
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The ‘Mudswamp’ of Culture: Endo’s Silence and the De-Christianization of American Culture

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| ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the impact of Endo’s “Silence” book and film, but very little about its impact on American cultural processes at the time. Still, much less has been written from a specifically Catholic Christian point of view. This essay seeks to redress that imbalance in a positive, constructive way. It seeks to redress that imbalance by primarily taking into focus how various social factors played a central role in the progressive dechristianization of American culture, as they did in Europe many years before. The central claim here is that while Christian theologians were championing the liberalization of American culture prior to but especially after the changes initiated by Vatican II, Endo’s book and film played a central role in continuing that dechristianization process largely unbeknownst by the average American Christian public, Catholic or Protestant. To make this clear, the essay engages in an extensive review of the literature on many related core issues: the social background of the author, Shusaku Endo; cultural changes initiated by Vatican II; Japanese social, historical, and cultural factors; important details about the film production of Endo’s book; American cultural changes taking place at the time; and more. The essay concludes by asserting that social factors played a central role in significantly influencing American religious beliefs.

| KEYWORDS

‘Mudswamp’, culture, social factors, theology, Vatican II, Buddhism, Christianity, moral absolutes, American, Japanese

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1. Introduction

In order to appreciate the full theological import of Endo’s film, “Silence”, and the 1966 Japanese book upon which it is based, it is simply not good enough to maintain intellectual focus at the level of film or social critic. The theological lessons to be learned from the film are so monumentally profound that it necessitates considerable research into numerous related factors which impact significantly upon the analysis.

Among other things, Endo’s social background, film director Martin Scorsese’s own views about central themes in Endo’s book, the similarities and differences between Endo’s book and the “Silence” film on which it is based, religious beliefs in Japan, and the origin, nature, and history of Christianity in Japan as well as in America, are all highly salient factors that should be considered. To do anything less prior to analysis of central themes contained in the book and the film version is to risk cherry-picking various scenes and parts of the film script to support and justify one’s own ideology and theological biases, thereby foregoing objective analysis.

Arguably, one of the most profound lessons to be learned, if not the core pedagogical takeaway from both the actual novel and the film, comes at the moment when a top Japanese official tells a totally demoralized and downcast priest who has apostatized that it was the ‘mudswamp’ of Japan that defeated him, and by inference not government officials in charge of persecution. Let us tumble into that formidable watery abyss ourselves that Endo describes through the mouthpiece of a key Japanese character,

Inoue, the magistrate of Nagasaki in charge of persecuting Christians, as the dark and murky 'mudswamp' of the Japanese cultural attitude, we need to take a few pitstops in unexpected intellectual terrain as suggested above.

Before we do, suffice it to say here at the outset that culture versus Christianity IS the obvious Catholic theologia thematis of Endo's movie and book, straight from the life, teachings, and words of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Judeo-Christian Bible. Given that Endo was baptized Catholic at eleven years old, this should not be terribly surprising. But what is much more theologically astounding and perplexing, if not morally reprehensible, is the strict avoidance of any serious consideration of how the book fits into the religious trajectory of contemporary American culture itself, described by the author himself, secular scholars from every disciplinary stripe, and theologians themselves, many of them self-avowedly 'Christian' and 'contextual' in their theoretical approach. More about this later. First, let's delve into Endo's social background to see what may be relevant to a suitable understanding of the potential social roots of the "Silence" book to determine if there's anything significant.

2. Relevant Social Background Factors

At a general level of analysis, even a half-hearted cursory glance at Endo's biographical features would reveal direct pertinence to the underlying cosmological themes within both the book and less so the film adaptation, "Silence" (Mathy, 1974; Morton, 1994; Williams, 1999; Miller, 2009). Endo was born in Tokyo in 1923, but soon after moved to leased territory in Manchuria. After his parents divorced, his mother returned Endo to Japan ten years later to live with an aunt.

In 1934, Endo was baptized as a Catholic, either at the instigation of the aunt or inspired by his mother's conversion to Catholicism following her divorce. He was baptized not by choice but by circumstance, and therefore, without going through the process of understanding traditionally required to this day for all baptisms in the Catholic communion, an absolutely crucial factor to be considered later.

In 1943, he started his studies at Keio University. However, the Second World War interrupted his studies, and he ended up working in a munitions factory. Nevertheless, somehow during this period, he contributed to literary journals, becoming chief editor of the most prestigious of these, Mita Bungaku (meaning 'see literature'). He had also attended Waseda University intending to study medicine, but that interest soon dissipated to be replaced by an avid interest in French Catholic authors. That decision soon led him to attend the University of Lyons in France in 1950, not to mention to lecture at two Tokyo universities upon his return to Japan a few years later. More about the significance of this foreign journey for Endo's writings and religious views are described below.

Within a year of completing his studies in France, he started to accumulate some meaningful literary credentials. In 1954, he was the recipient of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for the novel entitled "White Man" (1955), a novella about a French collaborator assisting Nazis in Lyons during the war to torture a Catholic seminarian. It was later expanded into "White Man, Yellow Man", where the 'yellow man' is also a novella about a Japanese Christian man who carries on a sexual relationship with his best friend's fiancée in Japan during the war.

In both stories, across two continents during the war years, Endo brings into sharp relief the *questionable meaning of Christianity* in both East and West. One year after first publishing "White Man", he gets married. One year after that, a son is born as the only child from his marriage. In Paris, as throughout life, serious illness plagued him, forcing considerable amounts of time to be spent in lengthy hospital stays for many of those medical problems. For example, he contracted pleurisy while studying in Paris in 1952¹.

When he returned to Paris in 1960, he was plagued by the same disease and stayed in French and Japanese hospitals afterwards for almost three years. In addition, he contracted tuberculosis, another much more severe lung disease, and suffered through thoracoplasty and the removal of one lung. Before dying from complications of hepatitis, he authored many books and received the Order of Culture in 1995, almost winning the Nobel Prize for Literature the previous year.

It was mentioned earlier that Endo lectured at two Japanese universities upon returning from studies in France. First, he gained both employment and notoriety as an instructor at Tokyo-based Sophia University in 1956, a uniquely Catholic university in the Jesuit Order established in the early 20th century following a long line of Jesuit presence in Japan which started in the 16th century with Francis Xavier. So, then, even at university, Endo preferred to teach at a Catholic religious institution, supposedly where he could safely practice his Catholic religion at a campus church operated by Jesuit priests without fear of rebuke or stigmatization.

Then in 1967, a private Catholic university in Tokyo, Seijo University, hired him explicitly as a "Lecturer on the Theory of the Novel". This university was first founded in 1917 as Seijo Higher School and then officially renamed Seijo University in 1950. It was first founded by a medical doctor and former Minister of Education who himself had converted to Catholicism, Dr. Masataro

Sawayanagi. It is highly instructive that both universities considered Endo to be a novelist first, specializing in historical fiction, not a bona fide university professor nor a religious scholar of any sort.

Again, at least on the basis of appearances, we can see here serious efforts to remain within the purview of employment organizations which could provide Endo with opportunities to freely practice his religious faith among similar others and nurture some sense of meaningful confirmation of supposedly deeply held religious beliefs. The suspicious tone of 'supposedly' is used here deliberately, for research indicates that Endo's religious identification with Christianity, let alone Catholicism, was never solidified in his life.

Essentially, it was always the result of a Japanese cultural struggle in which Japanese culture usually triumphed over apostolic Christianity. Perhaps Catholicism was simply an avenue through which he could secure meaningful employment and comfortable living as an author questioning the meaning of the Christian faith from within and under the protection of the Christian faith itself in true traditional Japanese style, one might say. Certainly, his writings seem to be organized around this dominant leitmotif.

Even though it is well-known that Endo wrote in a variety of genres, his primary genre is irremediably connected to Christianity, if not Catholicism, pure and simple. A plethora of experts and commentators have noted that Endo was a rare Japanese Catholic who struggled tirelessly to plant the seeds of his Catholic Christian religion in the 'mudswamp' of Japan (among them, Williams, 1991; Morton, 1994; Yancey, 1996; Mase-Hasegawa, 2008), a kind of romantic or poetic literary view of Endo's character, to be sure.

3. Endo and the Second Vatican Council

However, that same research also revealed that Endo wanted to mold and shape the clay of biblical Christianity with the Japanese cultural chisel, his own mixed brand of Christianity. This was a brand of personalized Christianity which seemed to fit quite well with the new, emphatically liberal-socialist cultural pronouncements of Vatican II at the time, with which Endo agreed wholeheartedly it should be kept firmly in mind front and center. In any kind of social analysis, this would be a pivotal factor to be seriously considered when deciphering the potential role played by Endo's books and films in the dechristianization of American culture.

Surely, this key American cultural connection with and curious coincidence between the publication date of Endo's "Silence" novel (1966) and the publication and pronouncements of Vatican II (October 1962 – December 1965) cannot go unnoticed. It's important to note here that the 16 documents produced by the Second Vatican Council during the period of its existence (not to mention literally thousands of related scholarly publications) not only changed Catholicism and Christianity in general within America forever but, more importantly, in the world as well. All of those documents were top cultural news in all institutions right across America, not just within the Catholic Church itself but across all nations of the world.

All during the Council's pronouncements and publications, there were heated debates at every level of all American educational institutions and intensely within all mass media on a constant basis (TV, radio, newspapers, and so forth). Additionally, during the immediate aftermath, a plethora of publications gushed forth either praising or lamenting the origin, nature, purpose and effects of the Council's work from both secular and religious individuals, groups, and organizations (Bea, 1966, 1967 a, 1967b; Hollis, 1967; Drury, 1967; Vorgrimier, 1967; Anderson, 1965-66; Flannery, 1966; Loeming, 1966; Hastings, 1968; Kaschmitter, 1975 – all of these together represent just a tiny proportion of thousands of varied publications produced during the immediate post-Vatican II period).

4. The Significance of 'Mudswamp'

In any case, it was mentioned earlier how Endo constantly and pejoratively referred to what he called the 'mudswamp' of Japanese culture as the central reason why Christianity was never able to take hold in Japan. As referred to above, 'Mudswamp' was a term that Endo often used himself in his "Silence" book and film characters as well as in live interviews and other writings when he compared Japan pejoratively to a kind of dim, murky wetland of some kind like a swamp, fen, marsh, or bog – a kind of lowland drowning in unclear water where nothing could really grow properly or even grow at all.

The religious connotations of this kind of vocabulary and descriptions are unmistakable, of course. In fact, in the stage play version of Endo's "Silence" film, titled "The Golden Country", the same official that tells the apostatized priest that he was defeated "by this mudswamp, Japan" also states the following:

"But the *mudswamp* too has its good points, if you will but give yourself up to its comfortable warmth. The teachings of Christ are like a flame.

Like a flame, they set a man on fire. But the **tepid warmth of** Japan will eventually nurture sleep."
(Mathy, 1974, p. 6).

Now the iconic term 'mudswamp' has reversed negative connotations FROM an insurmountable obstacle to the growth, nourishment, and progressive development of Christianity in Japan TO imputed positive connotations of warmth, comfort, and security. When Endo puts central thematic concepts like this into the mouth of central characters in his novels and films, it's not only significant literarily but also religiously and culturally, of course.

Many scholars have pointed this out. In fact, Morton (1994) states quite categorically that many of Endo's characters in novels and films are allegories, some of which reference non-Western religions². So, then, it is often the case that the main themes or messages an author intends to convey in a novel through various means don't necessarily equate to how they will interplay with complex structural factors once it is introduced into a culture like Endo's dominant religious themes were introduced into American culture. The exact same logic applies to the adaptation of those novels into films subsequently released into a particular cultural mix of complex structural factors.

Although this fact may not endear him at all to other Christians, particularly conservative Christians and traditional Catholics, we can see many Catholic Christian themes in his writings and, of course, "Silence". Without a doubt, the Christ-versus-culture theme so dominant in Catholicism enshrouds the entire narrative, whether intentional or not, since it is not so clear which side of the equation Endo himself prefers. Nonetheless, the stultifying stigma of being a diehard Catholic outsider in a pervasively Buddhist Japan is there, too, always fearfully hiding away from the sight of Buddhist cultural enforcers in everyday human interactions. The experience of being a religious 'foreigner' in one's own country, of being an ambassador of Christ in a country that has largely rejected Christ, is also a dominant theme, not to mention being a foreigner in France and in other countries, including America.

The central point here is that Endo's Catholic belief system can be recognized as a central feature in "Silence", but usually within situations and circumstances which place them within *meaning frameworks of doubt*. Although there are other themes playing about as well, the meaning of traditional Christian concepts, values, and principles are commonly placed under question and suspicion. Suffice it to say that we can detect Catholic themes all over the scripts of characters as they genuinely struggle with incredibly difficult moral issues and dilemmas, making choices under largely impossible conditions with mostly tragic, if not horrific, results.

In fact, many times, it seems as if moral ideas themselves are under suspicion rather than the particular beliefs of specific religious systems. As a Catholic, supposedly the good Catholic that he was, Endo is literally obsessed with illuminating the moral fabric of human life in culture, but in a way which imposes suspicion or doubt about absolute truths. Culture is cosmologically viewed as a clash between two 'kingdoms', 'this' world versus the 'other' world. In that clash in Endo's writings, the end result is rarely clear in terms of religious meaning.

God's other-worldly spiritual kingdom is represented in the holy cross and the actual physical material world of human beings, the inner-worldly culture of the flesh. It ends up being the stepped-on cross, by the way, viewed as culture's answer to the whole notion of the 'spiritual'. Endo's life experiences of Catholic Christianity inside and outside of Japan, as well as his lifelong struggles with various sicknesses and diseases, can be viewed within a Catholic Christian cosmological framework of a life lived by a Christian spiritual 'foreigner' within the 'domestic' fleshly world of culture. Or, more probable, Endo was never really at heart wholly committed to any form of Christianity, preferring instead to manoeuvre functionally within it simply to question its core meanings within a literary framework.

4.1 The "Silence" Film: Some Key Details Often Undervalued

Even the various details of the "Silence" film reveal Endo's obsessive preoccupation with questioning morality itself or the moral fabric of human life, not just the broad Catholic Christian cosmological brushing that implicitly colors those details. Let's start at the beginning. First of all, it should be emphasized that none other than the illustrious American film producer Martin Scorsese himself adapted Endo's Silence book to American film as director. This occurred precisely at a time when the dominant Protestant Christian religious culture in America was in the throes of liberalizing itself, not only the Catholic side of that culture.

In terms of the central role of an extremely liberal socialist mass media in the dechristianization of American culture and society at the highest institutional levels, this is a pivotal factor to take note of. In terms of the film's negative cultural effects viewed from a traditional or conservative Christian perspective, it is worth noting parallels. It is especially crucial given the fact that Scorsese was not exactly true to Endo's book itself and that he himself self-identified as what he called a "lapsed Catholic" (Thomas, 2016) during several media interviews before and after releasing the film.

In any case, the film itself tells the tale of Rodriguez and Garppe, two Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, who ask their religious superior for permission to visit Japan to find out what happened to their mentor teacher at the seminary, Father Ferreira. The superiors grant permission reluctantly only because of very troubling reports that have been circulating that Father Ferreira has become an apostate, publicly renouncing Jesus Christ and Christianity under cruel and merciless persecution against all Christians by the Japanese government.

So, then, in terms of a fictionalized historical novel and film, "Silence" essentially begins as a religious detective mission: 'What happened to Father Ferreira?' Catholic religious superiors are irreverently portrayed as being more concerned about the political fallout of priestly apostasy for Christian Europe than they are worried about the well-being of persecuted Japanese Christians or even the persecution of one of their own religious officials by the Japanese government. This irreverent portrayal at the very beginning fits very snugly within the traditional Protestant antagonism towards Catholicism in America and worldwide. This point should also not go unnoticed.

Once the two priests enter Japan, however, they begin ministering in a village. While doing so, they personally witness the brutal persecution and torture of countless Japanese Christians there, persecutions that are horrifically graphic and intended to sow terror to secret Christian villagers who may be hiding 'foreign' priests among them. Ministering under these conditions eventually forces them to leave their village for their own safety, but Rodriguez and Garppe get separated in the process. Still, they soldier onwards through thick and thin, determined to complete their 'mission' and keep the flames of Christianity burning brightly through the murky mist of the 'mudswamp' despite horrific torturing, death, and impending doom for all Christians involved. The depiction of Christian priests as heartless religious soldiers marching onwards robotically at all human costs to achieve their target 'mission' is here conveyed in the most emotionally forceful cinematic and narrative ways. Again, the dominant theme of Christianity under doubt and suspicion rules the script.

However, for Rodriguez, the trials and tribulations along the road to redemption are long, difficult, and emotionally devastating. The worst pain of all, it seems, is having to watch and hear Christian village peasants being tortured to a miserable death by government persecutors who promise him over and over again that all of it would quickly come to an end if he would simply apostatize. To be expected, Rodriguez himself responds by calling out prayerfully to (his?) God over and over and over again for guidance, but over and over again, God is Rodriguez prays tirelessly for God to bless the tortured dying peasants and himself with holy mercy, but over and over again, God is silent! Hence the film's title conveys the ultimate question about the existence of a Christian 'God', namely: If God exists, then why is he 'silent'? The strong cultural implication for believers who doubt is that 'silence' means 'God' is a cultural fiction, not an actually existing entity. Again, the cultural function of Endo's book and film is evident.

Finally, the key smashing cosmological moment comes when Rodriguez hears God's voice emanating from the fumie, the image of Christ emblazoned into metal set firmly into a flat wooden plaque that all Christians who wish to save their lives must step on in desecration in order to save themselves from sure death. Christ speaks to Rodriguez through the plaque and supposedly provides holy permission to step upon the image and, therefore, to set himself and the other Christian villagers free. In other words, Rodriguez apostatizes. But is the apostasy the real issue here to be debated, or is there a deeper philosophical issue at work here? From a Catholic and Christian point of view, of course, there is. From an East Asian secular materialist theological viewpoint, of course, there isn't.

5. Endo in American Cultural Change

More importantly, the much more profound theological issue here is to examine how this deeper philosophical debate potentially plays into rapid social changes occurring in American culture and the Catholic church long before that time and continuing long afterwards. To be sure, suffice it to say at this point that the solidly liberal-democratic (indeed, if not socialist leaning) and largely irreligious Hollywood moguls would never have bothered to get involved in such a prohibitively costly film production without predictable cultural payoffs, financial and otherwise.

Indeed, the great amount of discussion about the film and novel taking place across all mass media and within all major American institutions at the time and long afterwards makes clear that they could indeed foresee the huge dividends to be derived from using it to promote major ongoing cultural changes in America, changes which they themselves viewed quite positively.

As many social scientists have been quick to point out, one of the most significant but rarely considered social functions (intended and unintended) of film as well as all mass media in general in America at the time, was to promote the continued extreme liberalization of an American culture which had been struggling for many decades to maintain its traditional biblical Christian

beliefs in the face of rapid large-scale social changes occurring at home and in the world at large. Such a struggle was reflected in the literature quite before Endo's *Silence* and other writings, for example, in Green's literary works.

5.1 The Debate about Moral Absolutes

In any case, the more profound philosophical debate taking place about the *Silence* novel and film in American society at the time went beyond priestly apostasy, to be sure, way beyond, way beyond the surface entertainment themes marketed to other cultures across the world by American film and liberal news magnates (great cinematography, superb acting, and so forth). From their own historical experiences and perhaps varying cosmological views, what other cultures saw and took pleasure in were the palatable entertainment themes, issues, and values communicated through the movie (and novel), the cinematic wonders of American religious weakness and demoralization, NOT the central role of un-Christly Hollywood in the long-fought persistent effort to secularize American culture. In other words, it is likely that the film and book both played a significant role in the efforts of secular institutional chiefdoms in America to de-Christianize culture, to extract or neutralize the influence of Christianity in all corridors of American institutional and cultural life, not to mention every day, on-the-street life.

It was a significant part of a much larger and deeper cosmological debate that had been occurring within American culture (as well as elsewhere) for quite some time, literally centuries. That debate was at least partly about the heresy of compromising the 'primitive' moral absolutes contained in the Judeo-Christian Bible to the dictates of fashionable cultural trends like pluralism, relativism, and secularism viewed from the apex of powerful institutional spheres as infinitely more 'modern' and 'advanced'.

Of course, it was the same argument taking place in other cultures and nations around the world to varying degrees and in varying ways. Effectively, this was a social process that had been set into fervent motion long before Endo Shusaku in Japan first penned and published his *Silence* novel and first released the film on which it is based (1966-7), not to mention the many film adaptations of that novel in both Japan and the U.S. (and elsewhere) all the way to the last Martin Scorsese production. In fact, it was a social process initiated long before his prize-winning novella in 1955, "White Man".

Crucially, as mentioned above, it was also a social process thoroughly legitimated, authorized, and promulgated in earnest by Vatican II (1962-5), something that Endo, as a practicing Catholic in several Catholic venues, would have been keenly aware of long before writing his *Silence* novel. In fact, he had practiced many of the central Christian themes incorporated into *Silence* many times before in previous novels beginning in the 1950s, very much in line with Graham Greene's popular novels at that time (1978, 1961, 1951, 1948, 1940), someone whom Endo more than greatly admired, and that admiration was explicit and mutually expressed. This mutual admiration and respect between authors should not be underestimated as primary and powerful agents of cultural secularization.

Being a part of the Catholic Church and engaging in Catholic Christian practices himself, Endo would have certainly heard about the social and cultural pronouncements of Vatican II as discussed in local Catholic church masses, meetings and materials, declarations he most certainly viewed as a breath of fresh air from within the prison walls of a stultifying Catholic system of moral absolutes that he never truly understood and even less wholeheartedly agreed with. That's really what's happening in Endo's *Silence* book and film, increasingly so over time as the film is reprogrammed and re-adapted for follow-up versions for the upcoming generations, a kind of secularization process in high gear, so to speak.

In fact, that's what happens in ALL of Endo's books, films, and stage adaptations, that is, the questioning and turning upside down of every moral absolute contained not only in American Catholicism but, more generally, in the Christian doctrine itself, which means in the Bible itself. This fact alone places Endo's allegiance to Christianity in question or doubt, a doubt we will later appreciate as well placed. So, then, Shusaku Endo's 'Silence' novel and film cannot be properly understood from outside of the peculiar American cultural context of that time, a context partly characterized by a relentless culture-wide questioning and systematic extraction of moral absolutes from all cultural and institutional spheres, the very foundational principles of biblical Christianity itself.

Further, this part of the American cultural context was not just any contextual factor to be considered in terms of the dynamics of American cultural and social change. Quite the contrary, it sounded like the death knell of American Christian culture itself and the vulturous but fashionable secular trends so characteristic of 'modern' societies – pluralism, relativism, and secularism (kept in flight by mass media and its institutional allies) - were already circling around the gasping cultural carcass, as what had previously happened to the Christian carcass in Europe. Similar processes were also occurring in South America at the time in the name of so-called 'liberation' theology (Grenier, 2023).

Clearly, Endo was only too happy to be a part of that process and to contribute to it as much as possible, lining his pockets in the process. It could be argued that he knowingly promoted the death of Western Christian culture with literary works masked as an

innocent dialogue between Japanese Buddhism and American or Western Christianity in order to make one more palatable to the other.

In any case, as we look more closely at the Silence film to see if any themes about dissipating moral absolutes can be found, indeed, they are found in heaping proportions. For example, when Rodriguez literally hears the voice of Christ giving him permission to step on the fumie in order to stop all suffering. Christ says to Rodriguez that He understands suffering quite well and that it was, after all, part and parcel of his divine mission. Does that mean, then, that compassion for the suffering poor and exploited justifies apostasy? Does that mean that proper devotion to Christ as condoned by Christ Himself is to sacrifice everything one believes in order to show compassion for the suffering?

More to the point, does that mean it is legitimate to sacrifice or compromise the moral absoluteness of one's religious integrity in the name of proving one's ideological alignment with and compassion for the so-called 'suffering' in this world? Sometimes does one have to NOT BE a cultural Christian in order to actually BE an authentic biblical Christian? Here the image of Christ speaks to Rodriguez in ways that suggest the only way for him to be genuinely Christian is to stop being a Christian at all, and that's only acceptable due to circumstances beyond one's control, and ostensibly, after all, don't the circumstances dictate the moral rules to be followed?

The strong implication here is that it would have been more of a denial of his Christian faith for Rodriguez NOT to have saved the suffering peasant villagers by refusing to desecrate what he loved most, namely, Christ. But that's OK, after all, from a pragmatic point of view because the circumstances and conditions dictated no other viable alternative course of action. Surely, apostasy was not a course of action dictated by the moral absolutes of traditional Christianity. The only or even the best way to actualize God's love in this world was for Rodriguez to apostatize. An unlikely viable Christian proposition at best, but one that is thoroughly acceptable from a cultural point of view at that time. The message is clear: context and culture justify the moral rules, not abstract divine pronouncements in a holy book.

And that's where the second example of God's love comes into consideration. Endo puts the following words into the mouth of Rodriguez's former mentor, the great apostate Father Ferreira himself when the Japanese officials send him to assist in breaking down the will of Rodriguez:

"For love, Christ would have apostatized. Even if it meant giving up everything he had".

Does one really maintain their Christian faith by sacrificing its central core elements in the name of showing such a tremendous degree of love for suffering people? Is the choice REALLY between Rodriguez keeping his faith and 'loving' suffering people? Or, is that a moral choice choreographed and produced by liberal American film magnates for consumption and digestion by a specific national audience undergoing a massive and relentless liberalization of its beliefs and values? After all, many studies have shown that mass media is a powerful instrument in the liberalization and secularization of cultural values (see especially Grenier, 1992; Knott, 2013; Ma, 2021; West, 2017; Underwood, 2008).

6. Christ in the Fumie Talking Like Buddha?

Among other things, the voice of Christ that Rodriguez hears emerging from the fumie encourages him to desecrate:

"Trample! Trample! I more than anyone else know the pain in your foot. It was to be trampled on by men that I was born in this world." (Endo, 1969, p. 269)

It is crucial to point out that this Christ, Endo's Christ, is here preaching a kind of mercy that "bears a disturbing resemblance to the mercy of the Buddha" (Thomas, 2016, p. 3). That is to say; this is not the type of mercy which has forgiven the sins of fallen humanity even before they have been committed, as in conventional Christianity. In fact, it is not the type of mercy that even acknowledges the Christian notion of sin, for that matter. Instead, it is a mercy that forgives the irremediable emotional weakness of human beings in need of strong leaders.

The Christ in the fumie image who is calmly urging Rodriguez to "trample" away is how you talk to somebody who is believed to be so broken that they just can't do anything else because they're so weak, hopelessly weak. In other words, it's not merely curiously coincidental that in Rodriguez's "swamp" moment when he apostatizes, he hears Christ talking like Buddha. It is not so striking when considering the dominant religion of Japan was then, as it is now, Buddhism.

This Buddhist flavoring or dressing of significant moments in *Silence* comes out more clearly and explicitly when the magistrate of Nagasaki, Inoue, the architectural lord of all the vicious persecution against Christians, explains why Christianity failed to take root in Japan. The root cause of this failure was not the actions of Japanese government officials but, rather, the moral "swamp of Japan". Again, Inoue here explains that Christianity cannot take root in Japan without a "twisting and changing" of its central teachings in order to make it more agreeable or palatable to Japanese already-held religious sensibilities of Buddhism and naturalism. That means that the result of this swamp operation is Christianity's deformation to the point where it no longer exists as such, with all the strong tones of syncretistic fears this idea evokes.

Endo's Catholic Christian beliefs appear to express the murky aspect of this concern through the swamp metaphor. For example, Japanese naturalist beliefs don't appear to engage questions of transcendence. Buddhist sensibilities don't appear to deal even indirectly with matters of sin, guilt, redemption, salvation, and the like, which are so central to Christian doctrine. Human beings are "hopelessly weak", Inoue says to Rodriguez after he apostatizes, so what is needed are strong leaders like Inoue to guide them, not some kind of fictional God idea to 'save' them from illusionary damnation, whatever that is. To be sure, most of these Buddhist religious features contained in Endo's *Silence* novel and film, as well as in his other literary works, have been grossly underscored by a number of scholars (Janeira, 1970; Durfee, 1989).

7. Historical Japanese Hatred of Christianity

By the same token, character genuflection to Buddhism, it is not without coincidence nor irony that Endo chooses to name his Nagasaki magistrate "Inoue", the character through whom Endo talks about the defeat of Christianity by the 'mudswamp' of Japan mentioned earlier. Remember, this film was first released in Japan, not the United States. So, then, as a fiction novelist of some renown, social acceptance by the general Japanese population would have required Endo to import meaningful elements of Buddhism and Buddhist religious sensibilities into the *Silence* narrative in order to make it palatable to a Japanese audience. It had to be made acceptable to the cultural presuppositions and religious sensibilities of Japanese moviegoers, not to mention power structures at all institutional levels in Japan.

In fact, even minimal concerted research efforts would reveal that Buddhist criticism of Christianity in modern Japan is historically rooted in the multiple and adamantly anti-Christian writings of Inoue Enryō, real-life founder of Toyo University. What's more, these were writings that were solid intellectual 'bestsellers' in Meiji Japan, especially but not only among Buddhists (Kasahara, 1989; Kishimoto and Wakimoto, 1954; Sakurai, 1971; Okuwa, 1994; Staggs, 1983; Thelle, 1987). Throughout more than 100 writings, Enryō was at pains to state his visceral hatred for the "evil teaching" of Christianity categorically:

"I refute Christianity.... Truth is what I love; untruth is what I hate. Because Christianity misunderstands untruth as truth, because it realizes a small part of truth and takes it as the whole truth, I refute it" (Quoted in Schrimpf, 1989, p. 52).

Enryō's criticism of Christianity, which spread like wildfire throughout the power structures of Japanese society and culture, especially the hallowed halls of higher education and political power, was founded upon a fervent belief in the rational superiority of Buddhist theory over Christian theology, which he regarded as essentially "evil" and "irrational" in character. By contrast, he viewed Buddhism as a 'civilized' religion belonging to nations representing "modern" civilization much better suited to the pursuit of 'truths' in 'natural science' and 'philosophy' (Ibid.).

Rock bottom, Enryō's conception of the "evil teachings" of a largely transcendental "emotional" Christianity as being inappropriate for Japan is itself rooted in similar materialist-grounded Buddhist philosophical ideas that had been developed earlier in India and much earlier schools of Japanese Buddhism. Due partly but importantly to these differential philosophical foundational underpinnings between Buddhism and Christianity, transcendental Christian ideas and concepts were not easily acceptable in the Meiji Era of Japan's religious history (1868-1912). The same problem exhibited itself during the previous Tokugawa Era (1603-1868) when Japanese ethics had a firm Confucian character in the dominant religions at the time, Buddhism and Shintoism (Kishimoto and Wakimoto, 1954, p. 3). In other words, part of the strong tension between Japanese Buddhism and so-called 'Western' Christianity had less to do with cultural differences than antagonistic cosmological paradigms or worldviews.

8. Questions About Hollywood's Portrayal

But then, there's another equally valid interpretation that could be made to explain the presence of Buddhist elements in Endo's *Silence*, and that particular interpretation is not necessarily antagonistic to the first. The fervently anti-Christian nationalistic writings of Inoue Enryō as well as many other key Buddhist Japanese intellectuals over history, were indeed at one time the mainstay of the Japanese educational system at all levels, not to mention much of Asia itself. With this in mind, it is not by coincidence that the Catholic-baptized Shusaku Endo wrote the *Silence* novel to reflect, to some extent, his own religious

experience with Christianity in the largely unreceptive, antagonistic environment of the Japanese educational system as well as the Japanese culture itself.

More to the point, it is not by coincidence that the name attributed to the mastermind of Japanese Christian persecution by Endo in *Silence* is "Inoue", the magistrate of Nagasaki who first mentions the "swamp of Japan". It seems that Endo, the Catholic novelist, is here speaking allegorically through the mouth of the Nagasaki magistrate (himself a former Catholic) about his own difficult experience of feeling like an emotionally persecuted Christian 'outsider', if you will, treated as a 'foreigner' in his own country.

Putting a religious spin on this second interpretation proffered to explain Buddhist elements, it is perhaps appropriate to describe Endo, the novelist, as the Japanese Judas who betrays the Buddhist faith system adopted by his own country by portraying it in another country as the religious architect of terrible anti-human behavior. To his own cultural audience, the crafty Endo is speaking to the Christian hearts in Japan who might be receptive to the same message while simultaneously bowing to the dictates of Buddhism.

So, then, Shusaku Endo is not only releasing a film adaptation of his *Silence* novel in Japan but as well in America, seemingly an unenlightening historical detail until we realize the pivotal cultural implications of this fact suggested by the two interpretations offered above to explain Buddhist elements in the film and by the use of the religious term 'Judas'. More to the point in question, here it is being suggested that Endo's *Silence* book in Japan is being 'adapted' in such a way as to make it palatable or agreeable to Japanese religious sensibilities, whereas in the United States, it is being tailored to suit secular American cultural sensibilities (diversity, pluralism, etc.).

It is not beyond reason nor logic to point out that adaptation in the film medium plays a highly similar role to translation in the print medium. The strong suggestion here is that perhaps there may not be a very precise one-on-one correlation between what Endo actually wrote in a **book** word-for-word in the Japanese language and/or the translated English language **AND** what actually is spoken by characters or appears in the respective cultural **film** adaptations.

Expertise in the Japanese language is lacking, so perhaps the ramifications involved in this crucial point can best be explored on the English side of the equation. Earlier, we spoke about the central theme of moral absolutes being made questionable in the *Silence* film. For those readers even vaguely familiar with Catholicism, the role of biblically founded moral absolutes as a central organizing principle of apostolic Christianity is a front row-and-center consideration.

So, then, the question begs itself, why is a baptized-Catholic Endo compromising the moral absolutes contained in his own Catholic Christian belief system, which he supposedly professes to believe in, or is he? In another way of asking the question, why is he a kind of Catholic who really isn't Catholic, then? A fake-Catholic Japanese filmmaker? I don't think so... at least not fully. Enter the real fake-Catholic Hollywood mogul filmmaker Martin Scorsese.

8.1 Hollywood's Fake-Catholic Filmmaker

There is no space here to devote to a fully updated biographical sketch of Martin Scorsese in order to gather solid empirical evidence to support the following suggestions. Therefore, the conclusions proffered are tentative and speculative, although reasonable given the background research up to this point. Recall that Scorsese is a Catholic himself, but one who described himself in public interviews over and over again as a "lapsed Catholic", not a "regular churchgoer" (quoted in Thomas, 2016; Spadaro, 2017). By the time he met up with Endo's *Silence* novel, he had already been married and divorced several times, with various children produced in the wake of the process, all highly relevant background factors from a strictly Catholic point of view.

Very importantly, in terms of hinting at his "adaptation" orientation to novels, it must be emphasized that he had already adapted another famous book along relativist philosophical lines titled, "The Last Temptation of Christ", demonstrating quite categorically in the film a fervent and ready willingness to sacrifice whatever absolute moral principles of Christianity could be adapted to film. Believe it or not, among many other undermining portrayals, in this book, Jesus is portrayed as entertaining, maritally connecting with Mary Magdalene while simultaneously actually earning a living helping to make wooden crosses on which the Romans will later hang Christians! (Jacobson, 1988).

Surely, this kind of underlying cosmology is emphatically NOT where Endo, the Catholic novelist, was coming from in the *Silence* film, indeed, if ever he was a diehard Christian at all. Endo, in his novel, is trying to show how the Japanese teachings of Buddhism and naturalism (the "swamp") are not agreeable to the moral absolutes of God, death, guilt, and sinful, fallen man in Christianity. So, then, Christianity gets "twisted and turned" and transformed by interaction with this "swamp", underscoring and warning against the risks and dangers of syncretism.

By contrast, Scorsese 'adapts' Endo's novel to film in such a way as to promote the 'swampy' effects of pluralism, relativism, materialism, and secularism upon the Christian culture of American society. By doing so, Scorsese is on the front line of a spiritual war side by side and shoulder to shoulder with secular scholars and liberal mass media stooges consciously and actively promoting through the powerful medium of cinematographic film the effective dilution and extraction of moral absolutes from the nooks and crannies of all institutions in American society and culture.

Here the social function of mass mediated communications of meaning under these conditions is to put the ethical system of the population to sleep, more or less. With an ethical system effectively anaesthetized, they can be entertained technologically during the ethical extraction process. The viewing population is less likely to notice the carefully crafted and gradual process taking place by which biblically founded ***moral absolutes of meaning are being removed from social life.***

This may be a yawning revelation in those cultures which have always been and continue to be antagonistic to biblical Christianity by worshipping at the secular altar of the many 'ism' foundational philosophies just mentioned above. But it certainly was a sacramental religious crime against biblically founded Christian beliefs, values, and moral principles at the time Endo wrote *Silence*. This is why it's vitally important when Scorsese is heard repeating through many live interviews about the film that there are "many ways of viewing God". If this is not an anti-absolute self-declaration of moral relativism, then the sweet flavor of cotton-candy moral or philosophical relativism has never existed (Spadaro, 2017; Martin, 2016).

This kind of statement betrays Scorsese's cosmological orientation toward the adaptation of novels into films and fits very nicely into a Buddhist worldview. What is Scorsese's attitude toward that murky Buddhist "swamp" of Japanese sensibilities that don't allow Christianity to firmly take root in Japan, so the Nagasaki magistrate Inoue tells a downhearted Rodriguez after he apostates? In his "swamp" moment, Rodriguez hears the voice of Christ coming from the fumie telling him, basically, and I'm paraphrasing here to caricature Scorsese's attitude better: "Ok. OK. OK. I understand that you're in pain. You're weak, and so are the others. Hopelessly weak. Just trample on me and end all the suffering. Trample away. Do it, and let's not waste any more time!" What's the message here coming from Christ? Answer: "For this, I was born; for this, I came into this world...."

Then Rodriguez conforms and steps on the fumie, and voila! The cock crows in the background. The skies don't darken, and the heavens don't open. A Christian peasant villager is beheaded, and we hear cicadas chorusing on as if nothing of any profound significance has happened. Nature's behavior is disturbingly 'normal', uneventful until it breaks its deafening uneventfulness to comment on Rodriguez's apostasy, thoroughly unlike how nature behaved when Christ died on the cross. That's when the cock crows and that comes from Endo's book, not Scorsese's "adaptation". Rodriguez still tries to convince himself that he's a diehard Christian who just had a moment of weakness, but he is tremendously unsatisfied with that justification. That moment is precisely when the Nagasaki governor Inoue offers him a "swamp" interpretation of his apostasy.

Endo's book is clear about how manifestly tragic Rodriguez's life becomes after he apostatizes, but this is ***not in Scorsese's film at all.*** Instead, what we see and hear in the film about this issue is how Scorsese defines himself when he is asked about his own faith in many live interviews after the film is released. Among his many fluid responses: "I'm a lapsed Catholic, but I'm a Catholic", "There are many pathways to perceiving God, but I am most comfortable as a Catholic", and "a bad Catholic, but still a Catholic" (Spadaro, 2017). Here Scorsese really doesn't appear to understand what the cock crowing reveals about his own view of Inoue's "swamp" explanation for priestly apostasy and the failure of Christianity in Japan (Eamon, 2015).

Why is all this talk about Endo's versus Scorsese's views on the "swamp" moment in the *Silence* film so important? It is important because an accurate 'contextual' understanding of Endo's book and film cannot be secured without it, which means it is absolutely crucial to a proper understanding of the American cultural impact of this film. Even a rudimentary socio-functional analysis would clearly reveal that mass media serve social structural functions in any society, as do other social institutions.

The author of *The Silence* novel is definitely a friend of Catholic Christianity, at least at the beginning of his literary career, and uses literary art to sound a warning bell about the real dangers of syncretism that occur when Christianity is made to conform to the dictates of culture rather than allowed to itself shape culture unadulterated by that very same culture.

In the *Silence* novel and film, the 'swamp' of Japanese culture transforms, twists, and turns every part of Christianity in order to make it agreeable to Japanese Buddhist cultural sensibilities until it is no longer recognizable as it was prior to cultural contact. That was Endo's message in the book, but judging from Scorsese's interview comments mentioned above, that was not the organizing principle brought into its adaptation to film. What's the point here? Answer: in the West, they have their own cultural 'swamp'. In fact, the fact that such a 'Christian' film could be produced in the West at all tells us how far Western Christianity had actually fallen by that point in time. In the way of speaking, surely it can be viewed as the allegorical cultural apostate in Endo's *Silence*.

9. Some Catholic Reflections

As the Nagasaki magistrate persecutor reminded Rodriguez immediately after his apostasy, Christianity really doesn't have the ability or power to take root in Japan because healthy spiritual plants cannot really take root in the dark, murky, polluted 'swamp' waters of Japanese culture. Obviously, this assertion has tremendous consequences for an authentic Christian understanding of the apostolic mission. Despite the existence of well-intentioned local converts to Christianity, it slowly dawned on Rodriguez that they are never able to fully comprehend its true message nor respect its main dogmas. This was his true *crisis of faith*, so to speak.

If anything at all, and notwithstanding the dogmatic claims of evangelical Christianity, this suggests the true futility of mission, just as Inoue said to Rodriguez. Ferreira, the original apostate, confirms exactly this point when he arrives on the scene of Rodriguez's persecution to explain his own apostasy. The severely negative picture of the Christian 'mission' conveyed by these events in the film doesn't go unnoticed by American moviegoers, even more so by foreign moviegoers sitting in cinemas around the world, many of them intensely antagonistic if not hostile to American society and culture if not the Christian doctrine itself in any form. It is perhaps foolishly naïve to think otherwise.

9.1 Fully In Line With Christian Doctrine? Not Quite

In terms of renunciation of the Christian faith, Silence seems to be not so much in line with traditional Catholicism nor general Christian doctrine, for that matter. For example, when Kichijiro suddenly arrives one day at the dwelling place assigned to Rodriguez by Inoue after his apostasy, begging and pleading for forgiveness and confession, Rodriguez feels charitable enough to hear that confession and bless him. It is another cultural view of compassion, to be sure, not American nor Christian nor Catholic Christian. Certainly, this is not something that fellow priests nor traditional Catholic Christians would find acceptable in the real concrete religious world.

In fact, it would be considered downright sacrilegious that one could, in one moment, deny one's faith and all that one loves only later in the next moment to actively practice one of its dearest sacraments. Clearly, the film, in these moments, portrays such a fervent Buddhist conception of human weakness that it almost makes a joke out of both priesthood and the sacrament of ordination. At the very least, it relativizes the whole notion of the meaning of priesthood, if not apostasy itself, by reducing them to situational factors or circumstances.

Another idea wholly foreign to traditional Catholicism or Christianity, in general, is the conception of grace that comes across in Silence. When Rodriguez apostatizes, it appears to be a decision motivated by compassion for the horrific persecution and suffering of others. So, then, how can Rodriguez be considered a despicable 'non-Christian apostate', if you will, since he is expressing a charitable desire to 'save' others from torture and death? So, how can anyone in their right mind consider THAT motive to be sinful? Evidently, this seems to suggest that 'sin' itself is relative to circumstances, conditions, context, or other cultural factors within which it takes place, not some kind of Genesis-based state of fallen humanity. By logical inference, therefore, it does not appear to be a violation of any moral absolute law as in the ten commandments, for example.

In fact, here, the definition of sin is not Christian at all, despite the charitable motive fueling apostasy or any other 'sin' (love thy human neighbor, for example). The philosophy of grace here does not come from God but, rather, from the Buddhist concept of irreparable human weakness, it seems. It has nothing to do with humanity's irrevocable 'fallen' nature in Catholicism or Christianity biblically understood. Sin born out of love or compassion or charity or... is still just that in Christianity, namely, sin.

Rodriguez's ongoing interrogation and dialogue with God pre- and post- apostasy confirms this last point beyond doubt. Really, from within Catholicism or any kind of Christianity worth its salt, so to speak, who is Rodriguez to question God at all simply based on Christian principles alone? In other words, the very question itself does not emanate from biblical Christianity. In Silence, he tells God: "Lord, I resented your silence". The statement is even less Christian than the question. God answers, and Rodriguez responds,

"I was not silent. I suffered beside you".
 "But you told Judas to go away: What thou dost do quickly. What happened to Judas?"
 "I did not say that. Just as I told you to step on the plaque, so I told Judas to do what he was going to do. For Judas was in anguish as you are now" (Endo, 1969, p. 297).

In a manner of speaking, the implication here is that God would Himself sacrifice His own principles in order to guide Rodriguez emotionally to commit apostasy with some kind of a comfortable, reassuring feeling by virtue of having achieved a higher good

for the greatest number of those suffering horrible persecution, including himself (supposedly). But again, clearly, this is not God's language of moral absolutes, at least not explicitly specified as such in the Bible from the Old Testament forward.

When Christ talked about sin, He did not relativize it to situation or culture or context or social circumstances or anything else. It may make Rodriguez (and moviegoers and novel readers and others) feel better or provide some consolation to believe that God approved of his actions in order to end the suffering of innocents. But it was sinful human behavior nonetheless, from a strict biblical Christian point of view.

There is no sin justifiable by love or compassion for others, not in the Catholic communion nor in Protestant Christianity, generally speaking. This is the case because there is no sanctity that is achieved through sin. Yes, often times it does happen that human beings learn from their sins, from their moments of weakness. They can correct mistakes committed against God or against their Christian faith during trials and tribulations, problems and troubles in life. But the highest principles of your own faith system are not sacrificed out of practical expediency, even during severe experiences that cause crises of faith. It is precisely in those very moments that the metal of true faith is tested for strength, endurance, and authenticity.

It goes without saying that not every believer is equally unshakably strong under the most trying circumstances. This is where the original apostate Ferreira went wrong in his own apostasy, and now the Japanese enlist his assistance to encourage Rodriguez's own apostasy. The **assault on absolute moral principles** starts from the beginning of Ferreira's talk when he tells Rodriguez to listen attentively to the loud and ceaseless, horrifyingly painful voices of innocent peasant Christians hanging upside down in the pit near him. Now, finally, we get to the pointed reason why Ferreira apostatized and the title for Endo's narrative, namely the assumed 'silence' of God while he moaned and groaned in agonizing pain and suffering. Ferreira tells Rodriguez to

"Listen! I was put in here and hear the voices of those people for whom **God did nothing. God did not do a single thing.** I prayed with all my strength; but **God did nothing**" (Ibid., 266)

However, what did Ferreira, or Rodriguez, for that matter, expect? Did they expect that the skies would open up and God's hand would come thundering out in bright blinding light to free the persecuted and smite the persecutors? To say that "God did nothing" says more about the poor metal of Ferreira's (and Rodriguez's) Christian faith than it says about the imputed personality of the Christian God. And, like it or not, it says a lot more about the people who write scripts like that. Surely, true believers, strong believers, believe that God is always present even when appearing absent and demands our uncompromising trust. This much the Christian Bible makes perfectly clear.

This is the paradox of Christ's message to humanity. Millions die in major wars, children die from disease, famine, and abuse of every sort, evil doers wreak havoc upon human beings and prosper in the process, and the guards outside Rodriguez's prison cell tell jokes and laugh loudly at the persecuted Christians. The persecuted will all be comforted, the Christian faith proclaims, but not necessarily here and now in this life, and the wicked will also be subject to divine judgment and punished.

Fictional depictions of priests in novels or in cinematic films, as much as through any other technologically sophisticated mass media, are anything but neutral in such depictions regardless of the best and most innocent intentions of authors or producers, particularly when those priestly characters are created through the eyes of cultural and/or religious foreigners, nor to mention those authors or producers who may be less than ardent Christian faith followers themselves.

Hackneyed stereotypes of frail or weak priests caving into a great variety of sordid sinful worldly temptations from sex to booze to illicit drugs to debauchery to power to anything else humanly imaginable abound in such depictions for a reason. It is much easier to portray such characters on film than to get into the cosmological crises of the soul among social members trapped in a culture fast losing its spiritual beliefs. If priests are struggling in their faith with or against things that can be seen, it makes for a good narrative by film, certainly. But the unseen inner life of the priest's soul is much more difficult to portray on film, whether believed or not.

When priests are portrayed over and over again in *Silence* as denizens of the dark, murky waters of a cultural swamp compromising the highest moral principles of their own Catholic and Christian faith in every way and for every reason imaginable, the widespread negative social effects within a largely Protestant culture are palpable and considerable. One of those negative social effects is to instill doubt in the popular mind, in the mind of the moviegoing public, not only about the character and integrity of priests themselves but also Christianity itself.

Lastly, another negative social effect is to relativize Christian moral principles by reducing them to material or physical exigencies or worldly matters. Over time, the absolute divine moral principles contained in the Bible are diluted and replaced by so-called advanced 'modern' secular interests often defined by scholarly professionals employing their own ideological agendas. It is clear that these social effects or functions can occur at the structural, institutional level of society quite apart from the intention or awareness of authors, Endo included.

Footnotes

1

Pleurisy is a physical condition in which the two large thin layers of tissues that separate the lungs from the chest wall (known scientifically as the 'pleura') become inflamed, which causes continual sharp pains during the breathing process and typically worsens over time by combining with other medical complications. Each 'pleural' layer of tissue serves the breathing function properly without pain under normal conditions. One tissue layer wraps around the outside of the lungs, while the other one lines the inner chest wall. The space between these two tissue layers is usually filled with a liquid that allows them to glide past each other as the lungs expand and contract during normal breathing. But under conditions of pleurisy, these two tissues swell and become inflamed, resulting in extremely painful scraping up against each other like sand paper during the breathing process.

Since breathing, coughing, or sneezing worsens the pain, the individual quite naturally tries to minimize exhaling and inhaling, which, in turn, causes constant shortness of breath. Any upper body movement amplifies the pain and extends it to the shoulders or back. Although pleurisy can be caused by several different factors, such as rib trauma and autoimmune disorder, the most common causes are tuberculosis (TB) and viral (like influenza) and bacterial (like pneumonia) infection. This lengthy, detailed description of Endo's pleurisy illness is an essential component of adequately understanding his struggle not only with Catholic religious beliefs in general but also with Christianity as a faith system in particular.

2

For example, some of his writings mention Kakure Kirishitans, a modern term that refers to a member of the Catholic Church in Japan that was forced to go underground during the early Edo period in the early 17th century and who preferred to worship in secret rooms in private homes, very similar to early apostolic practices (although for different reasons, obviously). These Kakure are more popularly known as 'Hidden Christians'. Over time, however, all the Catholic Christian figures of the saints and the Virgin Mary, as well as the prayers themselves, were adapted to fit Buddhism religious tenets and beliefs.

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