have affirmed, that for the Christian, the body is as nothing when compared to the eternity of the soul, then is the crucifixion of the soul a martyrdom which makes other martyrdoms pale in comparison? (12).

By grappling with these sorts of questions in *Silence*, my students have come away “with a kind of enlarged or broadened sympathy or empathy, and certainly a heightened consideration of the lives others lead,” to recall Darren’s words. This has also been true of the many other wonderful novels I have shared with them, including Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, Raj Mulk Anand’s *Untouchable*, Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*. The literary works of Endō and these other authors have given my students, to return to Burnett, “the intellectual space to grapple with questions of enduring importance.” Therein lies the value of this sort of work, value that cannot be reduced to a number.

VII. CONCLUSION

In our recent conversation, Darren linked the ecumenical spirit of *Deep River* to our work together with Van, wryly observing that a “Mormon teaches a Baptist who then becomes a Catholic how to read a Japanese Catholic writer.” I would naturally add this Buddhist to

Darren's wonderful description of the links in that causal chain, and also note that the Catholic and Buddhist converts have been working together as close friends for over a decade, frequently contemplating the nuances of Endō's oeuvre over the culinary wonders at the Bombay Grille, with its gulab jamun, papadum, and delicious curries.

Darren recalled a recent email exchange with Justyna Kasza, a contributor to *Navigating Deep River* who is a student of Van's former student Mark Williams, discussing a fellowship she had received that would take her to back to Japan where she would again "be in the company of Endō." Darren recalled how she stressed the significance of that phrase—"being in the company of Endō"—which reminded him of the importance Endō placed on "being in the company" of St. Teresa. Darren also recalled Justyna's excitement as she looked to the future, telling him, "For the foreseeable future, we're destined to be in the company of Endō." Darren pondered her observation and concurred, telling me: "We're really just getting started [on our Endō work]. Maybe we will next take up a volume on *The Samurai*, [one of Van's favorite Endō novels]. We're forever destined to be pilot fish!" I chimed in: "That is a fine way to swim!"

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Example of a *fumie*

The “Formality” of the *fumie*? A Reconsideration of the Role of the *fumie* Scene in *Silence*¹

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The priest raised his foot [over the *fumie*]. In it he felt a dull, heavy pain. This was no mere formality. He was about to trample on what he had considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he had believed most pure, on what was filled with the ideals and dreams of man. How his foot ached! And then at that moment, the man in bronze spoke to him. “You may trample. I, more than anyone else, know the pain in your foot. You may trample. It was to be trampled on by you all that I was born into this world. It was to share your pain that I carried my cross.”

As the priest placed his foot on the *fumie*, dawn broke. In the distance, a cock crowed.²

¹This essay is reprinted, with permission, from Mark W. Dennis and Darren J. N. Middleton, eds., *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō’s Classic Novel*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp. 43–60. The reprint reproduces the book chapter’s original method of documentation.

²Endō Shūsaku, *Chinmoku [Silence]* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1966), 219; *Silence*, trans. William Johnston (Tokyo: Sophia University and Charles E. Tuttle, 1969), 271. In citing the novel, in cases where I differ from the published English translation, I shall give page numbers from both the Japanese and English versions of the text. In all other cases, I cite directly from the English translation.

There can be few passages in the entirety of post-war Japanese literature to have excited as much critical attention—and indeed controversy—as this short narrative section that appears towards the end of Endō Shūsaku’s classic work, *Silence*. In the build-up to this scene, the protagonist, the Portuguese missionary Rodrigues, having knowingly defied the Tokugawa shogunate ban on all Christian proselytization, has endured the whole gamut of human emotions. Arriving in Japan fired with the archetypal missionary zeal of a young seminarian and determined to save as many Japanese peasants as possible in rural western Japan before his inevitable capture and presumed martyrdom, it is not long before Rodrigues finds himself betrayed to the authorities by his solitary guide and interpreter, Kichijirō. He is then confronted, broadly speaking, with the choice for which he had spent his entire adult life preparing: agree to the authorities’ demands that he apostatize by placing his foot on the crucifix (a technique that had become the standard shogunal treatment of those suspected of clinging to the proscribed faith) and thereby abandon all that his life to date had sought to espouse, or cling to his faith in the knowledge of the inevitable consequences.

The scenario may not be unique. But in Endō’s fictional world, the situation is further complicated by a series of measures that have been introduced by the wily local magistrate, Inoue, himself a former believer but now determined to eradicate the imported faith once and for all. Two, in particular, exercise a peculiar influence on the crucial *fumie* scene introduced above. First, Inoue has determined that the most effective way to the missionaries’ hearts was not to bring physical pressure to bear on the priests themselves: they were, after all, well schooled in the importance of “turning the other cheek” and, in most cases, ready to martyr themselves for their faith. Instead, rather than subjecting Rodrigues to the unspeakable *anatsurushi* torture (whereby the victim is suspended upside down in a foul-smelling pit), this cruelty is inflicted, rather, on several of the Japanese converts, the so-called “Kirishitan,” all of whom have long since renounced any ties to the faith, but whose destiny is linked, overtly and deliberately, to Rodrigues’s response. At no time, therefore, is Rodrigues subjected to any of the physical torture for which

he has sought so hard to prepare; rather, he is confronted by the psychological torture of knowing that the groaning outside his cell, which he mistakes for the snoring of callous guards, can only be stopped by his agreeing to perform the hitherto unconscionable act of placing his foot on the *fumie*. The second measure introduced by Inoue to add to the dramatic tension of the moment is his insistence that the entire scenario is a “mere formality” (*honno katachi dake no koto*).³ Inoue is insistent that there is no imperative for Rodrigues to genuinely renounce his convictions: he simply has to “go through the motions of trampling [on the *fumie*].”⁴

As noted, the passage above has stimulated a variety of responses—and opinion remains divided. All too frequent in this discussion, however, has been an overwhelming tendency to discuss this scene as marking the “climax” of the novel. The implications of such a reading are profound, since it suggests that, in ultimately succumbing to the pressure to place his foot on the *fumie*, Rodrigues is destined to follow the route already travelled by his erstwhile mentor, Ferreira, who, confronted by the *fumie*, had succumbed under similar duress and had gone on to settle down with a Japanese home and a wife provided to him by the authorities and to cooperate with them in the shogunate’s attempts to eradicate any further intrusion of the “Western” religion into Japan. Indeed, a cursory glance at much of the initial criticism of the novel—or a viewing of the movie version by Shinoda Masahiro (1971), which does indeed accentuate the psychological drama of the *fumie* scene and concludes with Rodrigues seemingly resigned to a similar future—is likely to leave the reader with the distinct impression of such “closure.”

Significantly, however, the novel does not end at this point and, in later years, Endō himself was at pains to highlight the significance he attributed to the concluding section(s) of the novel, those that follow the *fumie* scene.⁵ Of particular concern to the author was the [Shinoda] movie version, hence his concerted attempts,

³Endō, *Silence*, 271.

⁴Endō, *Chinmoku*, 219; Endō, *Silence*, 271.

⁵Personal discussion with the author in the early 1990s.

even as his health failed him in the early 1990s, to persuade Martin Scorsese to make a new movie version of the novel.⁶ To that end, the discussion that follows will attempt to place the *fumie* scene in its context within Endō's narrative, and to offer a close reading of the conclusion of the novel in an attempt to underscore its significance. In so doing, a sharp distinction will be drawn between the ultimate destinies of Rodrigues and Ferreira. At the same time, moreover, the thorny question of whether the *fumie* scene is best described as a portrayal of Rodrigues's "apostasy" or rather as his "conversion" to a more personal faith will remain as a constant refrain.

A Variety of Responses

Turning first to the varied, and often conflicting, interpretations of the *fumie* scene, these span the gamut of possible readings—from those who would describe Rodrigues's decision to trample as a simple act of apostasy, to those who consider it, rather, as a vital step on a journey of "conversion." At one end of this spectrum is the "orthodox Catholic" reading of this section, whereby the two core arguments that had been employed by Ferreira to elicit Rodrigues's cooperation ultimately prevail. In the preceding pages, Ferreira had been at pains to persuade his former pupil both that Japan was a "swamp" in which the roots of Christianity are destined to "grow yellow and wither,"⁷ and that God had maintained His silence, even in the face of the torture and martyrdom of so many believers. With this reading, the *fumie* scene merely marks Rodrigues's final acknowledgement of the inevitable.

The logic here is clear: to such critics, Rodrigues, like his mentor Ferreira, was guilty of self-delusion in believing that he had something to offer Japan whereas, in reality, his faith had never been firm enough to resist such severe provocation: faced with the horrible reality of the *fumie*, he finally shows his true colors. The argument is close to that

⁶Endō mentioned this possibility several times in the 1990s. Scorsese started work on this venture in early 2014. For testimony to the personal commitment Scorsese has invested in this task, see his "Foreword" in the latest English edition of the novel (London: Peter Owen Modern Classics, 2007).

⁷Endō, *Silence*, 237.

advanced by the Bishop of Nagasaki who, in a sermon in 1971, urged the faithful not to read Endō's latest novel.⁸ A similar argument was articulated by the critic, Francis Mathy, who argued:

In *Chinmoku*, too, the Christians are presented as something less than true Christians—even the martyrs—while the defecting priest is from the first weak in his faith and easily moved to apostasy. Japanese critics reviewing the novel have pointed out that Roderigo [*sic*] is more Oriental than Western.⁹

For those in this camp, Rodrigues's action would have led to his immediate excommunication from the Catholic Church—and this certainly appears to represent a concern that preys on the mind of the protagonist portrayed in the immediate aftermath of the *fumie* incident. Here, however, it is important to note that the rumors of excommunication that reach his ears are sown only by the Dutch traders (who historically had exclusive access to the port of Dejima in Nagasaki at the time), who serve, very specifically, as symbols of the rival Protestant tradition. With Rodrigues uncertain as to how much of his action has been reported to the Catholic authorities back in Europe and in what guise those reports had been couched, these doubts augment the protagonist's sense of having sinned in the eyes of the establishment. He thus accepts that he is no longer in a state of grace, hence the portrayal of the protagonist, struggling to the end of his days with doubt, confusion, and uncertainty.¹⁰

A second reading of this scene places greater emphasis on the words offered by the emaciated figure on the *fumie*.¹¹ Here, the

⁸Confirmed in discussion with Katō Muneya on September 21, 2013.

⁹Francis Mathy, "Endō Shūsaku: *White Man, Yellow Man*," *Comparative Literature* 19:1 (1967): 73.

¹⁰I should like to thank Kevin Doak for help with these and the various insights concerning Catholic theology that follow.

¹¹For more on these alternative readings, see Kasai Akifu, "*Chinmoku* o dō yomu ka? Rodorigo no efumi-bamen to 'Kirishitan yashiki yakunin nikki'" (A Reinterpretation of *Silence*, pertaining to the *fumie* Scene and the "Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence"), in *Endō Shūsaku kenkyū* 5 (2012).

psychological tension that had been building within Rodrigues ever since his betrayal to the authorities by his guide Kichijirō reaches a crescendo, and the words sanctioning him to “trample” do indeed register with Rodrigues, inspiring him to proceed as all the onlookers would have it. In short, it is at this moment that God breaks the silence that had so troubled Rodrigues, enabling the latter to convince himself that he is indeed acting in accordance with God’s will. Typical of such a reading is that of the Catholic critic, Kasuya Kōichi, who argues:

Rodrigues heard God’s words encouraging him to trample and obeyed. . . . The decisive moment in the novel is when God breaks His silence and it is significant that He calls on Rodrigues to trample on the *fumie*. . . . When God speaks about the most precious of things, He maintains His silence. To me, the most disappointing aspect of the novel is that God breaks His silence.¹²

A similar reading is offered by the Protestant critic, Sako Jun’ichirō, who suggests:

If I may be allowed to express my personal wish based on my spiritual realism, I would rather that Jesus had not urged [Rodrigues] to trample—but that Endō had had Rodrigues trample on the *fumie* in spite of his inner anguish. . . . In short, I wish God had not broken His silence in the portrayal of Rodrigues trampling on His face. I would rather have had those words of God thrown at Rodrigues as he endured “the pain in his foot.”¹³

It is probably fair to say that this interpretation is the most prevalent. A third, alternative perspective is offered, however, by critics such as Ōzato Kyōsaburō, who offers the following suggestion:

¹²Kasuya Kōichi, “*Chinmoku ni tsuite*” (Concerning the Novel, *Silence*), in *Seiki* 18:7 (1966): 7.

¹³Sako Jun’ichirō, “*Chinmoku ni tsuite*” (Concerning the Novel, *Silence*), in *Seiki* 18:9 (1966): 78.

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Of course, the voice of the bronze Jesus represents an auditory illusion on the part of Rodrigues. But there is no doubt that it is on the basis of this that he abandons his faith and Endō supports his [subsequent] action.¹⁴

A reading of this scene as Rodrigues responding to some kind of auditory hallucination is certainly compelling given the circumstances in which the protagonist finds himself. Alone in a cell and disturbed only by the groaning of the peasants suffering on his behalf, Rodrigues has long been crying out for guidance: he has been desperate for some words of encouragement in his time of greatest need. At the same time, confronted by the all-too-human desire to capitulate and thereby end both the psychological anguish that he is enduring and the physical agony being experienced by those whose destiny lies entirely in his hands, all he requires now is some form of justification for proceeding in the direction in which he feels himself being inexorably led. He is, in short, desperate for some kind of suggestion of divine sanction for his pending action—and, according to this reading, this is introduced into the narrative at the most logical moment.

There remains, however, a fourth reading of this passage, one advanced by the critic Kasai Akifu. According to this interpretation, Rodrigues responds less to the words of encouragement offered by the figure on the *fumie*, and more to that which he reads into the facial expression with which he finds himself confronted. Schooled during his Western seminary education to worship the paternalistic face of Old Testament authority, Rodrigues has found himself troubled, ever since his arrival in Japan, by the “ugly face of Christ, crowned with thorns and the thin, outstretched arms.”¹⁵ Thereafter, as he finds himself “star[ing] intently at the man in the center of the *fumie*, worn down and hollow with the constant trampling,”¹⁶ Rodrigues is overwhelmed by the image, one that was to become a mainstay of

¹⁴Cited in Kasai, “Chinmoku o dō yomu ka?,” 89.

¹⁵Endō, *Silence*, 270.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 271.

Endō's subsequent *oeuvre*, of Christ as the *dōhansha*, the constant companion figure who shares the pain and suffering of His creations—and who “speaks” by coming alongside them in their hour of need. It is this that leads Kasai to conclude that “Rodrigues *felt as though it were the face* of the ‘bronze man’ who uttered the words, ‘You may trample.’”¹⁷

Such an interpretation of this passage would seem to be supported by subsequent comments made by the author. In a 1973 discussion with the critic Miyoshi Yukio, for example, Endō acknowledged:

What [Rodrigues] confronted on the *fumie* was the exhausted and emaciated face of Jesus. And *the face said to him*, “Since this is how I am, there is no problem in your trampling on me.”¹⁸

Of greater significance than any authorial pronouncements, however, is the text itself—and, in this regard, it is interesting to note that, in the concluding sections of the narrative (that is, those following the “climactic” *fumie* scene), there are two subsequent passages in which the narrative returns to focus on Rodrigues overtly reflecting on the “sad face” he recalls from the *fumie*. The first of these occurs about a year after the *fumie* incident—with Rodrigues released from his cell but living under house arrest in the Sotouramachi district of Nagasaki. With little to occupy his time but “to lean against the window and watch the people going to and fro,”¹⁹ Rodrigues’s mind is inevitably drawn back to the incident that had shaped his destiny so dramatically. However, what Rodrigues recalls is “the concave face on the *fumie* that had looked up at the priest in sorrow. In sorrow, it had gazed up at him as the eyes spoke appealingly. ‘You may trample. You may trample. It is to be trampled upon by you that I am here.’”²⁰ Significantly, the passage here focuses on the face—and in particular on the eyes—of the figure on the *fumie*

¹⁷Kasai, “*Chinmoku o dō yomu ka?*,” 89; emphasis in original.

¹⁸Cited in *ibid.*, 91; emphasis in original.

¹⁹Endō, *Silence*, 273–4.

²⁰Endō, *Chinmoku*, 224; Endō, *Silence*, 276.

pleading with Rodrigues: there is no recollection by the protagonist of his having been prompted by any audible stimulus.

The second narrative section in which Rodrigues recalls the *fumie* scene occurs some five years after the event, as he finds himself revisited by Kichijirō, his fickle translator and guide. Despite numerous occasions on which he had found himself succumbing to the authorities' demands, elicited by his suspicious behavior, that he defile the *fumie*, he finds himself returning to the protagonist's living quarters in search of absolution. At this stage, Rodrigues has just been informed by Inoue that he should assume the name of a recently deceased Japanese man, Okada San'emon, marry this man's widow, and establish himself in a residence in Kobinatachō in the shogunal capital of Edo. To the protagonist, this all represents a direct and inevitable consequence of his decision to trample on the *fumie* half a decade earlier. And as, once more, he finds himself confronted by Kichijirō, beseeching the protagonist to hear his confession, Rodrigues finds himself again recalling that "face":

Even now the face is looking at me with eyes of pity from the wooden plaque rubbed flat by many feet. "You may trample. Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on this plaque. . . . I will take upon myself some of your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason that I am here."²¹

By this stage, as Rodrigues relives the *fumie* scene yet again, the objective portrayal of the "dull, heavy pain"²² he had experienced at the time has been replaced by a "tremendous onrush of joy."²³ The dramatic tension may have disappeared, and his "resentment"²⁴ at the perceived silence of God in the face of the suffering of His creations has been assuaged. In their stead has emerged a more self-critical approach, one that leads him to question whether his self-justification

²¹Endō, *Chinmoku*, 240; Endō, *Silence*, 297.

²²Endō, *Silence*, 271.

²³Ibid., 297.

²⁴Ibid.

of his decision to trample on the *fumie* as an act of “love” was merely an “excuse to justify [his] own weakness.”²⁵ At the same time, Rodrigues comes to acknowledge that he cannot—and must not—conceal his weakness and cowardice. As a priest, he had been obliged to hide his weaknesses from the world; here, for the first time, he confronts himself as a weakling, possessed of cowardice, fear, and other negative attributes. On the one hand, therefore, his feelings for Ferreira have changed very little: despite the fact that they now meet on a regular basis in the service of the Nagasaki authorities, his feelings of contempt for his erstwhile mentor remain unattenuated. His understanding of these raw emotions has, however, evolved considerably—as he comes to acknowledge that these feelings were derived, not from resentment that this man “had led him to his fall . . . but because in Ferreira he could find his own deep wound just as it was.”²⁶ The two have indeed emerged, certainly in the eyes of the world, as “two inseparable twins.”²⁷

There exists, however, a rhetorical level to the text in this section, one that highlights the transformation, to which so many critics have alluded, of the stern, “paternal” face that had represented the focus of Rodrigues’s earlier faith to the more compassionate, “maternal” form that Endō subsequently embodied in his trope of the constant companion, *dōhansha*.²⁸ At the same time as seeking to analyze his continued feelings of contempt and hatred for Ferreira, for example, Rodrigues now finds himself openly questioning “if there is any difference between Kichijirō and [him]self.”²⁹ Similarly, as he finds himself once more confronted by his nemesis, Inoue, he is able to bring himself to admit that he had been fighting, not the “mudswamp” of Japan, as Inoue would have it, but his

²⁵Ibid., 275.

²⁶Ibid., 278.

²⁷Ibid., 279.

²⁸For a full discussion of this transition, see Etō Jun, “Seijuku to sōshitsu: ‘haha’ no hōkai” [Maturity and Loss: The Collapse of “the Mother”], *Gendai no bungaku* [Modern Literature], 27, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972).

²⁹Endō, *Silence*, 275–6.

own faith: as he confesses, “my struggle was with Christianity in my own heart.”³⁰

The evolution is, of necessity, portrayed as a gradual process of self-awakening, one that is marked at the textual level by a subtle shift in the focus of the protagonist’s persistent calls: he no longer cries out to “God,” but to the being he comes to address as “my Lord.” Such textual markings are important. Without them, Rodrigues’s claim, as he mulls over Inoue’s proposal for his future—that “my faith in you is different from what it was; but I love you still”³¹—would remain unconvincing. Moreover, the narrative assertion, following his decision, taken in spite of his own “fallen” status in the eyes of the church, to administer the sacrament of confession to Kichijirō—that “everything that had taken place until now had been necessary to bring him to this love”³²—would appear unsubstantiated. As it is, however, in the short narrative section that follows the *fumie* scene—a section that admittedly encompasses more than five years of personal development—Rodrigues has been transformed and now finds himself possessed, as Dennis Washburn asserts, of “a more self-reflective, critical consciousness that permits a new understanding of the nature of his faith.”³³

According to this logic, the *fumie* scene can be seen as representing a theological triumph for Rodrigues, as he emerges from his experience armed with a more personal relationship with the human figure he had encountered on the cross, one that is foundational—and separable—from the institution of the Catholic church. At seminary, Rodrigues would have been schooled in the belief that the church constituted Christ’s mystical body; at the same time, he would have been reminded that there can only be one interpretation

³⁰Ibid., 292.

³¹Ibid., 295.

³²Ibid., 298.

³³Dennis Washburn, “The Poetics of Conversion and the Problem of Translation in Endō Shūsaku’s *Silence*,” in Dennis Washburn & Kevin Reinhart, eds. *Converting Cultures: Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 346.

of any form that claims to be Christ (which would include the figure on the *fumie*) while at the same time contradicting Him, and thus the church: such a form can only be Satan, taking on the appearance of Christ for the purpose of leading the individual away from Christ and His body, the church.

The question that emerges from this is whether this “Satan” succeeds in achieving this separation of Rodrigues from Christ when he suggests that Christ can be separated from the church. And it is here that a more nuanced reading of the remainder of Endō’s text is so crucial. Most immediate in this regard is the conclusion to the *fumie* scene itself—which, following the depiction of Rodrigues placing his foot on the *fumie*, ends with the following narrative depiction: “dawn broke. In the distance, a cock crowed.”³⁴ The allusion to the gospel accounts of Peter’s being confronted with the reality of his having denied Christ three times is overt.³⁵ And this, in turn, militates against any reading of this scene as simply portraying Rodrigues at his moment of theological triumph. The decision to trample on the *fumie* may indeed represent a moment of insight, as the protagonist establishes a more mature and personal relationship with Christ, freed from the constraints of the institutional church. But then comes the reality check—in which Rodrigues is brought face-to-face with the implications of his act. With this seemingly innocuous aside, therefore, the narrative signals that the protagonist’s decision to defile the *fumie* will somehow not be the end of the matter. At the same time, as Washburn notes, it is this depiction that shifts the narrative focus on to the image of Rodrigues as a fusion of “betrayal and betrayed, apostate and convert.”³⁶ Seen thus, it serves a crucial role in presaging the ensuing text in which the simplistic portrayal of Rodrigues consigned to the shadows as an apostate priest is steadily undermined.

³⁴Endō, *Chinmoku*, 219; Endō, *Silence*, 271.

³⁵As Endō noted, however, this reference was lost on the vast majority of his Japanese readership, cf. Endō, *Chinmoku no koe* [The Voice of Silence] (Tokyo: Purejidento-sha, 1992).

³⁶Washburn, “The Poetics of Conversion,” 350.

“The Diary”

Regardless of how one reads the *fumie* scene, the image with which we are left at the conclusion of the narrative section of the novel is of Rodrigues, having administered the sacrament of confession to Kichijirō, clinging desperately to his conviction that he “remains the last priest in the land.” Fully aware that his “fellow priests would condemn his act as sacrilege,” he is nevertheless possessed of a conviction that his “life until this day would have spoken of [our Lord].”³⁷ However, as the author himself was at pains to stress—particularly following the appearance of the [Shinoda] movie version of that dramatic scene, which leaves Rodrigues at the end aggressively seeking to consummate his relationship with his recently acquired wife—the novel does not end at this point. There follows a concluding section—“The Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence”—which, for all its literary awkwardness,³⁸ nevertheless serves an essential hermeneutic function.

In his “Atogaki” (Postscript) to the novel, Endō acknowledged the non-fictional provenance of the “Diary.” It is, he indicates, “extracted and adapted,” from the *Sayō Yoroku* (Miscellanies on the Search for Evil Religions) section included in the *Zoku-zoku gunsho ruijū* (Additional Collection of [Kirishitan] Documents).³⁹ And, by way of further explanation, he notes, in a reflective piece following publication of the novel, that this original diary, the *Yoroku*, was penned by one of the clerks at the Christian residence in Edo as a report on the movements of the foreign priests and others with strong earlier connections to the proscribed religion who were confined

³⁷Endō, *Silence*, 298.

³⁸Endō himself acknowledged some of these problems in his *Chinmoku no koe*, p.88. *Inter alia*, Endō suggested that he “should have translated the ‘Diary’ into modern Japanese,” that the narrative “lacks passion” (*minetsu*) and that the various characters “fail to come alive” (*ikite inai*). Also, significantly, as noted by Van Gessel, it is important to note that there is no indication in the Japanese original that the author intended this “Diary” as an “Appendix” to the novel: in the original, it is presented simply as a final chapter.

³⁹This appears in the hardback edition (1998) of the novel, p. 256.

there under close surveillance. And of greatest relevance to the current discussion are the sections dealing with the historical figure of Giuseppe Chiara (1610–85), Endō's acknowledged model for Rodrigues. According to the author, his sole contribution was to “transpose the original *kanbuntai* (Chinese style text) into classical Japanese.”⁴⁰

Comparison between the original *Yoroku* version and Endō's fictional “Diary” section makes for interesting reading.⁴¹ Indeed, consideration of those sections that Endō has chosen to transcribe verbatim from the *Yoroku* and those areas where he has opted to amend the original material provide invaluable insights, not merely into the narrative provenance of the “Diary,” but also, more significantly for the purposes of this discussion, into the nature of the protagonist's faith in the aftermath of his decision to trample on the *fumie*.

Both works begin their biographical account of the protagonist's movements in the year Kanbun 12 (1672), more than a quarter of a century after Rodrigues—now renamed Okamoto San'emon in *Yoroku*, Okada San'emon in the “Diary”—had been brought up to Edo (in 1646). And both accounts paint a similar picture of San'emon living in the Christian residence with his wife and maid-servant. From the outset, the portrait is of the protagonist's living, despite the restrictions on his movements, in relatively relaxed circumstances: he has been “granted the ration of ten persons” and is reunited with Bokui, Juan, Nanho, and Jikan, described in the *Yoroku* as four of Chiara's original traveling companions from Europe who had been arrested almost immediately on arrival in Japan

⁴⁰Cited in Kasai, “*Chinmoku o dō yomu ka?*,” 98. At this point, I should like to refer the reader to Gessel, note 10. It is clearly imperative to avoid the pitfalls of searching for “authorial intent.” But, as with Gessel, I too believe that the author's voice should also be included as an integral part of the hermeneutic process.

⁴¹Here too I wish to acknowledge the interpretative work conducted by Kasai in this regard; cf. Kasai, “*Chinmoku o dō yomu ka?*”

and apostatized in the face of Inoue's cruel torture, but here introduced into Endō's narrative for the first time.⁴²

For all Endō's faithfulness to the original historical record, however, there are at least three areas in which the *Yoroku* and the "Diary" versions differ significantly, with all these amendments serving to augment the sense of the protagonist, San'emon, having arrived at a "new understanding of the nature of his faith." The first of these concerns the nature of the writings with which Chiara/San'emon is frequently described as being engaged. In both cases, the protagonist is portrayed as penning a "*shūmon no shomotsu*" ("book/document on religion"), a depiction that has inspired considerable discussion in Japan as to the nature of the document concerned.⁴³ To some, including Kasai, the issue appears clear: given that San'emon is portrayed as writing this document "at the command of Tōtōminokami,"⁴⁴ the shogunal official with overall responsibility for the Christian residence, such critics see this as a formal document, a pledge of apostasy disavowing all connection with the protagonist's former faith—but with the clear implication that, even now, more than 25 years after his initial encounter with the *fumie*, San'emon continues to waver.

⁴²Endō, *Silence*, 299.

⁴³Cf., for example, Arase Yasunari, "Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* ni okeru Rodorigo no saigo no shinkō: 'Kirishitan yashiki yakunin nikki' ni egakareta sakusha no bungakuteki ito" (The Faith of Rodrigues at the End of Endō Shūsaku's Novel, *Silence: The Author's Literary Intent as Portrayed in the "Diary of the Official at the Christian Residence"*), in *Hanshin kindai bungaku kenkyū* 3 (July, 2000); Ikeda Jun'itsu, "Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* no kenkyū: 'Kirishitan yashiki yakunin nikki'—'Kyo' to 'jitsu' to no aida" (A Study of Endō Shūsaku's *Silence: Between "Fiction" and "Reality" in "The Diary of the Christian Residence"*), *Jōchi-daigaku kokubungaku ronshū* 26 (January, 1993); Kasai, "*Chinmoku* o dō yomu ka?"; Miyao Toshihiko, "*Chinmoku* oboegaki: 'Kirishitan yashiki yakunin nikki' to Sayō Yoroku" (Thoughts on the Novel, *Silence: "The Diary of the Christian Residence" and Miscellanies on the Search for Evil Religions*), in *Nagano-ken tanki-daigaku kiyō* 36 (December, 1981).

⁴⁴Endō, *Silence*, 300.

To others, however, such an interpretation remains anathema. Why, they argue, would an act that should, in theory, comprise affixing a simple signature to a formal document take so long to complete and, more significantly, how are we to account for the repeated references to San'emon writing such a document over an extended period?⁴⁵ To critics such as Miyao Toshihiko, there is no way that “it could take 81 days (*sic*) to write a pledge of apostasy”; the work on which San'emon was engaged was, rather, he suggests, a “report on Christianity,” including an unequivocal denunciation of the core tenets of his erstwhile faith, along the lines of the *Kengiroku*, the anti-Christian tract written by Sawano Chūan, the post-apostasy name granted to Ferreira.⁴⁶

The distinction is subtle, but crucial. Endō would certainly have been aware that the *shūmon no shomotsu*, as portrayed in the *Yoroku*, represented a generic reference to a report that could be demanded of anyone about whom the authorities retained concerns of a religious nature, in which the signatory was expected to create a full and incontrovertible denunciation of his or her faith. At the same time, moreover, as an author renowned for the meticulous research that underpinned his historical novels, he would surely have been aware of the entry given for “Chiara” in the standard historical reference work, *Nihon kirisutokyō rekishi daijiten* (Historical Dictionary of Christianity in Japan), which includes the following detail:

The *Kirishito-ki* and *Sayō Yoroku*, two documents written by the Inspectorate of Religious Conversion, contain many sayings by

⁴⁵In the “Diary,” all three references to San'emon working on such a document occur in the second year of Enpō (1674): the first occasion takes place between January 20 and February 8, the second during February, and the third between June 14 and July 24th. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the English translation describes the second of these references as simply referring to San'emon's “writing a book,” while the other two portray him writing a “disavowal of his religion” (300).

⁴⁶Cited in Arase, “Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* ni okeru Rodorigo no saigo no shinkō,” 64.

Okamoto. These documents are now missing, but, in the second year of Enpō (1674), Okamoto wrote three books about his religion at the command of the authorities. In his *Tenshukyō Taii*, Arai Hakuseki said that these three books contain references to Christianity, but that each makes clear that he is engaged in no anti-Bakufu subversion. In short, it seems that Okamoto had not renounced his faith.⁴⁷

In the years following publication of the novel, Endō himself appeared to advocate both interpretations: on the one hand, in his short story, “Meshitsukai-tachi” (Servants, 1972), he specifically describes a *shūmon no shomotsu* as a “report on Christianity written at the command of the Bakufu.”⁴⁸ In his subsequent discussion with the critic Miyoshi Yukio, however, he was at pains to stress the significance of this document: the “*shomotsu*” was, he argued, no mere guide to Christianity, but a “*seiyakusho*” (covenant, pledge [of apostasy]).⁴⁹ More germane to the current discussion, however, is the following explanation, offered by the author in his study, *Kirishitan jidai no chishikijin: haikyō to junkyō* (Intellectuals of the *Kirishitan* Era: Apostasy and Martyrdom, 1967), penned shortly after completion of *Silence*:

In the *Shūmon-aratameyaku kiroku* (Record of Religious Conversion) by Inoue-chikugo, reference is made to a document similar to a pledge of apostasy, to which Okamoto San’emon affixed his seal . . . roughly speaking, this document denounces Christianity as a heretical religion, acknowledges that the Christian missionaries

⁴⁷*Nihon kirisutokyō rekishi daijiten* [Historical Dictionary of Christianity in Japan] (Tokyo: Kyōbunkan, 1988), 354.

⁴⁸Endō Shūsaku, “Meshitsukai-tachi” (Servants); reprinted in *Endō Shūsaku bungaku zenshū* (The Complete Works of Endō Shūsaku), 8 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000), 140.

⁴⁹Endō Shūsaku and Miyoshi Yukio, “Bungaku: Jakusha no ronri” (Literature: The Logic of the Weakling), in *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 18:2 (1973): 22.

had been spreading unfounded information and that the signatory had come to Japan fully believing in the faith.⁵⁰

The depiction of San'emon signing a formal pledge of apostasy is here explicit. As with Endō's novel, however, the story does not end here. Instead, the record ends with the following notification:

In consideration of such matters, we carried out an investigation of the *bateren* (padres) and *iruman* (brothers), and had them discuss religion on the tenth and fifteenth days of the month. I then ordered them to be tortured.⁵¹

Consideration of the timeline of events offered in the "Diary" makes for an interesting comparison. But ultimately a reading of the "Diary" that appears to be in keeping with the supporting documentation is of San'emon, having made clear his determination to revert to his erstwhile beliefs, being confronted with another document of apostasy (the *shūmon no shomotsu* of the "Diary" text), of his subsequent wavering and of the authorities' consequent decision to engage him in religious debate and to subject him to torture. And, in sharp contrast to the *Yoroku*, which makes specific mention of the fact that this shomotsu was finished and signed by the following year, the "Diary" not only emphasizes that this process is repeated on at least two further occasions, it also offers no apparent closure: the narrative

⁵⁰Endō Shūsaku, *Kirishitan jidai no chishikijin: haikyō to junkyō* [Intellectuals of the Kirishitan Era: Apostasy and Martyrdom] (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbunsha, 1967), 169. Here it is important to remember, as Arase notes, that this represents a reference to a fictional document: it was the scholar of religion, Anesaki Masaharu, who reprinted a section of the *Kirishito-ki* in his study, *Kirishitan shūmon no hakugai to senpuku* [Persecution and Secrecy in the Kirishitan Faith] (Tokyo: Dōbunsha, 1926) and "chose to call it the *Shūmon-aratameyaku kiroku* out of expediency"; cited in Arase, "Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* ni okeru Rodorigo no saigo no shinkō," 65.

⁵¹Cited in Arase, "Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* ni okeru Rodorigo no saigo no shinkō," 66.

deliberately leaves open the possibility that, even at the end, San'emon was continuing to refuse to sign such a pledge. The image is that of a torn man, continuing to waver to the end of his life—and this adds poignancy to the final portrayal of San'emon, laid to rest in a Buddhist ceremony at Muryōin temple at Koishikawa and conferred the posthumous Buddhist name of Nyūsen Jōshin-shinshi.

The second change effected by Endō on the *Yoroku* original concerns the figure of Juan, a seemingly minor player in the novel, whose only brief appearances in Endō's text occur in the "Diary" section, but who, when compared with the wavering figure who appears in the *Yoroku*, is portrayed in the "Diary" as possessed of an unshakable faith and thus serves as a useful counter to the vacillating San'emon. Apart from his initial introduction as one of Rodrigues's original traveling companions, the only other references to this figure concern his being sent to gaol, firstly on September 5 in Enpō 2 (1674) and subsequently again on December 10 in Enpō 4 (1676). On both occasions, he is described as being jailed for his "perverse" (*wagamama*) behavior—with the second edict adding that he was "a most insolent person."⁵²

The portrait is of a man of unwavering faith, one determined to cling to the orthodox tradition from start to finish. This, however, is in sharp contradiction to the Juan figure who populates the pages of the *Yoroku*—and there would appear to be two specific changes made, designed to augment the sense of constancy personified by Juan in the "Diary." The first of these relates to the decision to omit entirely any reference to events of the third year of Enpō in the "Diary," despite the fact that this section in the *Yoroku* is relatively lengthy. Significantly, the depiction here is of Juan being released from gaol and of his being paid a relatively generous monthly allowance, both of which would militate against the image of a man refusing to relent. The second change made to the *Yoroku* version in this regard relates to the timing of Juan's return to gaol. In the *Yoroku*, this occurs following the death of San'emon: the "Diary," however, has San'emon die with Juan seemingly still in prison, a

⁵²Endō, *Silence*, 304.

subtle shift which nevertheless serves to emphasize the contrast between the two men.

The other important variant between the two texts concerns the reintroduction into the drama of Kichijirō. In the *Yoroku* account, the protagonist is served in jail by his loyal attendant, Kaku. In choosing to change this in order to place renewed focus on the role of Kichijirō, Endō would appear to be shining the spotlight on the question of why San'emon is still continuing to redeclare his faith. As already noted, in the immediate aftermath of Rodrigues's initial decision to trample on the *fumie*, it had been Kichijirō who had remained at his side, albeit, for the most part, he is carefully depicted as too scared to venture out from the shadows. As Rodrigues awaits his transfer to Edo, however, it is Kichijirō who re-emerges as a thorn in the authorities' side and who, continuing to defy their proscription of all communication between the two men, turns up unexpectedly at Rodrigues's temporary residence asking for the sacrament of confession. The incident represents a crucial stage on Rodrigues's journey towards his new "critical consciousness": determining that he is "the last priest in the land,"⁵³ he finds himself inexorably drawn to the mental anguish being betrayed by Kichijirō. Confronted by the latter's haplessness, Rodrigues is reminded that his own fall from grace does not necessarily prevent him from offering the sacrament. The two men are here depicted as possessed of a faith emerging from what the theologian William Hamilton has described as the "crucible of doubt."⁵⁴

In keeping with the narrative portrayal of San'emon struggling with the issue of the nature of his faith for the rest of his life, therefore, it is entirely appropriate that it should be Kichijirō who is reintroduced into the "Christian residence" section. Not only is he thereby depicted as pathologically incapable of putting his past involvement with Christianity totally behind him; in this portrayal, moreover, Kichijirō succeeds in drawing San'emon's attention to the

⁵³Ibid., 298.

⁵⁴Cited in Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), 2.

need for a reassessment of so many of the black and white distinctions that the latter had brought with him on his initial journey to Japan. Gone, for example, is the unshakable belief in a division between “the strong,” embodied in the person of Garrpe, Rodrigues’s fellow priest, and the various Japanese converts who resolved to martyr themselves for their faith, and “the weak,” including Rodrigues and Ferreira, who had ultimately succumbed to the pressure to defile the *fumie*: as Rodrigues argues: “Can anyone say that the weak do not suffer more than the strong?”⁵⁵ Gone too is the uncompromising image of the “paternalistic” God who might have been expected to stand in judgment over Rodrigues’s act of “betrayal.” Instead, the “Diary’s” focus is as much on Kichijirō who, in choosing—or rather finding himself drawn—to remain with San’emon, not only takes over from Ferreira the mantle of the protagonist’s “inseparable twin,” but also comes to stand, in many ways, as the physical embodiment of the protagonist’s newfound image of a “maternal” God, seeking nothing else than to exist as a “constant companion” (*dōhansha*). In this way, he offers San’emon the rays of hope and optimism that enable the latter to keep debating with himself and with the authorities.

Conclusion

We have, of necessity, covered the concluding sections of Endō’s narrative in considerable detail. This is, I believe, essential, not merely to problematize a literal reading of the *fumie* scene as a simplistic portrayal of an act of apostasy, but also to transform the rather one-dimensional view of Rodrigues that a reading of the protagonist simply following in the footsteps of his former mentor, Ferreira, would engender. Until this moment in the novel, the narrative focus has remained largely on the psychological vacillating betrayed by Rodrigues: as he awaits his moment of destiny, he oscillates between times when he finds “solace and support in the thought of that other man who had also tasted fear and trembling” with a concomitant sense of “joy in the thought that he was not

⁵⁵Endō, *Silence*, 297–8.

alone”⁵⁶ and occasions when his despair threatens to overcome him. It is, however, only with the *fumie* scene that Rodrigues’s psychological torment truly comes alive—as the narrative focus shifts from objective, external depiction of the scene before the protagonist to a closer emphasis on his interior dialogue. And it is only in the sections that follow this scene that the full significance of this shift in narrative perspective is fully appreciated. As Washburn suggests, “the elements of Rodrigues’ character that made him plausibly susceptible to apostasy also establish the ground upon which his conversion becomes possible.”⁵⁷ Without the focus on Rodrigues/San’emon’s ongoing journey of spiritual transformation that follows the *fumie* scene, however, this plausibility would be brought into question.

In many ways, therefore, we are left at the end of the novel with the portrayal of San’emon dying, seemingly of old age,⁵⁸ still struggling with the same doubts that had plagued him since his arrival in Japan. On the one hand, as Kevin Doak has noted, Rodrigues’s journey following his public act of renunciation differs markedly from that pursued by Peter in the gospel accounts: unlike Peter, San’emon never comes to an acceptance of his own identity as a sinner in need of forgiveness and he seemingly betrays very little by way of contrition.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, he is now a far cry from the determined, unquestioning young man who had first set foot in Japan: he is now shown as possessed of a depth of humanity which, however flawed, nevertheless speaks to those around him. Here for the first time in Endō’s *oeuvre* is a concerted attempt to consider the “logic of

⁵⁶Ibid., 252–3.

⁵⁷Washburn, “The Poetics of Conversion,” 349.

⁵⁸Here it is interesting to note that some Japanese critics (for example, Arase, “Endō Shūsaku *Chinmoku* ni okeru Rodorigo no saigo no shinkō, 72ff.) have picked up on the fact that San’emon is described at the end as “*fujiki itasu*”; this can refer to his simply “losing his appetite” due to ill health (as the English translation has it, 306), but can equally be seen as referring to a religious act of fasting/refusing food. Clearly, this latter interpretation opens up the possibility of San’emon ultimately choosing to martyr himself.

⁵⁹Remark made in an email to myself, July 16, 2013. Doak states this point more explicitly in the present volume.

the weakling.”⁶⁰ The stage was set for a broader examination, a task that would be honed in subsequent Endō narratives, notably *Samurai* (*The Samurai*, 1980) and *Fukai kawa* (*Deep River*, 1993).

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In April 2018, Gessel was awarded this imperial decoration, Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon.

An Interview with Van C. Gessel, Literary Consultant on Martin Scorsese's Film Adaptation of *Silence*

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Darren J. N. Middleton (DJNM): Martin Scorsese first read Endō Shūsaku's novel *Silence* during a trip to Japan in 1989. He was there to appear in an Akira Kurosawa film, by all accounts, and finished the story riding the bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto. Reading about such details inspires me to inquire: when, where, and how did you first encounter the novel?

Van C. Gessel (VCG): In late 1971, I had just returned to the U.S. after two years of service in Japan as a Christian missionary. Although I had always been interested in literature, I knew nothing about Japanese fiction, so I decided to have a look at a few works that had been translated into English. I was, of course, drawn almost immediately to *Silence* when I learned that it dealt with the travails of a Catholic missionary in Japan. As I began to read, I was intrigued by the character of Father Rodrigues, and though of course my own challenges as a missionary in Japan could not be compared on any level to what he had to endure, I felt an affinity with him that carried me through the story of his trial of faith. I can remember thinking at that point (though I had still not finished my undergraduate

studies) that, if Japanese literature could produce works such as this, here was a subject I wanted to examine in greater depth.

DJNM: What inspired Endō to write *Silence*? And how would you describe its theological themes?

VCG: There are many elements that came together fortuitously to bring Endō Sensei to the writing of the novel. Having been metaphorically dressed up by his mother in a “suit of ill-fitting Western clothing” (his description) when, at her urging, he was baptized in 1935 at the age of twelve, it was inevitable that he had to grapple with the implications of professing faith in a foreign religion, particularly after Japan instigated war with the Allied nations. He was taunted by his teachers and classmates at school for placing the Christian God above the sacred Japanese emperor. And he was not comfortable with the Church’s position that serving in the Japanese military during those years did not violate the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Like many Japanese converts before him, he was disturbed by the dogmatic sectarianism he observed among the Christian denominations in Japan.

Well before the idea for *Silence* ever came to him, he had written in his 1959 novel, *Wonderful Fool*, about a gangly, horse-faced Frenchman named Gaston who comes to Japan a few years after the end of World War II. Although most of the Japanese he encounters consider him a spineless, clumsy fool, when it becomes obvious to a young Japanese man who gets to know him well that Gaston, who is cowardly and “weak by nature,” will do anything, including sacrificing his own life for those who are suffering, his foolishness begins to appear as a virtue, precisely because he will not abandon those who are sorrowful. Gaston is one of the first appearances of a Christlike “eternal companion” in Endō Sensei’s fiction.

Perhaps of greatest import in providing inspiration for *Silence* were his seemingly endless battles with poor health. He was plagued by lung problems from an early age and spent years in and out of hospitals, and

in 1961 he received the first of three perilous lung surgeries. Enduring severe pain and fearing the likelihood of premature death just as his literary career was beginning to take off, he began reading about the sufferings of the early Japanese Christians who had to endure horrific torture and death. He could easily empathize with their physical and emotional pains. The day before the third and final surgery—which removed all that remained of one diseased lung—Endō Sensei was shown a crude *fumie* drawn on paper some three hundred years previously. The image was seared into his mind and heart. After a visit in 1964 to Nagasaki, where he saw one of the bronze *fumie* images in a museum, he pondered the pain that must have been experienced by all the early Christians who had to plant their feet on the embossed face of Jesus and brought that powerful image together with the story of Father Christóvão Ferreira, the most prominent Jesuit priest to apostatize, in 1632, after torture. That became the scaffolding from which *Silence* was built.

Theological themes? For me, certainly the most compelling of the themes is the vital necessity of having a faith in God that goes far deeper than our surface acts and righteous intentions. Without a soul-deep faith, the rains and the floods and the winds of mortality that beat without ceasing on our houses can cause us to fall. A faith that is founded not solely on the ceremonies and callings of the outward Church below, but a faith that is so personal and so intense that Christ can be constantly with us, never abandoning us, even when the whole world seems to be collapsing around our heads. And equally important is Endō Sensei's determined view that the strong have no proprietary rights over that kind of faith. Perhaps they can do great works because of their strength. But who can deny the faith of one who is a weakling—like Kichijirō—and who may, in fact, be more deserving of Christ's companionship since it may well be all he has to sustain him?

DJNM: Can you tell us a bit more about Endō? You've translated numerous Endō stories, you've authored studies of his work, you've taught him for some time now, and you knew him fairly well. What's gained in learning about Endō's life?

VCG: To me, he was the strongest of the weak, the drollest of the solemn. He delighted in playing up his youthful failures, but he wrote with such powerful empathy about those too frightened to endure physical and psychological pain for their beliefs. Virtually all of his work that has been translated into English falls under the category of his “serious” works, the ones that confront the issues of faith and human frailty head-on. But he was also a humorist and a prankster; he was famed in Japan for playing elaborate jokes on both friend and stranger. And he wrote a number of humorous novels and droves of comical essays.

What I most admired about him was his all-encompassing generosity toward others; he never made distinctions between the famed and the unknown. In fact, he probably spent more time bringing playful amusement to “common” people than he did associating with the literati. I’m thinking here of the amateur theatrical troupe, Kiza, that he created solely to give regular folk with no talent to speak of a chance to perform on the stage in such plays and musicals as *West Side Story*, *A Chorus Line*, *Carmen*, and *Gone with the Wind*. In his own circumscribed, mortal way, he became a uniquely flawed Christ figure who spent his days ministering (performing) among the meek of the world, much as the maternal Christ of his best writings never left the side of the suffering.

DJNM: Endō’s novel was filmed twice before, in 1971, by Japan’s Masahiro Shinoda, and then again, in 1996, by Portugal’s João Mário Grilo.¹ Most critics know of Shinoda’s adaptation. Did Endō ever tell you what he thought about it? Do you happen to know how Scorsese felt about Shinoda’s movie? And how about you? What adjectives would you use to describe it, and why?

VCG: In 1976, Endō Sensei was invited by the Japan Society of New York to give a lecture, following which they screened Shinoda’s

¹The Portuguese film referenced here was released under the name *Os Olhos da Ásia*.

adaptation of *Silence*. He was in no sense of the word silent about his displeasure with the film. He told the audience that Shinoda had thrown out the second half of Endō's own screenplay and replaced it with material that completely distorted his intentions in writing the novel. Having seen the Shinoda film years ago, and now after being a part of the new adaptation, I have to agree completely with Endō: Shinoda's film says really nothing about faith. It's a hollow sham, and I can't help but feel that the director truly didn't "get" the novel, but rather just wanted to tell a gripping story. It is as superficial as the faith of Endō's Rodrigues is deep by the end of the book and in Mr. Scorsese's re-creation.

I am told that Mr. Scorsese goes out of his way to avoid seeing any earlier versions of works he wants to film. His vision of the material comes from his own remarkably creative mind. When I met him just three months before *Silence* was released in theatres, he told me he hadn't yet watched the Shinoda film. And he was just a bit apprehensive, since he was just a few weeks away from actually seeing Shinoda, whose other work he much admires, in Japan.

DJNM: Walk us through the steps leading up to your time as a consultant on Scorsese's *Silence*. When did you become involved? And for how long were you attached to the project?

VCG: Although I had written about the novel in several journal articles and such, and had, in fact, pointed out some serious errors of interpretation in the published English translation (others, including Professor Mark Williams, currently Vice President for International Academic Exchange at International Christian University in Tokyo, had also written on this topic), it never occurred to me that I might be contacted to act as a consultant on the film. I had known for quite some time, in fact heard from Endō himself (who was flattered that such a famed director would be interested in his novel) that Mr. Scorsese had bought the film rights. But then decades went by with nothing. I began to wonder whether the project had been abandoned.

Then in June of 2011, out of the blue, I received an email from Marianne Bower, Mr. Scorsese's researcher and archivist, inquiring whether I might be able to give them a little help with the film, since production was now moving forward. It seemed from that first email that they were interested in some information about the nature of the dialogue in the novel: Was it an attempt to recreate seventeenth century Japanese, or was it in a more easily understood modern approximation of the language of that period? I assumed that my involvement would be short-lived and limited to that exchange.

But emails shot back and forth between me and Marianne through late July of 2011, and then . . . nothing. I didn't know whether my assistance was no longer needed, or whether the project to film *Silence* had finally been abandoned for good.

The agonizing wait lasted a little over two years—and Marianne returned! She apologized that Mr. Scorsese had put *Wolf of Wall Street* on the front burner, but now he was ready to go full-steam ahead with the Endō project. From that point forward, literally hundreds of emails flew between Marianne and me, and it became evident that my input was being sought on a much wider range of issues and questions. It took a while, but eventually I got the sense that Mr. Scorsese, aware that the English translation of the novel he was using was problematic, decided that I could be a go-between to help him understand what Endō Sensei had written in the original Japanese. That, for me, was the most rewarding aspect of my participation in consulting on the film. Although my interactions with Marianne, who was relaying Mr. Scorsese's questions to me and my responses back to him, became far fewer in number once actual shooting of the film in Taiwan began, there were still some questions that I needed to respond to almost up to the time of the premiere.

DJNM: In one of the early news features on the filming process for *Silence*, Paul Elie describes the many people who put their faith in "Scorsese's act of faith." What did it take for you to put your faith in this project?

VCG: I admit that over the years from the purchase of the film rights until the time I was contacted by Marianne, I had several concerns about the approach Mr. Scorsese might take to the material. I'm sure I wasn't the only person who thought that, given the nature of some of his other well-known films, his interest in making *Silence* was primarily to show scene after scene of brutal violence. It didn't help that I read some foolish speculation somewhere that he was going to turn it into a condemnation of European colonialism.

My "conversion" to Mr. Scorsese's approach to making the film didn't happen instantaneously once Marianne contacted me. I was gradually led toward faith in the project as Marianne asked one truly insightful question after another—some of which I could tell came from her own keen sensibilities as a researcher, some from the director himself—and it dawned on me that so much of what was going into the preparations to make the film involved the big, profound questions raised by the book. And when I was sent an interim draft of the script, I became a fully devout follower of Mr. Scorsese's vision.

DJNM: What's your sense of how Scorsese researches a subject? Was there anything in his preparation(s), for example, that surprised or intrigued you?

VCG: I knew, from seeing some of his earlier work, that he was a stickler for detail. But I was still astonished at how concerned he was with getting even the smallest details right. Not just the themes, but truly picayune aspects of the story and setting. One example sticks out in my mind because it happened late in the process; in fact, I think it was the last specific question Marianne asked me. She told me that Mr. Scorsese wanted to shoot a close-up of a candle with a moth circling around it, but he needed to make sure that the original text said "moth" and not some other flying creature. I was able to confirm that it was a moth. Tragically, that fleeting moment didn't make the final cut for the film!

I was in fact quite surprised at the depth and breadth of the research that was carried out in the early stages of production. Marianne had

clearly read just about every available English-language resource on the historical period, the activities of the Jesuits in Asia, and so much else that would make the film so true to the realities of seventeenth century Japan. It's telling that every Japanese person I have talked to about the film affirms that there is not a false note in the film, nothing that would suggest that it was made by a non-Japanese. I think that's an enormous tribute to Marianne and Mr. Scorsese and also Jay Cocks, the co-author of the screenplay.

DJNM: What was the most energizing thing about working with Scorsese? And what was the most challenging?

VCG: It was exciting for me to get into conversations about the core themes of the novel. We had a number of lengthy exchanges regarding interpretation of Rodrigues's act of stepping on the *fumie*, or whether Rodrigues and Ferreira had, as Ferreira says in the book, become "the same man." Those sorts of discussions—with occasional pushback from Mr. Scorsese, and a counter-push from me—were among the most invigorating and satisfying parts of my participation in the film.

There were a few occasions when (if you'll pardon the expression) I had to put my foot down and say something like "Yes, I know that's what the English translation says. But it's not what the Japanese says!" As Mr. Scorsese and his team came to trust me more (I hope!), it became somewhat easier to have rewarding conversations.

I'd like to add that I had been well prepared to have these kinds of discussions because of the consulting work I had previously done with Steven Dietz, the extraordinary American playwright who adapted the novel for the stage. Steven and I had numerous conversations about many of the same issues that came up in the making of the film. I can't claim that I was successfully persuasive in every case, but the fact that I am completely satisfied with the film that Mr. Scorsese produced speaks volumes, I think.

DJNM: *Silence* is an atmospheric film. The minimalist soundtrack hints at a certain tragic beauty, for example, and the belligerent waves crashing onto the shore evoke human frustration in the face of God's wounding absence. Even the persistent mist reflects the foggy doubt in the minds of the Jesuit protagonists, Frs. Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Garupe (Adam Driver), as they both minister to Hidden Christians and track down Fr. Ferreira (Liam Neeson), their Kurtz-like mentor. Were you pleased with Scorsese's theo-poetics of uneasy space? Or do you think the movie's solemn geography and melancholic ambience failed to adequately convey Endō's ultimate sense of Christ as the Eternal Companion, the Fellow Sufferer who understands?

VCG: I can't think of how anything other than what you describe as "uneasy space" could have worked with this story. The assaults and obfuscations from the natural setting—the waves that swallow up Mokichi and Ichizō, the mists that envelop and sometimes even blot out exchanges between the Europeans and the Japanese peasant Christians—are, to my mind, vital to creating an unsettling atmosphere that should prepare us for the doubts and fears and temptations that seem about to drive Rodrigues to insanity.

To the question of whether the "solemn geography" doesn't allow a clear view of Christ remaining faithfully at Rodrigues's side as the priest undergoes his own kind of Passion, I can see that some viewers might be misled or perhaps even driven into a kind of weary numbness by the constant pounding of the sea and the gnawing silences. But personally, I think that the mood created by this ambience serves to heighten the drama of the moment when a very soft, loving, understanding voice speaks to Rodrigues as he is about to place his foot on the face of Christ. Yes, it takes a good deal of time to get to that climactic moment—but I think if we are to experience the kind of doubt and anguish that the priest suffers before he—and we—are given reassurance that he has not been left to suffer alone, that protracted, even sometimes monotonous evocation of setting is crucial.

DJNM: I want us to talk about the Jesuit priests, especially Garfield's character, yet I wonder if we might discuss them from an angle suggested by Jen Yamato's review in *The Daily Beast*. She notes the doubt-riven Fr. Rodrigues, for example, but she pans the way Scorsese's lens obscures the Japanese gaze:

Throughout *Silence* those silent agonies flash across Garfield's distressed baby face, which Scorsese alternately smudges with grime to blend in with his dirt-covered parishioners, or frames in long voluminous Jesus curls to juxtapose his Christ-like glow with the wretched, imploring Japanese Christians. It's not the plight of the Japanese that Scorsese is interested in, nor is that what the prideful Rodrigues worries over, as he longs to serve his righteous way to the Lord or die a glorious martyr's death. As a result, *Silence* is a frequently dragging and exhausting meditation on spiritual fidelity that has little time for the non-white people on either side of this unholy reign of terror.

Is this a fair assessment?

VCG: With all due respect: No. I can understand the desire to have more access to the Japanese gaze, but that would be a different story. Perhaps contemporary political correctness demands at least equal time for the non-whites, but I think we have to go back to the original question of what Endō Sensei was trying to convey in this novel. I frankly don't think it's all that much about grime-smeared European Jesuits coming to "save" the sorrowful heathens—although certainly Rodrigues initially feels himself superior to the frightened peasants, and that's not a totally inconsequential part of the story. But if I'm correct in asserting that Endō's primary aim is to probe what it means to be a weak, terrified human being yearning to have some reassurance that he or she is not abandoned by God in the extremity of his or her mortal experience, then I honestly don't think it matters whether Rodrigues is Portuguese or Chinese or Japanese or any other -ese. Look at Endō's next major novel, *The Samurai*, written in 1980. It is set in virtually the same historical period in

Japan, and, yes, one of the main characters and a sometime narrator is a European priest. But the title character is a minor Japanese vassal of a powerful warlord who is buffeted and manipulated by the political and religious powers of the day until he is beaten down and ordered to die, at which point he realizes that the only companion he can find who understands him and who will “attend” him in both life and death is “That Man”—Christ.

One more thing that I think is significant. It is a delicious irony that the story as written by Endō Sensei is in a sense more “cinematic” than the cinematic adaptation. By which I mean that the changing modes of narration function much like a camera. Nearly the entire first half of the novel is narrated by Rodrigues. Endō Sensei was a rarity among Japanese writers in his ability to create convincing non-Japanese characters. We see only what Rodrigues sees. All action is interpreted from Rodrigues’s European viewpoint. We are, in a sense, stuck inside his head, and he controls the scenes the camera allows us to see and his voice dominates, in an almost imperialistic manner, the soundtrack of the book. What better way to let us see into Rodrigues’s egotism, his sense of superiority as a religiously enlightened Westerner who understands very little about the Japanese flock to whom he is supposed to minister?

Once he is betrayed by Kichijirō and imprisoned by the Japanese authorities, however, the novel’s camera pulls back. No longer is the “I” of Rodrigues in control of the narrative. He becomes “he,” and almost all the time he is not referred to as “Rodrigues” at all, but merely as “the priest.” After he steps on the *fumie* and, outwardly at least, forsakes his identity as a priest, he is given a Japanese name, Okada San’emon. And in the final, cryptic section of the novel that consists of official documentary reports, even Okada gets essentially lost in the mists of historical time, and it is no longer of any importance that there was once a Portuguese priest named Rodrigues who came to Japan. All that matters is that one tormented human being comes to recognize that his entire life had “spoken” of a Christ who did not remain silent.

My point in all this is that if, as Yamato-san argues, neither Scorsese nor Rodrigues is interested in the plight of the Japanese Christians, neither again is this novel written by a Japanese Christian. Endō Sensei's mode of narration pushes Rodrigues into greater and greater loneliness and desperation, until, as a suffering human (not a European or a Japanese, just a human), the only thing he can rely on is his Eternal Companion, Christ.

DJNM: Turning to the Japanese gaze, as it were, I am keen to secure your insight into the seemingly-sincere-but-decidedly-duplicitous character of Kichijirō (Yōsuke Kubozuka). How would you classify him? Is he a doctrinal exemplar—his shifty or wily persona somehow an embodiment of Endō's theology? Or is something else in play?

VCG: I'm confident that anyone who is reading this knows of Endō Sensei's famous statement, "Kichijirō is me." I think he felt that, in his own life, the only way he could reconcile his personal shortcomings with his yearning to be acceptable to God was to seek within the limitless eternity of God those aspects of forgiveness—of grace, if you will—that could reach down far enough into the depths of human weakness to locate something worth saving in believers with the shakiest of faith. He wanted, for himself and for others, a God who was not unlike his own mother—one who would look with compassionate understanding on his many failures and not cast him off, but rather embrace him, and tell him that it was "all right." I'm of course thinking here of the voice of Christ that speaks to Rodrigues from the *fumie*, telling him that it is all right to go ahead and trample on the image—on Him—because it was to suffer alongside failing humans that He came into the world.

Endō Sensei was also thoroughly familiar with the challenges Christianity has had—first in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then again after Japan opens up to the West in the mid-nineteenth century—gaining acceptance among the Japanese people. After a couple of hundred years of proselytizing by both Catholic and

Protestant missionaries, only a little more than one percent of the population has accepted the Christian message. From his study of the wrestles that many early twentieth century converts had (and many of them later left the faith), he knew that the dogmatic, sectarian-splintered, puritanical brand of Christianity that was introduced beginning in the 1880s was hard for the Japanese to swallow. In a famous essay, “Paternal Religion, Maternal Religion” from 1967, Endō Sensei argues that the Japanese of that time were presented an image of God as a stern, Old Testament patriarch whose sole aim was to punish fallen man. He proposes that Japanese attitudes toward religion, be it of the Shintō, Buddhist, or Christian trademarks, are characterized by a longing for a softer, nurturing deity who offers mercy over justice, companionship over condemnation. If this can be called Endō-ism, this theology is fully realized in the character of Kichijirō; Endō Sensei said he loved this weakling very much as he created him. And, I might add, it can be persuasively argued that Kichijirō is the central character in *Silence* and provides the Japanese gaze that Yamato-san found lacking.

DJNM: “I was taken by the moment of apostasy,’ he [Scorsese] says [in *The Hollywood Reporter*], ‘but I didn’t quite understand the epilogue,’ when the book follows Rodrigues over many years after he has been tortured and freed. ‘I thought it would be interesting to write a script.’” Scorsese is nothing if not interesting! His film ends in a way that departs from Endō’s novel, as you know, and I’m curious to hear your response to some of the differences. What kind of input, if any, did you offer? And what do you think Scorsese was thinking or trying to accomplish with this fresh interpretation?

VCG: It is, I think, impossible to argue that there are not thorny problems with what Fr. Johnston in his translation labeled the “Appendix” (and, by the way, it is neither “Appendix” nor “Epilogue” in the original; it is simply a continuation of the final chapter). Endō Sensei wrote it in seventeenth century formal documentary style, which makes it frightfully difficult for a Japanese person today to understand. Since I have some limited idea of what the author was at-

tempting to achieve in that section, I can state with certainty that he wanted it to be murky, clouded, as it were, by the mists of time, and to create the effect I mentioned earlier: to have the historical character of Father Rodrigues fade away and perhaps thereby to leave us as readers with an opportunity to ponder the larger issues of faith rather than focus in on the dilemma of one man who lived so many years ago. What Endō Sensei is hinting at in those documents is, first, that Rodrigues, who is taunted by village children who call him “Apostate Paul,” has been secretly ministering to the Japanese Christians who are imprisoned with him. Second, that the authorities suspect what Rodrigues is up to and repeatedly require him to write out a new oath of recantation. (That oath was originally mis-translated as “writing a book,” which can only mislead the reader into thinking that Rodrigues is now walking directly in the footsteps of Ferreira and writing refutations of Christianity which the authorities can use against the faithful.) Third, that Kichijirō, who is in the same prison, has received a Christian amulet from Rodrigues, but when it is discovered, he protects Rodrigues and denies he got it from the former priest. These are all quiet suggestions that Rodrigues, officially defrocked but continuing his Christian ministry in secret—“from the heart”—is still walking with Christ in different ways than he had earlier in his life, but with equal or perhaps even greater faith.

Because it’s so hard to understand the original Japanese of this final section, and because there are problems in the English translation, I was able to provide Mr. Scorsese with some interpretive comments made by Endō Sensei and then give some feedback of my own. What seemed most important to me was to conclude the story with some indication that Rodrigues is not an “apostate” even though he may have outwardly performed an act considered heretical. That in the depths of his heart he has a new, enhanced understanding of his relationship with Christ and retains his personal if not his occupational faith.

The way Mr. Scorsese chose to convey that vital insight was equally subtle, with a degree of tantalizing ambiguity. The very last scene of the film, which is not anywhere in the novel, does that with what I

can only call creative genius. I know reactions to that scene vary greatly, primarily among those who have only read the book in translation, but for me, it captures better than anything I can imagine the tone and substance of what I believe Endō Sensei was trying to convey. And it is a conception completely original to the filmmakers. I had absolutely nothing to do with that decision—it was made before I ever became involved in the project.

DJNM: Allow me to linger with the movie’s ending for one more question, because I’m curious to hear your response to how *The Guardian’s* movie critic, Peter Bradshaw, concludes his review:

Silence is a movie of great fervor that resolves itself into a single thought: if a believer is forced to recant, yet maintains a hidden impregnable core of secret faith, a hidden finger-cross, is that a defeat or not? God sees all, of course, including the way a public disavowal of faith has dissuaded hundreds or thousands from believing. Is the public theatre of faith more important than a secret bargain with a silent creator? It is a question kept on a knife edge. Martin Scorsese’s powerful, emotional film takes its audience on a demanding journey with a great sadness at its end.

VCG: I think Mr. Bradshaw raises a very important concern, and it’s one that I think we all have to grapple with. I of course take issue with the idea of a “silent creator”—Endō’s and Rodrigues’s God is not silent. Nor do I think that it becomes a “single thought” story simply because it funnels down to a close-up inside the burning cauldron/coffin that makes a statement about one man’s choice of sustaining his faith against all odds. But that concern is not neutralized merely by arguing against a couple of two-word phrases in Mr. Bradshaw’s review. My own views are considerably moderated by my understanding of the novel/film, by my understanding of Endō Sensei’s conception of the story, and by my reading of his other writings, especially *The Samurai*. And what it comes down to for me is that, taken as a moment in the context of history, one could well argue that Rodrigues’s decision could have a negative impact on “hundreds

or thousands” of believers. But I read it as a significantly autobiographical examination by the author of his own belief in God, and though the storyline is set in a real moment of bloody events in the seventeenth century, if we allow Endō Sensei to tell a very personal story, I think the issues of a personal commitment to Christ take precedence. Because I know the author and his work so well, I acknowledge that I may be in the minority of those who view the movie in seeing it as a testimony of the faith of one man, Endō Shūsaku. Or is it also about one other man—Martin Scorsese?

DJNM: Scorsese invited you to special screening of his movie, correct? What was that like? And what do you recall about the conversation when the credits rolled, the lights went up, and he sought your response?

VCG: I met Marianne at the offices of Sikelia Productions, Mr. Scorsese’s production unit, and she showed me into a private screening room, and the film began to roll. I was there all by myself, just me and this phenomenally powerful movie. I knew Marianne wanted my thoughts and feedback after the viewing, but at that point I didn’t even know whether the director was in town. Marianne let me sit there for awhile with my own thoughts, wiping away my own tears, before she came in with her notebook. Frankly, all I can remember from my post-viewing conversation with Marianne is expressing how deeply moved I was, how pleased I was that it was so faithful to the original novel, and then one or two very minor suggestions of things that could easily be handled by the editor. And then she said, “Well, let’s go meet Marty.”

I’m pretty sure I’m not the only one who harbors a lot of preconceived notions of what a great artist will be like in person. When we went into his office, Mr. Scorsese stood up from behind his desk with a warm smile, offered his hand, and told me how delighted he was to meet me. I naturally thought it was then time for me to be ushered out. But he invited me to sit down, and then, joined a few minutes later by the film’s editor, the remarkable Thelma Schoonmaker, we

had an hour's worth of conversation on a wide variety of topics. Of foremost importance when we first sat down, of course, was what I thought of his film. I said: "I have no right or authority to channel Mr. Endō's spirit and speak for him. But I can tell you, from all I know of him and all that I have read, that he would be deeply moved by this film, and profoundly grateful that you have been so faithful to what he was trying to do in writing the novel."

DJNM: Peter Travers (*Rolling Stone*) thinks viewing *Silence* is a "religious experience." And Tom Shone (*Newsweek*) presses the analogy, seeing the movie as "devotional cinema of an exacting and exalted sort." "It's basically like living inside a prayer, participating in prayer and that's to me the highest compliment. It draws you in. It really is like a Jesuit meditation. And that's pretty amazing in a movie," Fr. James Martin tells Inés San Martín (*Crux*). So, what happened? It's a film about faith, and certain U.S. Christians have lamented Hollywood's apparent refusal to make 'faith-based movies' for some time now, so why do you suppose *Silence* struggled at the box office?

VCG: I hesitate to say this, but I'm afraid I think that "certain U.S. Christians" are looking for something that isn't a compelling "meditation," to use Fr. Martin's word (and I can't say enough about how crucial I think Fr. Martin's contributions as a consultant on the film were to its success). I think they want a superficial, feel-good look at people whose faith produces miracles, mostly people who don't live in the real world of pain and doubt and cruelty. It's as though for them, a "faith-based" film should be a fairy tale, no violence, no swearing, no nudity or sex, and we all leave feeling good and wishing that we went to church more often. Along comes what I think is the most "religious," "prayerful," soul-provoking film that perhaps has ever been made, and what response does it get, especially in the United States? Utter apathy.

DJNM: It seems to me that Scorsese's film, like Endō's novel, refuses tidy theological claims and elects, for the most part, to give us access to particular kinds of pastoral as well theological struggle(s),

and then it leaves us there. I can live with such spiritual ambiguity. Emma Green concurs. Writing for *The Atlantic*, she thinks the power of the movie resides in the fact that it

leaves no protagonists free of moral burden, and proposes no firm conclusions to the ambitious questions it takes on. Artistically, it's difficult to pull off—to architect a nuanced, respectful interrogation of moral, religious questions in a way that's compelling and accessible. But the truly counter-cultural coup is that Scorsese has legitimized these questions as fair game for sophisticated, mainstream art. God's silence is not just a matter for church halls and cathedrals, Scorsese has declared. Any moviegoer can grapple with the meaning of Jesus's blank stare.

But that's not enough for a certain kind of believer, is it? It's certainly not enough for Bishop Robert Barron, whose words agitate me (in a good way):

My worry is that all of the stress on complexity and multivalence and ambiguity is in service of the cultural elite today, which is not that different from the Japanese cultural elite depicted in the film. What I mean is that the secular establishment always prefers Christians who are vacillating, unsure, divided, and altogether eager to privatize their religion. And it is all too willing to dismiss passionately religious people as dangerous, violent, and let's face it, not that bright. Revisit Ferreira's speech to Rodrigues about the supposedly simplistic Christianity of the Japanese laity if you doubt me on this score. I wonder whether Shūsaku Endō (and perhaps Scorsese) was actually inviting us to look away from the priests and toward that wonderful group of courageous, pious, dedicated, long-suffering laypeople who kept the Christian faith alive under the most inhospitable conditions imaginable and who, at the decisive moment, witnessed to Christ with their lives. Whereas the specially trained Ferreira and Rodrigues became paid lackeys of a tyrannical government, those simple folk remained a thorn in the side of the tyranny.

Thoughts?

VCG: Emma Green instantly becomes one of my heroes with that reaction to the film. And though I understand what Bishop Barron is saying, and can on one level agree with his concerns, I think he buys into the all-too-obvious fallacy of only looking at this as a singular moment in history when the gulf between the religious elite from Portugal and the pious, long-suffering Japanese lay followers of Christ was enormous. Certainly that is part of the takeaway from the story. And, yes, most certainly it is disturbing to see Ferreira not merely apostatizing, but becoming a sharp tool in the hands of the authorities who are trying to undermine the foreign religion. But, as I said earlier, Rodrigues is *not* the same man as Ferreira, and though outwardly he may be forced to examine imported items to ferret out Christian devotional objects, secretly he continues to build the faith of those in his immediate surroundings. But more to the point, I think both Endō Sensei and (if I may) Scorsese Sensei want us to feel compassion, perhaps even Christlike compassion, for those who are too weak to stand up against swords and boiling water baths to defend their beliefs. The courageous lay Japanese are greatly to be admired, yes; but none of us is in a position to act as judge of the fearful and the cowardly—not unless we have experienced the same level of threats to our own faith.

DJNM: Let's move away from the critics, because I'd like to ask about Endō's family. Can you talk about their reaction to Scorsese's adaptation?

VCG: Endō Sensei's widow, Junko, turned ninety this year, and I understand that she is suffering the effects of age. I don't know whether she has actually seen the film. But their only child, their son Ryūnosuke (who was appointed President and Representative Director of Fuji Television in May of 2019), has been highly vocal about his delight with the film and has expressed his own assurance that his father would be very pleased with it. I might add that Endō Sensei's closest associates in the Japanese literary world—both his

disciples and critics who have carefully studied his work—have written that the film is remarkably faithful to the novel and that they are deeply grateful that Mr. Scorsese has treated this powerful material with such artistic reverence.

DJNM: If it's true that Scorsese's body of work may best be read theologically, then what type of theologian does Scorsese's adaptation of *Silence* show him to be?

VCG: Let me first respond with a couple of questions: How many great artists are also great theologians? And how many great theologians are great artists? By asking that, I'm not suggesting that there is a never-the-twain principle at work here. Still, I think it is fair to ask whether Mr. Scorsese has demonstrated in *Silence* that he not only understands the complex depths of the original novel but that he has his own creative perspectives to add to the conversation. What is that original perspective? Perhaps I can add my two yen. A Japanese writer named Masamune Hakuchō (1879–1962) was baptized a Christian at the age of seventeen, but by the age of twenty-two he had renounced his adopted faith. Hakuchō was very influential on Endō Sensei, particularly since he was perhaps the first to declare Christianity as it was taught in Japan to be far too severe, the proscriptions on personal freedom too unforgiving, the doctrine itself demanding martyrdom in the sense that the “old creature” had to be sacrificed in order to become a “new creature.” Yet, despite sixty years of separation from the Church, on his deathbed the final word Hakuchō uttered was “Amen.”

I would propose, based on no authority whatsoever beyond my own private interpretation, that *Silence* is very much Mr. Scorsese's “Amen” to the Catholicism he was taught as a child. Not that I hope in any way that he is on his deathbed! But I sense something of a personal reconciliation with the religious tradition of his youth, and I can't help but feel that he has made his peace with Christianity by pondering this novel over a period of three decades and then setting his own interpretation of it out on public display. As he wrote in his

Foreword to a reprinting of the translated novel, there is a “painful, paradoxical passage—from certainty to doubt to loneliness, to communion . . .” (viii). One might postulate that the “certainty” about his faith that led the youthful Martin Scorsese to aspire to the priesthood gave way to a painful “doubt” that created a passageway to “loneliness,” but that with this film, he has come to feel a sense of “communion.” A communion with the novel *Silence*, with the religious vision of Endō Shūsaku, and with the internalized faith he has stumbled his paradoxical way toward throughout his life and cinematic career.

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Martin Scorsese directing *Silence*

Martin Scorsese on *Silence, Grace, and Salvation:* An Interview

Final Revision by Martin Scorsese

I was given Shūsaku Endō's novel in 1988.¹ I finished reading it in August of 1989 on the bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto, after I'd completed my scenes as Van Gogh in Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*. I can't say whether or not I was actually interested in making a film out of it at that point. The story was so disturbing, so profound to me, that I didn't know if I could ever even attempt to approach it. But, over time, something in me kept saying: "You have to try." We obtained the rights around 1990/91. About a year later, my friend and writing collaborator Jay Cocks and I tried to write a draft.

But really, I just wasn't ready. That was the beginning of a long process that led to the first real draft of the script in December of 2006—that was when we came up with a real structure for a movie. During all those years, I really did not, in any way, ever imagine that I would make the picture. It would have felt . . . presumptuous of

¹This edited version of an interview with Martin Scorsese is being reprinted with his kind permission. The interview was originally published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* on 15 January 2017. Republished courtesy of Fr Antonio Spadaro, SJ, and *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

me. I didn't know how to deal with the themes. In addition to that, it was extremely difficult to actually get the project put together once we had the draft. So many legal and financial issues arose over the years that the whole situation gradually developed into a kind of Gordian knot, and it took many people and a lot of time to sort it all out. Then, there was the problem of actors. I'd find actors I liked and who were "bankable," they'd agreed to do the picture, and then time would pass and they would be either no longer "bankable" or they would be too old, or they would be both. Actors who guaranteed a certain amount of money necessary to make the picture, and actors who wanted to actually play the roles. A very, very long process—nineteen years, to be exact—with many stops and starts.

Looking back, I think that this long gestation process became a way of living with the story, and living life—my own life—around it. Around the ideas in the book. And I was provoked, by those ideas, to think further about the question of faith. I look back and I see it all coming together in my memory as a kind of pilgrimage—that's the way it felt. It's amazing to me, to have received the grace to be able to make the film now, at this point in my life. . . .

There was the desire to make the actual film on the one hand; and on the other hand, there was the presence of the Endō novel, the story, as a kind of spur to thinking about faith; about life and how it's lived, about grace and how it's received, about how they can be the same in the end. This, in turn, gave me a greater strength and clarity in my approach to the concrete task of making the picture. . . .

Grace is something that happens throughout life. It comes at unexpected moments. Now, I'm saying that as someone who has never been through war, or torture, or occupation. I've never been tested in that way. Of course, there were those people who *were* tested, like Jacques Lusseyran, the blind French resistance leader who was sent to Buchenwald and kept the spirit of resistance alive for his fellow prisoners—in fact, we've been trying for many years to make a film based on his memoir, *And There Was Light*. There's Dietrich

Bonhoeffer. Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi were able to find a way to help others. I'm not saying that their examples provide some kind of definitive answer to the question of where God was when so many millions of people were systematically slaughtered. But they existed, they performed acts of tremendous courage and compassion, and we remember them as lights in the darkness.

You can't see through someone else's experience, only your own. So, it might seem paradoxical, but I related to the novel by Endō, who was Japanese, in a way that I never have to Bernanos. There's something so hard, so unrelentingly harsh in Bernanos. Whereas in Endō, tenderness and compassion are always there. Always. Even when the characters don't know that tenderness and compassion are there, we do. . . .

There's something that Marilynne Robinson wrote in her book *Absence of Mind* that goes right to the heart of this question for me: "The givens of our nature—that we are brilliantly creative and as brilliantly destructive, for example—persist as facts to be dealt with even if the word 'primate' were taken to describe us exhaustively." Of course she's right. The idea that everything can be scientifically explained doesn't seem ridiculous to me, but actually quite naive. When you settle your mind to consider the great, overwhelming *mystery* of just being here, of living and dying, the very idea of getting to the bottom of it all by means of science just seems beside the point. This is what Robinson writes about in her essays and in her novels. And what she calls "mind and soul" is, for me, true Catholicism. Mind and soul is really everything that you do—the good that you do and the damage that you do. It's the *trying*, with others in general and with loved ones in particular. And my own particular struggle has been trying to get through my absorption in my work, my *self*-absorption, in order to be present for the people I love. Because I express all of this—everything we're discussing—in cinema. Living in the world of notoriety and fame and ambition and competition is another struggle for me. But, of course, even when you're part of that world—I have to admit that I am, to a certain extent, and I've even made a few films about it—the spiritual dimension of life, as you call it, is always right

there. Carl Jung had a Latin inscription carved over the doorway to his house in Switzerland: “*Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit.*” “Called or not called, God will come.” That says it all. . . .

So the other side of [salvation] is something we already talked about in relation to [*Raging Bull*]. Accepting yourself, living with yourself, possibly becoming a force for something positive in people’s lives. I suppose that’s one way of defining salvation. It comes down to the people you love: your family, your friends, your *loved ones*. You try to be as good as you can, and as reasonable and compassionate as you can. . . .

The word “salvation” is interesting. It’s something that one can never know. At the moment of your death, if you’re conscious, do you know if you’ve reached salvation? *How* do you know? And you certainly can’t know while you’re living life. The only thing you *can* do is to live as decent a life as you can. If you fall, you have to pick yourself up and try again—a cliché, but it’s true. For me, day and night, there are peaks and valleys, constant exhilaration and darkness, a doubting that becomes self-criticism. But you can’t overdo that because, again, you have to accept yourself. So it’s an ongoing process. . . .

When I was younger, I was thinking of making a film about *being* a priest. I myself wanted to follow in [my mentor,] Fr. Principe’s footsteps, so to speak, and be a priest. I went to a preparatory seminary, but I failed out the first year. And I realized, at the age of fifteen, that a vocation is something very special, that you can’t acquire it, and you can’t have one just because you want to be like somebody else. You have to have a true calling. Now, if you do have the calling, how do you deal with your own pride? If you’re able to perform a ritual in which transubstantiation is enacted, then yes—you’re very special. However, you have to have something else as well. Based on what I saw and experienced, a good priest, in addition to having that talent, that ability, always has to think of his parishioners first. So the question is: how does that priest get past his ego? His pride? I wanted to make that film. And I realized that with *Si-*

lence, almost sixty years later, I was making that film. Rodrigues is struggling directly with that question.

But I think that the most fascinating and intriguing of all the characters is Kichijiro. At times, when we were making the picture, I thought, "Maybe he's Jesus, too." In Matthew, Jesus says: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." You cross paths with the person in the street who repels you—that's Jesus. Of course, Kichijiro is constantly weakening and constantly causing damage to himself and to many others, including his family. But then, at the end, who's there with Rodrigues? Kichijiro. He was, it turns out, Rodrigues's great teacher. His mentor. His guru, so to speak. That's why Rodrigues thanks him at the end.

And of course, in terms of my own pictures, people have pointed out to me that Kichijiro is Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets*. The character of Charlie, played by Harvey Keitel, has to get through his pride. He understands that spirituality and practice is not limited to the actual edifice of the literal church, that it has to be outside on the street. But then, of course, you can't choose your own penance. He thinks he can, but penance comes when you least expect it, from a quarter that you can never anticipate. This is why Johnny Boy and Kichijiro fascinate me. They become the venue for destruction or salvation. . . .

We don't know what the historical Father Ferreira did or didn't believe, but in the *Endō* novel it would seem that he actually lost his faith. Maybe another way of looking at it is that he couldn't get over the shame of renouncing his faith, even if he did it to save lives. Rodrigues, on the other hand, is someone who renounces his faith and thereby regains it. That's the paradox. To put it simply, Rodrigues hears Jesus speak to him and Ferreira doesn't, and that's the difference. . . .

I chose the face of Christ painted by El Greco because I thought it was more compassionate than the one painted by Piero della Francesca. When I was growing up, the face of Christ was something that was always a comfort and a joy. . . .

When I was young and serving Mass, there was no doubt that there was a sense of the sacred. I tried to convey this in *Silence*, during the scene of the Mass in the farmhouse in Goto. At any rate, I remember going out on the street after the Mass was over and wondering: how can life just be going on? Why hasn't everything changed? Why isn't the world directly affected by the body and blood of Christ? That's the way that I experienced the presence of God when I was very young. . . .

It reminds me of that extraordinary passage in Marilynne Robinson's novel, *Gilead*, which I read when we were making *Silence*. The dying minister is describing the wonder that he felt when he saw his son's face for the first time. "Now that I am about to leave this world," he says, "I realize that there is nothing more astonishing than a human face. It has something to do with incarnation. You feel your obligation to a child when you have seen it and held it. Any human face has a claim on you. Because you can't help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and the loneliness of it. But this is truest of the face of an infant. I consider that to be one kind of vision, as mystical as any." I can say, from personal experience, that this is absolutely true. . . .

I am obsessed by the spiritual. I'm obsessed by the question of what we are. And that means looking at us closely, the good and the bad. Can we nurture the good so that at some future point in the evolution of mankind, violence will, possibly, cease to exist? But right now, violence is here. It's something that we do. It's important to show that. So that one doesn't make the mistake of thinking that violence is something that others do—that "people" do—to think to ourselves, "I could never do that, of course." . . .

It took many years to get *Silence* made, for many reasons, and we looked at quite a few locations around the world before we settled on Taiwan. We started with the real places in Japan where Shūsaku Endō's novel takes place—Nagasaki, Sotome, Unzen Hot Springs—but we didn't end up filming there because it would have been prohibitively

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expensive. In addition to Japan, my production designer, Dante Ferretti, scouted New Zealand, Vancouver, Northern California and then, finally, Taiwan, which has extraordinary landscapes and coastlines that are virtually untouched and that are visually close to the places in the novel. Right away, we realized that this was where we could make the picture.

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Martin Scorsese is a filmmaker, actor, and historian. The winner of numerous honors and awards (including an Academy Award for Best Director for *The Departed*), Scorsese directed such films as *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *The Color of Money*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Goodfellas*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Gangs of New York*, *The Aviator*, *The Departed*, *Hugo*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and *Silence*. To date, Scorsese's films have been nominated for eighty-one Academy Awards of various kinds, winning twenty.

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