Select Bibliography on Interpretation of Shusaku Endo’s Silence

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Endo’s theological interpretation of Jesus Christ, based on the Gospels, and with a view to explaining Christ to a Japanese non-Christian audience.


A historical novel concerning cultural clashes encountered in a diplomatic mission of Hasekura Tsunenaga to Mexico and Spain in the 17th century. In 1613 a small group of Samurai join a group, including a Spanish missionary, that travels to Mexico, Spain and eventually Rome.

Selected Secondary Works on Endo’s Silence

(See also the section that follows which focuses on Martin Scorsese’s film adaptation of Silence)

N.B. Since the announcement of the Scorsese film adaptation the novel version of Silence has produced a renewed interest in both the theological and literary arenas. The entries below are selected to represent some of these differing perceptions and do not pretend to be an exhaustive, comprehensive list.


Uses the same interpretative structure to make quite similar points in the article above.


While not dealing in any explicit way with Endo’s Silence Chauvet’s theological reflections on “silence” in terms of language and culture do help in fleshing out a fuller framework to consider the key theme of “silence” in Endo’s novel.


Looks at Endo’s Silence through perspectives offered by Buddhist thought and contemporary hermeneutical theory. The “blue eyes” of Jesus as envisaged by Fr. Rodrigues in Endo’s novel serve as “not only as the fount and guarantor of meaning and action, but also as a symbol of the oppositions that inform his view of the ‘Oriental other’. For example, the beautiful blue-eyed face of Christ imagined by Rodrigues contrasts starkly with the yellow ‘Japanese’ eyes of Kichijiro, an ugly Judas-like figure who ultimately betrays the priest.” (p. 160)


Acknowledgments Introduction: Silence in the World Mark W. Dennis (Texas Christian University, USA) and Darren J. N. Middleton (Texas Christian University, USA) Part One: Background and Reception 1. Before Silence: Stumbling Along with Rodrigues and Kichijiro Kevin M. Doak (Georgetown University, USA) 2. Silence on Opposite Shores: Critical Reactions to the Novel in Japan and the West Van C. Gessel (Brigham Young University, USA) 3. The 'Formality' of the fumie?: A Re-consideration of the Role of the fumie in Silence Mark Williams (University of Leeds, UK) 4. Endo and Greene's Literary
Theology Darren J. N. Middleton (Texas Christian University, USA) 5. Charting Endo's Catholic Literary Aesthetic Mark Bosco, S.J. (Loyola University, Chicago, USA) 6. Forbidden Ships to Chartered Tours: Endo, Apostasy, and Globalization Christopher B. Wachal (Marquette University, Milwaukee, USA) Part Two: Christianity and Buddhism 7. The Catholic Shift East: The Case of Japan Christal Whelan (Independent Scholar and Filmmaker) 8. Agape Unbound in Silence and Deep River Elizabeth Cameron Galbraith (St. Olaf College, USA) 9. Discerning the Marshland of This World: Silence from a Japanese Buddhist Perspective Dennis Hirota (Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Japan) 10. A Buddhist Reading of the Blue Eyes of Jesus in Silence Mark W. Dennis (Texas Christian University, USA) Part Three: Endo's Theology 11. Literature as Dohansha in Silence Jeff Keuss (Seattle Pacific University, USA) 12. Is Abjection a Virtue?: Silence and the Trauma of Apostasy Dennis Washburn (Dartmouth College, USA) 13. 'And Like the Sea God was Silent': Multivalent Water Imagery in Silence Frances McCormack (National University of Ireland, Galway, Republic of Ireland) 14. Laughter Out of Place: Risibility as Resistance and Hidden Transcript in Silence Jacqueline Bussie (Concordia College, USA) Part Four: Teaching Silence 15. Silence in the Classroom John Kaltner (Rhodes College, USA) Part Five: Later Adaptations 16. Silence, a play Steven Dietz 17. Silence, a film Martin Scorsese Contributors for Further Reading Index.


Fujimura is a bi-cultural Japanese—American Christian convert and artist who probes at length the novel for hidden positive Christian themes of evangelization, and thus encourages a much deeper reflection on many of the key events in the novel, especially the notions of “apostasy” and “silence.” F. observes that approaching “Endo is like reading a mystery novel in which many of the clues prove to misdirect the reader” (p. 27) and throughout the book F. helps the non-Japanese reader understand some of the key “clues” from Japanese culture that Endo uses in his novel. In the final section “The Art of Brokenness” F. offers a key theological insight on the Eucharistic elements of wheat and grapes that are “trampled” to make bread and wine for the Lord’s Supper which “provides a narrative and metaphorical journey into any experience of brokenness” as well as an important place of healing from life’s traumas “in which bread is broken and wine is shared” (p. 205).
Reviewed by James T. Bretzke, S.J. in *Theological Studies* (forthcoming)


Heidelberger draws comparisons between Gutierrez and Endo.


Lakeland uses a number of novels, including Endo’s *Silence* to consider how these can support human imagination in probing more deeply the mystery of God which goes beyond earthly horizons. Lakeland posits that this sort of attention to religious imagination in literature may aid in bringing a secular mind to consider this mystery in ways that more traditional theological approaches tend to fail with this particular audience.


Magister is a well-known arch-conservative lay Italian “Vaticanista” (journalist who focuses on the Holy See) and constant critique of Pope Francis and his papacy. In this
blog posting he uses the recent release of Scorsese’s movie *Silence* to critique a recent article in *La Civiltà Cattolica* on evangelization in Japan which (mistakenly in Magister’s view) focuses too much “on common human demand for religious values.”


Considers some of the issues of inculturation in a post-modern and post-colonial world, focusing on insights from Endo’s novels, especially *Silence* and *Deep River*.

Matata is an African missionary priest who at this writing was connected with the Oriens Institute for Religious Research in Tokyo.


Argues that Endo’s work was rightly viewed as hostile to Catholicism and reflects a 1960’s existentialism that has “Orwell’s Winston Smith being Rodrigues’s most significant literary antecedent. The Portuguese priest may not come to love his equivalent of Big Brother but, after interrogation and the threat of torture, he does submit to the intransigent political power of his day and willingly serves it.”

Roy Peachey is a doctoral student at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, Melbourne and teaches at Woldingham School in the UK.


A close look at Rodrigues as revealed in the novel, especially in connection with the character Kichiro and the events post-apostasy detailed in the “Appendix” of the novel which contains the “diary” of Dutch merchant to Japan.

Jesuit priest Raymond Schroth repeats the common identification of Endo’s Rodrigues with Graham Greene’s whiskey priest in the latter’s *The Power and the Glory*, but notes some differences (which I believe he mistakes): “Endo asks whether the Western and Eastern image of God can ever be reconciled.” P. 191-2. He states that the Jesuit missionaries in Japan “virtually court martyrdom as if it were a seventeenth-century Catholic version of the Congressional Medal. But rather than spiritual triumph, they experience a terrible shame and learn another kind of spiritual lesson: that maybe this whole hundred years of sacrifice has not been a good idea. Perhaps it is not even God’s will.” P. 192. Schroth posits that Endo’s upbringing, marked by betrayal from his parents’ divorce and childhood experiences helped him “develop his own felt image of Christ, not as the triumphant judge of Western Christology but as one who suffers and forgives.” P. 192. Schroth concludes “*Silence* is one of the most depressing novels I have ever read. But I’ve read it three times.” P. 193.

A wide-ranging, scattered, condemnatory essay of Endo’s *Silence*, Scorsese’s film adaptation, and a range of other punching bags. Snow equates Endo’s novel with the 1960’s “Death of God” theology and castigates the emotion of “empathy” that she sees as the prominent flaw in the work. “*Silence* is an anachronism a projection of the modern mind, a hallucination of an anxious, confused, and codependent imagination. It is a story dreamed up by Endō himself, a troubled twentieth-century Catholic, which attracted the attention of Martin Scorsese, another troubled, long-lapsed cradle Catholic. … In a world without God, the new commandment of empathy might have been foreseen. Once God has been pronounced dead and the loyalty we owe him void, the question of what we owe to others and what we can expect from them becomes urgent. Unable to locate our life’s meaning in God and his eternity, we seek it in our relationships with other people. This is the eventuality the Death of God theologians anticipated: a horizontal, desacralized world that has broken down every barrier to inclusion, a world in which, undistracted by an outgrown God, we can finally give our full attention to one another.”

Patricia Snow is a freelance writer in New Haven, Connecticut and a frequent contributor to conservative Catholic journals.


Considers whether “abjection” can be understood as a genuine virtue, and whether this then might be a key to interpreting Rodrigues’ “apostasy” as “conversion” in Endo’s *Silence*. Washburn repeats many of the points he had made in his earlier 2007 essay “The Poetics of Conversion and the Problem of Translation in Endo Shusaku’s *Silence.*”


While Washburn does make many helpful observations about the text and the understandings of the struggles that both Rodrigues and Endo himself faced with the conflict between Christianity and its cultural expressions, Washburn does “miss” many of the subtler points of the novel, especially Rodrigues’ own pilgrimage to truer
identification with Jesus Christ and the core of genuine Christianity as it might be inculcated in a land like Japan. His final sentences, though, do hold true: “The silence Rodrigues experiences is a textual aporia. It is a marker of what cannot be translated; it is a textual supplement that functions poetically to describe the complex dynamics of the experience of conversion.” (p. 363)


Sustained reflection on the supposed notion of “betrayal” in Shusaku Endo’s Silence.

Works on Martin Scorsese’s film adaptation of Silence


Interviews with Martin Scorsese


Martin, James, S.J. “Creating Silence: an Interview with Martin Scorsese.” America (December 19-26, 2016) https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2016/12/06/exclusive-martin-scorsese-discusses-his-faith-his-struggles-his-films-and


Selected Secondary Works on Martin Scorsese’s film adaptation of Silence

N.B. The film occasioned a good deal of response across the theological and cultural spectrum. The entries below are selected to represent these differing perceptions and do not pretend to be an exhaustive, comprehensive list.

A rather critical appraisal of Martin Scorsese’s film adaptation and of the positive reception by many of the movie: His Grace opines “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.”

Various shortened versions of this interview are posted to a number of other ecclesial blog sites.


Detweiler served as a missionary in Japan and his piece is carefully done in paying close attention to the complexities of the characters, especially that of Kichijiro: “Kichijiro is the face of the Judas that resides within each and every one of us. He becomes the foil upon which Silence’s key questions emerge. Is forgiveness available even to those who betray friends and family? Father Rodrigues must confront the spirit of Judas residing within himself and accept that grace extends to even the most deplorable humans.”


Greydanus, the film critic of the conservative *National Catholic Register*, gives a largely unsympathetic and critical review of the portrayal of Rodrigues in the film, and he contrasts this with a “true” martyr, Mokichi: “Not long after, Mokichi refuses an apostasy test and is sentenced to a ghastly crucifixion in the surf, slowly overwhelmed by the incoming tide. Toward the end, as villagers and executioners keep a mute vigil, Mokichi raises his voice and sings a plaintive *Tantum Ergo* (the last two verses of St. Thomas Aquinas’ Eucharistic hymn *Pange Lingua*). In a story of a long defeat, here is a privileged moment of grace. Here, for all with ears to hear, God is not silent.”

However, in a follow up reflection Greydanus does allow that perhaps there might be an alternative “reading” of the film: “Silence is many things: an indictment of Western imperialism and cultural chauvinism, a jeremiad for the ruthless ingenuity of Japanese cruelty, a hymn to Japanese martyrs and a tribute to hidden Christians. Thinking about it over the last several months, I confess, I’ve gone back and forth on what I think of the climax. The cock crow, among other things, clearly frames Rodrigues’ act as a betrayal.
Is it Jesus he betrays? Could he possibly have heard the voice of Jesus at the climax, and what would it mean if he did? However we answer these questions, we shouldn’t answer them too quickly.’ From his Apostasy and Ambiguity: ‘Silence’ Asks Hard Questions About Faith and Persecution” National Catholic Register (February 11, 2017) http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/apostasy-and-ambiguity-silence-asks-hard-questions-about-faith-and-persecution (accessed 2/11/2017 11:16:16 AM)/


Typical of any number of very conservative reactions to Scorsese’s film and its portrayal of the struggles of the Jesuit missionaries: “The modern world has a problem with martyrs. People cannot understand the glory of their witness for Christ. Modern man would rather try to find some justification behind the anguished decision of those who deny the Faith. Such is the case of Martin Scorsese’s latest film “Silence.” It is a tale about this second category of non-martyrs—of whom Our Lord said: “But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:33).”


Connects Silence with some of Scorsese’s other films, as well as questions of what constitutes “faith” in the light of contemporary struggles, whether at the time of Christ, Galileo, or 17th century Japan. “How eager we are to spread the truth, as we understand it. How suspicious and vicious we become when our established truth is challenged by another one. And how convinced we are that despite all, the truth will out, and set us free.”


Thoughtfully done assessment of the complexity of the themes of the novel and the movie. “Silence is the kind of film that cuts at everyone’s self-perceptions, including my own. I haven’t been able to shake it, because I need to remember — now, frankly, more than ever — that I am not able nor responsible to save the world, let alone myself. How the world changes is a giant, cosmic mystery. To grow too far from that and become hardened in my own belief is a Silence is beautiful, unsettling, and one of the finest religious movies ever made - danger: I grow complacent and deaf, too willing to push others away. In Silence, nobody is Christ but Christ himself. Everyone else is a Peter or a
Judas, a faltering rejecter, for whom there may be hope anyway. What Scorsese has accomplished in adapting Endô’s novel is a close reminder that the path to redemption lies through suffering, and that it may not be I who must save the world so much as I am the one who needs saving.”