Select Bibliography on Interpretation of Shusaku Endo’s Silence

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Works by Endo Shusaku Related to Silence

Books by Endo

N.B. This is NOT a comprehensive list of Endo’s works, but only those that have a more direct bearing on Silence and the related themes treated in this book.


Traces the stories of four Japanese tourists who come to India and the Ganges River for various reasons that have aspects of a religious pilgrimage. In this sense this final novel
of Endo fits in well with many of his earlier works, especially *Silence*, *Samurai*, and *A Life of Jesus*.


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.

**Articles by Endo**


*Supplied Abstract:* “Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo still uses a pencil rather than a typewriter or even a pen because he likes to feel what he is writing. Endo, a Roman Catholic, writes novels that tell of the frequently bleak search for salvation through God. This differs from the theme of the novels of his Nobel prizewinning compatriot, Kenzaburo Oe, which Endo sees as being 'salvation without God.' However both men are equally distrustful of the entire Japanese establishment. Endo, who is 71, is extremely pessimistic and fears the consequences were Japan ever to become isolated again.

**Historical and/or Complementary Works on Themes Related to Silence**

This is a 568 page book which compiles, annotates, indexes and cross-references resources in the principal Western languages of English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish which focus on East Asia (principally China, Japan, and Korea) in the primary areas of philosophy and religious studies, with supporting resources in theology, history, culture, and related social sciences. The bibliography is organized both thematically and geographically, and the index gives not only author's and subject's names, but includes a wide range of topics and sub-topics as well. A notable additional feature of this bibliography is the inclusion of extensive Internet-based resources, such as a wide variety of web-sites, discussion lists, electronic texts, virtual libraries, online journals and related materials which allow for easy further research.

*Focus of the Sections and Sub-sections*

The initial section of the bibliography treats general and/or miscellaneous works on philosophy or religion in Asia as a whole, i.e., without particular reference to one of the specific themes or geographical areas treated in the other sections. This section also lists a number of resources concerned with the theme of the inculturation or contextualization of Christianity into the various areas of Asia and Asian life.

The next major section of the bibliography concentrates on the major religious and philosophical traditions of East Asia, namely, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Each of these sub-sections begins with a listing of primary sources in translation of the principal sacred texts, and then moves on to a listing of secondary resources, divided according to further specializations of the individual tradition (e.g., Zen Buddhism or Neo-Confucianism), followed in turn by works dealing with inter-religious dialogue and/or interaction with the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Following treatment of these three major religious traditions of East Asia there are separate sections dealing the Chinese and/or Confucian Understanding of Religion, Business and Economic Ethics in East Asia, and Human Rights in the East Asian Context, and Asian Feminist Philosophy and/or Theology. These sections in turn are followed by a geographical breakdown of China, Japan, and Korea, and these three geographical areas are further sub-divided into religious thematic areas.


Increased interest in the so-called "globalization of ethics" has led to a number of studies which utilize various hermeneutical and communicative theories to sketch out viable paradigms for developing a fundamental Christian ethics as a whole, as well as its various
components such as moral reasoning, which together would be capable of entering into and maintaining such discourse. The accent of most of these studies falls on the universalizability of ethical discourse and scant attention has been given to the cultural particularity of each and every ethos and ethical system. This article briefly rehearses the principal elements of the concerns raised by the globalization of ethics and then focuses on the particularity of culture using insights from both cultural anthropology and inculturation. The Confucian context of Korea is employed to illustrate some of the issues raised by greater attention to cultural particularity.


A principal task for the discipline of moral theology in the twenty-first century will be to engage the challenge of developing a cross-cultural ethics which will recognize first that a certain plurality of views on important moral concepts such as virtue, duty, the common good, the natural law, etc. is a positive value in itself, rather than an obstacle to be overcome, side-stepped, or obliterated, and second, that a process of cross-cultural dialogue based on mutual respect for the various cultures will facilitate the cultivation of the richness of this moral pluralism. If such an approach is adopted and followed then ethical pluralism itself can be transformed and we shall be able to move from a pluralism of "co-existence" in which several moral outlooks exist along-side one another, and whose primary moral claim is for mutual tolerance, to a healthier pluralism whose central value is better expressed by the metaphor of "cross-fertilization." Through ethical cross-fertilization a fuller understanding of the richness and complexity of the moral world would develop both within individual cultures as well as across cultures as well as to help correct some persistent and tenacious problems connected with the darker side of any culture's moral world-view and ethical values and practices.


This essay begins with a brief discussion of what “cross-cultural ethics” is and how “cross-fertilization,” can help students come together to discover not only the ethical perspectives of the cultural "other," but to become more deeply aware of how their own “global pre-scientific convictions” (Rahner) and Fundamental Values & Root Paradigms (Turner, Douglas, Geertz, et al.) shape their ethical worldviews. Seen in this context pluralism can be a positive resource rather than a threat to an objective understanding of morality. Taiwanese theologian C.S. Song’s stages of dialogue are briefly analyzed and the essay concludes with a reflection on a “Pathways to Spiritual Wisdom” course team-taught with Tendzin Choegyal, the 15th Ngari Rinpoche and the younger brother of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. The final endnote provides the URL to a mixed media cross-cultural Power Point presentation used in the beginning of the course.

This article outlines the graduate course in which Endo’s *Silence* is used. Recent discussion concerning the globalization of ethics and the prospects for a common morality, as well as related issues such as inculturation, pluralism, and multi-culturalism all provide a challenging context for critical reflection on how religious ethics can and should be done in these universities, theological centers and seminaries. This article outlines both some of the major concerns raised in teaching ethics from cross cultural, ecumenical, and inter religious perspectives in the United States, as well as developing a coherent methodology which is grounded in the theological tradition of Christian ethics, but which seeks to integrate these different perspectives.


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.


Gives a quite readable historical account of the introduction and development of the Catholic missions in Japan. In the Epilogue he provides a brief analysis of Endo’s “mudswamp” metaphor in the context of what Japanese social critic Shichihei Yamamoto terms “Japanism,” which postulates that the Japanese are not a-religious nor anti-religious, but that they tend not to commit themselves to any particular religion.


Originally written in 1959 as a handbook to introduce Japan to newly arrived Catholic missionaries it has been expanded for a larger audience.


Considers several issues involved with “indigenization” (what Catholic theologians usually term “inculturation”) in the Japanese context.


_Description of contents_: The Beginning of Heaven and Earth -- The Evil fruit cast to Middle Heaven -- The Division of Deusu's body for the salvation of humankind -- The King's death -- The Tribulations of Santa Maruya -- The Five mysteries of the morning -- A Nationwide search -- Yorotetsu captures the Holy One -- Up Karuwaruyu Hill -- Money
bedazzled -- The Kirinto -- The Holy One's selection -- Establishment of the officials -- The Destruction of our world.
From a universal religion the Tenchi constructs a system of beliefs entirely Japanese in spirit. Its earliest context was in all likelihood the encounter between a storyteller and a group of Kakure Kirishitan [Hidden Christians].

Selected Secondary Works on Endo’s *Silence*

(See also the separate 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.

Articles on Endo Shusaku


*Author supplied abstract*: “This article examines Endo Shusaku's (1923-1996) Chinmoku (*Silence*, 1966), a novel based on the history of Christian persecution in seventeenth century Japan. Like many other Japanese Christians, Endo struggled throughout his life attempting to reconcile Christianity and Japan. Endo's solution was to transform Christianity into something acceptable to Japanese religious traditions. In *Silence*, Endo reshaped "paternal" (strict) Catholicism into a "maternal" (forgiving) religion of love. This change has triggered much debate. Some have praised it as a humane inculturation, while others criticized it as a distortion of orthodox teaching. This raises an old yet unresolved question: what is the essence of Christianity?"


Bretzke, James T., S.J. “Giving Voice to Shusaku Endo’s Novel Use of Zen Ascetical Spirituality.” Catholicism, Literature and the Arts: 1850 – Present International Conference, 5-7 July 2017, Durham, UK  Script: [https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/HearingSilenceInEndoScript.pdf](https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/HearingSilenceInEndoScript.pdf) and Power Point at [https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/HearingSilenceInEndo.ppsx](https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/HearingSilenceInEndo.ppsx)


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


Critiques Endo’s novel in light of Pope John Paul II’s 1993 Encyclical on Fundamental Moral Theology Veritatis splendor for the supposed violation of an absolute moral norm forbidding apostasy. Cavanaugh concludes that “Compassion has become a deadly virtue in our society that can no longer make sense of suffering. We have lost the root meaning of the word compassion, meaning to "suffer with." A follower of Christ may be able to set individual suffering within a larger drama of the confrontation of the Kingdom of God with the principalities and powers that killed Jesus Christ. In a society in which personal choice has overtaken such a grand narrative, however, suffering and truth become dissociated, and we come to believe that our highest calling is to eliminate any suffering at any cost, even the cost of truth. … We feel we must act because God will not. To read history in the light of the crucified Jesus, however, is to refuse such murderous compassion, and to find the silent activity of God among the victims of this world” (p. 115).


A rather negative view of Endo’s novel from a noted conservative Catholic professor of theology.


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)


Junko Endo was the wife of Shusaku Endo.


Excerpted by her article in Dharma World listed above.


Reviewed by Chia-Ning Chang in Monumenta Nipponica 45/1 (Spring, 1990): 100-103; Janet Goff in Japan Quarterly 37/3 (July 1990): 373-4.
From the author supplied abstract: Since Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked, 'who is Jesus Christ for us today?', there have been many attempts to 'update' Christology; but what is lacking is a 'picture' of the Christ which can move our Age at the level of the imagination, not merely rationally. *Imago Christi* must precede *theologia Christi*. In the work of the contemporary Japanese novelist, Shusaku Endo, such an image of Christ is powerfully glimpsed. Endo, a convert to Christianity, offers a devastating critique of the triumphant Christus of Western Christendom. In place of the kingly Christ who accompanied Western imperialism to the East, he shows us a suffering and broken Christ reminiscent of Luther's *theologia crucis*. His novel, *Silence*, as well as his more recent life of Christ, has relevance not only for the East but for the Western Church, which must 're-think' its Gospel in the light of contemporary experience.

At this writing was on the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University.


Heidelberger draws comparisons between Gutierrez and Endo.


Looks at the Eastern and Western understandings of “God” in Endo’s work.


*From the author supplied abstract:* Endo Shusaku was one of the most famous writers of 20th century Japan. He admired the work of the great English novelist Graham Greene
and he wrote some books that led to him being called the "Graham Greene of Japan." Endo's novel Silence has interesting parallels to Greene's The Power and the Glory. These parallels can be used to help solve a controversy in the literary criticism of Endo's novel.


*From the author supplied abstract:* “In an attempt to question the ascendency of today's relativism, this essay asks two different but interrelated questions: (1) Does the celebration of cultural differences guarantee the disappearance of ethnocentric universalism? (2) Is it possible to envision a universalism that is not ethnocentric? Answering the first question negatively and the second question affirmatively, this essay analyzes the life and work of the Japanese Catholic writer Endo Shusaku (1923-96), with particular attention to his *Chinmoku* (Silence), a novel that explores intercultural subjectivity in the context of Japan's encounter with the Christian West in the seventeenth century. It further elaborates the notion of the "common," whereby people of various backgrounds enter into a commonality that enables them to communicate and act together from the shared perspective of the oppressed even as they articulate and maintain their differences.


*From the author supplied abstract:* “While much has been written in literary criticism about Shusaku Endo’s various historical and literary novels particularly by William Johnston, SJ and Van C. Gessel who have also served as key translators of Endo into English, this essay builds on their work and provides a necessary theological and phenomenological exploration of Endo’s work through his fluidity of imaging the face of Christ in *Silence* and *Life of Jesus*. In particular, Endo’s use of the ‘fumie’ image of Christ provokes a reading of Jean Luc Marion’s notion of idol and icon and creates a compelling reassessment of the dislocating images of Christ found in the Lenten season.”


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 Civilta Cattolica* on evangelization in Japan which (mistakenly in Magister’s view) focuses too much “on common human demand for religious values.”


Consider 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.


From the author supplied abstract: Abstract: Shusaku Endo’s (1923-1996) novels, Wonderful Fool, Silence and Deep River are examined in order to psychologically follow the spiritual path the writer, born and nurtured in both Japanese traditional culture and western Catholicism, took until, after initially perceiving the incompatibility of being a Catholic and being a Japanese, he became able to bring Catholicism near to the Japanese way of being founded upon amaе, which views the Christian God, humanized in Jesus, as a maternal God, who preferably and unconditionally loves sinners. This perceptual moving does rise psychological questions about divine fatherhood/motherhood approached from diverse religious and cultural presuppositions.


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.


From the author supplied Abstract: “The idea that Japan is a ‘shame culture’ and that the Japanese have a weak sense of sin has been an influential one, both in Japan and abroad. It has also often influenced attitudes towards Japan’s behaviour in World War II. This idea, however, has its roots in the Japanese critique of pre-war ideology after World War II and in the Japanese reception of Ruth Benedict’s The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. In various forms, the idea also became an important element of Nihonbunkaron, those theories of Japanese culture which have been so popular in post-war Japan. The same idea was also given a powerful and influential expression in the novels of Endo Shusaku (1923–96). Earlier Christian theologians in Japan, such as Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko (1904–45), had often seen traditional Japanese culture as closer to Christianity than modern European culture. To such thinkers, Japan’s war with Britain and America was in part a war on modernity itself. By contrast, Endo accepted the post-war belief that Japan was a shame culture, distant from European Christianity. As his career proceeded, however, he came to take a more positive view of the ‘weak’ Japanese self. In this sense, his work closely parallels the development of Nihonbunkaron itself. Paradoxically, however, Endo’s ‘Japanese’ reinterpretation of Christianity proved highly popular not only in Japan but also abroad, raising the possibility that it was less exclusively Japanese than his work suggested.

Overview of Endo’s major works


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. Bu I’ve read it three time.” 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.


Author supplied abstract: “In his book, Gerhard Forde asserts, “[T]he theology of the cross is an offensive theology. The offense consists in the fact that unlike other theologies it attacks what we usually consider the best in our religion.” If causing an offense against Christian theologians and the populace in general is considered a criterion for this
theology, Shusaku Endo surely sets forth the theology of the cross in his novel. Although he would not identify his thesis by such a term, Endo presents the theology of the cross challenging the conventional understanding of the Christian faith. This short article explores Endo's book, examines how it demonstrates an articulation of the theology of the cross, and argues that Sebastian Rodrigues, the main character of the novel, is a theologian of the cross.


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 inculturated 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*.

Books Related to Endo Shusaku


Reviewed by T. Howland Sanks III, S.J. in *Theological Studies* 69/4 (2008): 964. *From the Sanks Review*: “Putting these three novels in dialogue with other theologians from their own and other traditions, B. makes a persuasive and convincing case for the functions of laughter of the oppressed. The book is clearly organized and well written, a model for the use of literature as a rich resource for theology.”


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 Silence15. Silence in the Classroom John Kaltner

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.” Fujimura 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 Fujimura 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” Fujimura 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).


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.


From *Reference & Research Book News*. 23/2 (May 2008): “Mase-Hasegawa (religion and culture, Nanzan U.) provides a theological analysis of the work of Japanese writer Endo and his struggles to inculturate Christian faith in Japan. She argues that fundamental to his thought on inculturation is the concept of *koshinto*, the indigenous beliefs and spirituality of the Japanese people, and that any successful process of missiological inculturation demands a serious anthropological consideration of
indigenous faith and spirituality. The study began as her doctoral dissertation in missiology at Lund University, Sweden.


*From Dodd’s Review:* “In the course of six chapters of close readings focusing on individual novels, Williams examines several important themes addressed by Endô: the inner conscience that enters a character’s mind and refuses to be silenced; the problem of whether a Christian writer’s first duty is to his religion or position as novelist; use of the *doppelganger* in order to view the self from an external perspective. Particularly interesting is his exploration of how Endô, far from condemning ‘weakness’ in characters (like the apostate Rodrigues in *Silence*), instead interprets it as a means to a more rounded and sympathetic understanding of humanity. I wonder if this urge towards reconciliation is not also related to his acknowledgement and ‘forgiveness’ of an earlier generation’s shortcomings during the war.”

Works on Martin Scorsese’s film adaptation of *Silence*


Interviews with Martin Scorsese

Cooper, Rands Richard. “An Interview with Martin Scorsese: Faith, Film & 'Silence’.” *Commonweal* (December 15, 2016) [https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/interview-martin-scorsese](https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/interview-martin-scorsese)


*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.”


The conservative Catholic convert columnist for the *New York Times* writes of the Scorsese film/Endo novel that it “cuts to the heart of his own uncertain faith. It also cuts to the heart, in striking ways, of the great Pope Francis-era debate within the Roman Church about sin and mercy, remarriage and the sacraments, and how the Church should or shouldn't bend to contemporary mores. …[Calling the apostasy] a tempter's case, delivered by a sinister torturer and a broken, self-justifying father figure. The cinematography around the moment of crisis is infernal, not celestial. The aftermath—corruption, collaboration, the triumph of the persecutors—seems to make ridiculous the idea that this achieved a higher good.”

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-persecut (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 Endō’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.”