All I can do here in the brief half-hour allotted is to frame my thesis and highlight some of the key points, which I believe will support it. Clearly more work needs to be done, and I’m going to move a relatively quick pace, presuming that you will be able to follow my presentation in the accompanying handout. The Power Point, along with this Handout, are available at my web-site listed on the first slide, along with my e-mail.
In this second slide I am putting down a few of the presumptions I am making about those gathered here in this room. I’ll not go into any of these bullet points here, though would be happy to expand on them if any time remains, or at any other time during our Conference time together.

**Prologue & Presumptions**

- Basic knowledge of the Christian persecutions in Japan
- Basic knowledge & acceptance of hermeneutical theory
- Many of you have either read the novel, seen the movie, or both
- Some of the key Japanese linguistic & cultural context is *terra incognita*

**Chinmoku “Silence” (1966)**
Very briefly stated, my thesis revolves around the premise that *nolens volens* Shusaku Endo (遠藤周作 *Endō Shūsaku*, March 27, 1923 – September 29, 1996) utilizes a lot of the Japanese religious cultural tradition that is found especially in Zen Buddhism and that a bit of more direct attention to this tradition will uncover aspects of his novel that escape many Westerners, and also correct some rather glaring misconstruals and misunderstandings surrounding Endo’s theological positions implicit in the 1966 novel *Silence* (*Chinmoku*) Part of the Japanese cultural tradition is coded in the use of *Kanji* or what can be called Chinese ideograms.

**Slide 4**

![Function of Ideograms (Kanji)](image)

Ideograms do *not* communicate phonetic sounds that comprise words, the way our alphabets work. Rather, they are abstract building blocks that construct, and communicate in written form, meaning. I first studied this system of Chinese ideograms during my time as a missionary in Korea in the 1980’s and so I would “vocalize” these ideograms in the Korean language, but the ideograms themselves can be read and understood immediately by those conversant in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and literary Vietnamese, etc. Thus, my very first point about the English translation of Endo’s novel is that the title is infelicitously incomplete: *Chinmoku* in Japanese “can” be rendered as “silence,” but this is misleading. It would have been more accurate (if inelegant) to render the two ideograms as “Deep (or Meditative) Silence.”

**Slide 5**
To expand on this point I’ve scribbled down on Slide 5 a few ideograms with relevance to the novel and/or Christianity. A larger version of this slide is at the very last page of your handout. I’m not going to elaborate on these here at this point other than to make the observation that many ideograms that connote abstract meanings are combinations of two (or more) ideograms, and to probe the nuances of some of these ideograms. It is illuminating to see how they are combined with other ideograms to communicate related meanings and tried to color-code some instances in which a particular ideogram reappears in other word combinations. On this sheet I have focused primarily on the ideogram *moku* highlighted in yellow which gives us the “silence” in *Chinmoku*.

*Slide 6*
Now on to the novel itself. Slide 6 takes us to the opening social location of Rome (that’s the Jesuit headquarters in the foreground and St. Peter’s in the background [though at the time of the novel our Jesuit curia was located in the complex which houses the Church of the Gesu and the Rooms of St. Ignatius a short stroll from the Quirinale, then the Apostolic Palace]). Relocating successfully from “Rome” to “Japan” will take much more than an arduous sea voyage.

Slide 7
Our Jesuit main characters, Ferreira, Valignano, Garrpe and Rodrigues all have actual historical counter-parts and as Jesuits I think it safe to say that they had been formed in the Western and Jesuit view of the universe---represented here in Slide 7 with the trompe l’oeil ceiling of the Church of San Ignazio in Rome which does put Christ in the center, but whose light is largely directed at Ignatius Loyola and from there reflected to the 4 corners of the earth---landing on a convenient Jesuit saint, if available, such as Francis Xavier for Asia (in the lower right-hand corner).

Slide 8
As my dissertation director, Fr. Jaques Dupuis, used to observe, Xavier was canonized not for his theology, but his zeal, and Xavier believed mightily in Cyprian’s axiom *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*—outside of the Church there is no salvation, and this theology impelled generations of missionaries to baptize and preach the Gospel—often in that order, so as to win as many poor souls as possible for eternal salvation. Certainly that would have been the regnant theological world view of our novel’s characters.

*Slide 9*
As a young child raised on the cusp of Vatican II I remember reading a hagiographic account of the martyrdom of St. Paul Miki and companions pictured here in Slide 9. The pattern was familiar: at great personal cost the noble Catholic missionaries and their loyal band of early converts endured a number of formidable challenges, hardships, sufferings, torture before finally winning the palm branch of martyrdom. The messages were clear even us children: thus the faith was planted, and thus the faith must be tended.

Slide 10
When I saw the movie for the first time just as Rodrigues was about to put his foot on the *fumie* image of Christ, an older woman spontaneously shouted out “Don’t do it!” I think that negative reaction was captured by many, and for me underscores the key, crucial, and common misunderstanding about the meaning of that act. Several others have joined their voices to my one-time movie companion, and here I lift up one of the more vocal—Bishop Robert Barron, pictured here in Slide 10, who is a promoter of a very different, and more “robust” understanding of the priesthood and seminary formation which he as packaged in a very popular YouTube video entitled “Heroic Priesthood” (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaoqdKz4m5E&t=65s). Clearly he views Endo’s protagonist Rodrigues as a failure, and not in accord with the theological vision of the “Heroic Pope” St. John Paul II. (He also has published another Youtube video on his analysis of Scorsese’s film version of “Silence” cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Th7Tiz1cEk). It’d be fascinating to put Barron’s videos in a contrast with scenes from *Silence* but that will have to be a project for another time.

*Slide 11*
As a former missionary in East Asia myself I do accept many of the notions connected with being a “martyr” but would remind us all that the first, and chief meaning of the Greek biblical term is “witness” and not “murder victim.” Tertullian’s expression “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” certainly was held fast by Rodrigues and company, but he ultimately will come to learn that shedding this blood is not a “recipe” for evangelization, any more than the Cross by itself alone ipso facto produces the resurrection. As any landscape artist or suburban home-owner knows, too much “fertilizer” kills what one is trying to grow.

Slide 12
One of the most difficult characters to grasp in *Silence* is Kichijiro seen here in Slide 12. In the Japanese version of the novel his name is never given its formal *Kanji*, by which even the low-born would be officially and uniquely known, but his name is always rendered in the Japanese syllabery called *katagana* and it is my hypothesis that Endo intended by this device to help the readers see Kichijiro perhaps akin to the way Robert Bolt utilized the “Common Man” character in the play version of his “A Man for All Seasons.” Connected also to my thesis is the possibility that Kichijiro himself functions as a riddle---a Zen Koan that aims at tearing down many of our presuppositions so that we can come to a deeper enlightenment of a greater truth.

Yes, Kichijiro is servile, abuses alcohol, does not exhibit much courage, but his unshakable faith conviction is that he can be forgiven of his sins repeatedly, and without too many strings attached. I suspect Jesus also endorses that view.

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1 Another interpreter, though, suggests that the use of *katagana* emphasizes Kichijiro’s status as an “outsider.” See Makoto Fujimura, *Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering* (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016).
So let us now turn in Slide 13 ff more explicitly to some of the key practices and concepts associated with Zen Buddhism, which is one of the core cultural religious aspects of what Samurai Lord Inoue calls the “swamp” of Japan. The Ideogram 禪 for what in Japanese is pronounced “Zen” (and Chan in Chinese and Son in Korean) connotes a regimen of deep meditation that aims at breaking down and removing attachments, rational thought constructs and distractions that hinder one from achieving personal enlightenment that results in a freedom to escape the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Slide 14
Slide 14 shows a typical Zen practice of facing the wall, seated in a fairly rigid posture that would be accompanied by a meditative breathing pattern to aid in this ascetical practice. One aspect of Tibetan Buddhism underscores the need to remove “afflictive emotions” that hinder this achievement of spiritual freedom. *Klesa* can be not only things like lust, but also values and commitments which may be “good” or “worthy” in themselves, but if they take on an excessive importance they function then as afflictive emotions which tie one day. In Ignatian vocabulary we’d call these “inordinate attachments” and in the novel *Silence* the Jesuit priests exhibit many layers of *Klesa* in their attachment to understandings of the Church, priesthood, Christianity, Europe, and their personal valor—to name just a few. Rodrigues states in the beginning of the novel that they arrived with absolutely “no baggage to bring to Japan except our own hearts” (p.22) and the unintended irony of that deeply mistaken self-assessment becomes progressively, and painfully, clearer as the novel unfolds.

**Slide 15**
Slides 15 and 16 illustrate through meditative calligraphy a few of the key concepts of Zen that unfortunately we will not have time to pursue sufficiently here. Taken together they underscore the connectedness of all things, and highlight the counter-productiveness of striving to “achieve” a goal through one’s own efforts (Wu-wei).

**Slide 16**
Slide 17

Slide 17 gives one example of a Zen Koan---a paradox that aims at dismantling ways of looking at the world in a “rational” manner, which in turn will block achievement of satori or personal enlightenment. My thesis is that rather unwittingly Rodrigues finds himself engaged in a wrestling with similar paradoxes in his self-understandings of being a Jesuit priest, missionary, Portuguese, Christian, and so on.

Slide 18
Slide 18 pictures Lord Inoue, the Samurai and former convert, who leads the persecution of Christians, concentrating on flushing out the hidden foreign priests. One aspect of Zen philosophy is that an “enemy” can also be an important facilitator on the path to Enlightenment, and I believe this would be a more helpful lens to view him in *Silence*, rather than simply casting him as a determined antagonist.

Slide 19
Slide 19 gives us the Ideogram for *Satori* and is comprised of three other ideograms: “heart” to the left, “five” on top and “mouth” on the bottom, and together these connote “I” as in the self. To the right we see a famous Zen well in the Golden Temple of Ryonji in Kyoto which uses the “mouth” ideogram in a kind of riddle to produce the phrase “I know only contentment,” which is certainly a by-product of *Satori*. *Satori* I posit can be Christianized and Endo does this by using some key concepts and practices from Ignatian spirituality (Slide 20), and it is important to keep in mind that he was well-acquainted with Jesuits, especially at Tokyo’s Sophia University (上智大学: Jōchi Daigaku, literally “great school of advanced wisdom”)

*Slide 20*
Again, time does not allow here for even a brief summary of Ignatian spirituality of finding God in all things through the Spiritual Exercises, but I am hoping that many of you are sufficiently well acquainted with this tradition.

Slide 21
Based on my own understanding of this tradition I believe that Rodrigues himself is engaged in a number of the core dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* which I have pictured here in Slide 21.

**Slide 22**

*Ignatian Koan: 3rd Degree of Humility Identification with Xt.*

The third is most perfect Humility, namely, when in order to imitate and be more actually like Christ our Lord, I want and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches, opprobrium with Christ replete with it rather than honors; and to desire to be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ, Who first was held as such, rather than wise or prudent in this world. *Spiritual Exercises* #157

Chief among these is coming the the freedom to desire the so-called Third Degree of Humility, which I argue functions very much as a Christian Koan, and which is quoted here in Slide 22. As a Jesuit Rodrigues would have been formed to pray for this special grace, and throughout the novel he does “see” himself like Christ, though until the critical moment of his apparent “apostasy,” he sees that similarity as enobling himself in the eyes of other Christians. Only when his act of trampling on the fumie does he allow himself to be subjected “truly” to be rated as worthless and a fool in the eyes of those who “count” in his own eyes—fellow Christians, Jesuits, and the public at large.

**Slide 23**
Here in Slide 23 we come to the critical test of faith---when the long “silence” of God is broken and he hears the voice of Christ telling him to “Trample!” because it was precisely for this trampling by others that Christ came into the world, and now Rodrigues will share that ignominy as well.

Slide 24
Slide 25

For the priest the mystical power to confect the Eucharist, to bring Christ to the altar in transforming the bread and wine into his Body and Blood, is seen by many—including Rodrigues—as the apex of priestly power. But I believe Endo’s particular Gospel insight is that the Eucharist was not the primary reason Christ came into the world and that this confection power is not in fact the most important or enduring service a priest can perform. Rather, the key ministry is the forgiveness of sins and this is what Rodrigues can and does do even when he has lost the ability to celebrate Mass. The last action recounted in the novel that Rodrigues does is to once again celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with Kichijiro (pp. 190-191) and in that moment Rodrigues experiences solidarity and compassion with the Lord—the true grace of the whole of the Spiritual Exercises.

Listening to the “Deep Silence”

- The sound of one-hand clapping
- The chirping of the cicada
- The cooing of the turtle dove
- Moaning of the Christians in the pit
- Kichijiro’s Pleas for Confession
- Concluding Buddhist chant: *Namu Amida Butsu* (“turn around and rely upon the infinite awakening”)

Slide 26

Time does not allow for continuing to probe my thesis more deeply, but in this last two Slides (27-8) I picture a few of the “clues” that Endo himself gives to support his own theology and its complement sub-aspects of understanding more deeply the salvific mission of Jesus Christ, the sacramental economy of the Church, what priesthood ultimately entails and how the faith of even the most simple low class non-European Japanese peasants has much to teach us all about the true meaning of being united with Christ in Paradiso.
Mt 5:44-5: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

For Further Reading

- “Moral Theology out of East Asia” Theological Studies 61 (2000): 106-121
- “A New Pentecost for Moral Theology: The Challenge of Inculturation of Ethics” Josephinum (Summer/Fall 2003): 250-260